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Afghan Women's Business Federation  
(AWBF)



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**"AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup>" Global Trademark Announced Today: New Brand Certifies Better Pay, Working Conditions, Access to Education, Literacy Training and Health Care for Afghan Women Carpet Weavers**

**New Brand Certifies Empowerment of Afghan Women through Business, Not Charity.**

(New York, February 13, 2007) The Afghan Women's Business Federation (AWBF) today made the première announcement of a new trademark called AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup>, which is a certification brand label that will be carried on exported carpets made by Afghan women who are employed by women-owned or women-managed carpet-making businesses there.

The new AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> brand label on a carpet certifies that the Afghan women who made that carpet were paid fair wages while working in inspected working conditions with no illegal child labor, and with access to health care and education, including literacy training.

"This is a major humanitarian, educational and business development breakthrough *by* Afghan women *for* Afghan women in the post-Taliban era of our country's history," said AWBF spokeswoman Ms. Halima Kazem of Kabul, Afghanistan, who made the announcement at a press conference today at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York City.

"For centuries, many Afghan women have toiled for much of their lives on looms, sometimes barely eking out a living, while making the hand-knotted, world-famous Afghan carpets that are emblematic of the artisan culture of Afghanistan. Many of these hard-working women today are illiterate, with limited social, health care or educational opportunities. Some are war widows. Most are mothers and many are breadwinners for their families. They sometimes work on the carpet looms for wages as low as one dollar per day, or less, while making high-end, heirloom quality carpets that can sell for premium prices," said Ms. Kazem. "As of press time, eight women-owned or women-managed carpet companies or consortiums employing 24,000 weavers have signed on to the AfgahnMark<sup>SM</sup> brand certification program. We expect the numbers to continue to grow as more companies, carpet studios and artisans join."

(more...)

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Ms. Kazem continued, "The new AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> trademark brand means empowerment for working Afghan women not through charity, but through business, with fair pay and labor rights. For these women, the AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> brand means more and better food for their families, education, health care and, above all, greater respect for Afghan women who, under Taliban rule, and in other eras, were often treated poorly.

The new AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> trademark empowers conscientious consumers, wholesalers, importers and retailers to make an informed choice and select high-quality carpets that meet the certification standards of the AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> brand.

Only "heirloom quality" carpets, which the AWBF certifies as a particularly high standard of carpet, will be allowed to carry the new AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> certification trademark. Each carpet will be numbered and will have with it a brief story of the woman or women who wove the carpet.

Ms. Kazem explained, "The AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> was created by the post-Taliban era Afghan Women's Business Federation, which is headquartered in Kabul with women-owned and women-managed member business throughout Afghanistan. We want the AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> to become a true, meaningful and increasingly widely recognized symbol of a better life for Afghan women weavers who aren't asking charity, but just the opportunity to benefit fairly from their hard work on the looms."

The Afghan Women's Business Federation was established in Afghanistan after the elimination of Taliban rule with U.S. assistance from the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) [www.cipe.org](http://www.cipe.org) and funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) [www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov)

The Rubin Museum of Art (RMA) in New York City, the venue that was chosen for the world première AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> announcement, is dedicated to the art of the Himalayas and the surrounding regions.

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### **Digital Photos**

**Note to Editor:** You can find downloadable digital color AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> logo images and dozens of 300 d.p.i. color photos of Afghan women working at all stages of carpet making, from wool preparation to actual weaving, plus "snapshots" of life in Afghanistan today, including women attending school, at [www.afghanmark.com/press](http://www.afghanmark.com/press)

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PS Note to Editor: In America, we consumers have become accustomed to seeing various kinds of quality assurance and seal-of-approval labels on products made in America or elsewhere. While it is appropriate to say that the new AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> is in the spirit of and inspired by these same concepts, the new AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> is uniquely Afghan -- by Afghan women and for Afghan women. It is a clearly recognizable step forward in earnings, empowerment and status for the hard working women of Afghanistan.

## **Focus on Fairness**

### **The AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> Program's Inspection, Pay Rate and Evaluation Criteria**

#### Evaluating AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> Program Criteria

The Afghan Women's Business Federation (AWBF), which created and owns the AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> certification brand, has a monitoring system in place that checks the working conditions of carpet weavers at each loom and assesses the age, health condition, education level and wages of each weaver. Each participating AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> company, studio or consortium is required to provide the name, location, age and wage earned by each weaver. This provides a benchmarking measurement matrix by which the independent Afghan International Chamber of Commerce monitors the economic, social and educational well being of all of the weavers. In addition, each AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> program participant is required to provide proof that his/her weavers have access to health care and education through a nationally or internationally recognized provider. Proof includes documentation and is validated by unannounced site visits to ensure that standards are met. Through random spot checks, the AWBF's AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> monitoring committee can make unannounced, unexpected visits to a loom studio or a factory to determine if company owners are abiding by the rules set out by their agreements with AWBF for the AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> brand certification standards.

If the AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> monitoring committee ever finds children working on the looms, for the benefit of the children, AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> will stop the work and the inspectors will refer the child/parent along with the carpet company owner to organizations such as Children in Crisis or Aschiana, which provide educational opportunities for working children or older children who have never attended school. For medical care, AWBF's AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> inspectors will refer the weavers to programs run by non-governmental health organizations and private local clinics. AWBF requires carpet companies to invest in the education of all their weavers, both male and female. AWBF requires all carpet companies to use vertical looms so that weavers are not hunched over horizontal floor looms. If carpet companies fail to act on the requirements of the AWBF monitoring committee, the AWBF Director of AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> Programs will issue an official, written warning to the company. Two written warnings will result in the prompt expulsion of the company from the AWBF and the AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> brand program. AWBF is currently consulting with carpet monitoring organizations to further train the AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> monitoring and inspection staff.

#### Ensuring Fair Wages

Participating AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> companies/organizations are required by AWBF to provide fair compensation to their weavers. This new AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> level of compensation, which the AWBF has set at 150% of the current wage rate, must be paid directly to the weavers in cash. In addition, companies are required to provide an additional 10% commission on the sale of each carpet payable in cash directly to the woman who wove it. AWBF will monitor the production cost, wholesale cost, selling price and wage paid to each of the weavers of each carpet to ensure that AfghanMark<sup>SM</sup> program criteria are being met consistently.

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