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Verein zur Unterstützung von
Schulen In Afghanistan e.V.

Marga Flader and Ingrid Fraser report from their trip in May 2009

Dear Friends

After the drought of last year which brought a lot of suffering upon the poor people, we saw a lot of fresh green during this trip. In the garden of our Education Centre were lots of beautiful roses which were looked after well in memory of Rahmanqul, our murdered regional director, who had planted them. The downside of the plentiful rain: flooding and destroyed houses. We saw tents made from plastic sheets and carpets in which the victims have to live until the water recedes and they can start rebuilding their houses.

In Mazar-e-Sharif we visited the school in Chooghdak, which we built in 2002 and which is getting a second floor at present, the agricultural school where two buildings will be finished pretty soon, and the Maqсадullah Shaheed High School for Boys and Girls where a 8 classroom school building is under construction. As always, we were satisfied with the construction works. Not only we were satisfied, but also the students and the teachers are grateful for this help.

In one of the schools, a school headmistress was waiting for us. She asked if we could come and have a look at her school and we did: 2400 girls are being taught in an old derelict building, one ruin and many torn tents. The headmistress has already managed to obtain land for a new school building but all requests to NGOs or the government have so far been in vain. The open minded girls and lady teachers (who are all well educated) really impressed us.

In Andkhoy we again visited the Daulat Gildi Fidayee School for boys and girls in Andkhoy who are being taught in the hallway, in small side buildings and rented rooms. They were a bit disappointed to hear that we have not managed to collect the money for their school so far. We want to build a second floor and are looking for sponsors. A primary school in Germany has already organised a sponsored run and "earned" EUR 5000. We also visited a building site for a boys' lycee. As usual, it looked good and we expressed our thanks to our construction manager and his good team. The foundation stones had already been delivered for the next school where construction should start soon.

We also went to see some of our own educational projects and some schools in the four districts which have a partnership with a German school in order to see if they still need help. Recently, we supplied notebooks to all students of the 47 schools in the four districts. Our carpentry workshop is regularly making tables and benches which we give to the state schools. However, we still saw children sitting on the floor. Naturally, we were asked for further help: rooms for a library, new classrooms for those students who do not have a proper school building and also for the many girls and boys have been enrolled in first grade. Our help is still urgently needed.

Our courses in our education centre are particularly important: The preparatory courses for university, the computer and English courses and the carpentry workshop are all running well. The car-

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penry trainees are in their second year right now and they were busy making a wall-to-wall cabinet for the teachers' room of our education centre. We had meetings with the teachers and students of our preparatory courses. Since our last visit, they had elected a new students' council. We told the students to pass questions on to their representatives so that we could discuss their ideas with them. In this way we hope to promote democracy at grassroots level. We had very good discussions; the young men and women were very happy to talk with us. It was important for us to hear their views about the recent changes. They confirmed to us that the courses were useful and suggested that we introduce a new Dari/Pashtu department because they had problems with these two official languages of Afghanistan as their native tongue was either Uzbek or Turkmen. Another complaint concerned one of the teachers and they requested outings to interesting places in Afghanistan. We can, of course, understand such (even unrealistic) requests, however, we could not fulfil these wishes as on the one hand the security situation does not allow any outings right now and on the other hand we obviously cannot use your donation in this way. But it was very nice to see that these young people are really interested in the running of their Education Centre. We are sure that it would be such young people who bring the change Afghanistan needs so urgently.

The students of our home courses (courses in private homes where young girls and women are prepared for attending state schools from grade 7) told us their wish: being able to attend the Yuldoz Lycee in Andkhoi.

The students of the sewing courses were busy working for the "bazaar" which was to take place on the first "Women's Day" in our Education Centre. All female students and teachers were invited and they could bring their mothers and friends. They had been told that they could sell homemade food and clothes and other small things. Approximately 200 girls and women came. In four classrooms some of them offered their handicraft, finger food and also cosmetics. They played table football, basket ball and skipped in the three small gardens. Others borrowed books in our library and sat down on the grass to start reading immediately. Everyone was happy and lively. The girls of the English courses enjoyed long conversations with us. We are always surprised about their excellent knowledge of the English language. It was a very nice day and the best day of the trip. We hope that these „Women's Days“ will take place in our education centre in future, too. We leave it to the women themselves to organize their day.

During our three weeks in Afghanistan, we had many discussions with our employees. They organise and implement our projects. Not all problems can be solved by mail and telephone and, therefore, these visits are very important. Especially in our jubilee year we ask ourselves if changes in our work are needed. We will continue our discussions in Germany and Afghanistan along our *code of conduct* which we set out some time ago.

It is not easy to obtain the funds for the construction of school buildings. Even if our proposals to the BMZ (German Ministry for International Cooperation and Development) or from the State of Schleswig-Holstein are successful, we still have to bear a 25 % share from donations. So we hope very much that you will continue to support us to enable us to continue our support for the children of Afghanistan.

We would be very happy to meet you at our jubilee celebrations on 4 and 5 September 2009 in Hamburg.

With kind regards
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