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**AMBASSADOR SAID T. JAWAD ADDRESSES
AFGHANISTAN'S ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION IN ILLINOIS**

WASHINGTON – Said T. Jawad, Afghanistan's ambassador to the United States, traveled to Illinois on June 6 and 7 to participate in a number of forums addressing Afghanistan's economic reconstruction and rural development. At the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign's College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES), Ambassador Jawad participated in a roundtable discussion of the relationship between education and development. The roundtable participants visualized a future partnership between Afghanistan and the University of Illinois, which could include the creation of scholarships for Afghan students, training programs for Ministry of Agriculture employees, faculty exchange programs with Kabul University, the implementation of a national soybean development plan, and distance-learning education initiatives. The Embassy's Economic, Trade & Investment Department pledged to continue pursuing the development of these and other cooperative programs for Afghanistan's agriculture sector. Ambassador Jawad met with the Deans of University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign and Southern Illinois University's agricultural colleges to thank them for their contributions to Afghanistan's agricultural sector.

On June 7 Ambassador Jawad addressed the audience of the WSEC program *The Ambassador Series* in Springfield, Illinois. The Ambassador spoke broadly about trade, rural development and economic reconstruction. "Since the days of the silk route, Afghanistan's unique location in the heart of Asia has made it a natural trade hub. Our two most important assets are our location and our people. Afghanistan is a land bridge connecting emerging markets with energy sources in Central Asia. In central and south Asia all roads lead to Afghanistan. Our population is young, eager to learn and to partner with the international community," he said. Work is nearing completion on Afghanistan's 3,300 km national highway system, which will connect all Central Asian capitals to the Persian Gulf in less than 32 hours.

Afghanistan has experienced double digit economic growth in the past four years and made considerable progress in connecting the country by building roads and telecommunication systems. The Asian Development Bank expects economic growth to reach 11.7% in 2006 and 10.6% in 2007. Ambassador Jawad stressed that the Government of Afghanistan would continue to pursue market-driven, private sector led growth, combined with significant investment in human capacity, physical infrastructure, legal reform, and institution building.

International experience has shown that long-term rural development is the best means of fighting against narcotics. Agricultural development is key to sustained, effective rural development. Prior to

the Soviet invasion, agriculture accounted for more than 83% of Afghanistan's economic production; in 2004, agriculture only accounted for 38.4 % of GDP. Further agricultural development in the form of increased access to irrigation, dams, roads and cold-storage facilities will provide a strong economic incentive for farmers to abandon poppy production.

The Ambassador discussed Afghanistan's business-friendly investment climate and pointed out that the World Bank has ranked Afghanistan among the 16 easiest countries in the world to start a new business. The Ambassador identified the private sector as the true engine of Afghanistan's economic growth, and explained that the major obstacles to private sector development have been removed. "Why invest in Afghanistan? We have low tax rates, low labor costs, a growing domestic consumer market, an opportunity to create employment for women, and an eager and committed work force," he said.

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