

United Nations Development Programme

Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People

برنامج الأمم المتحدة الإنمائي/ برنامج مساعدة الشعب الفلسطيني



PRESS RELEASE

UNDP/PAPP and Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture Pledge to Mainstream Biodiversity Conservation

Jerusalem, October 10, 2005 — His Excellency Dr. Walid Abed Rabboh, Palestinian National Authority (PNA) Minister of Agriculture, and Mr. Timothy Rothermel, UNDP Special Representative, will today sign a Memorandum of Understanding at a ceremony to launch the joint Mainstreaming Biodiversity Management Considerations into Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Production Processes project with the total budget of **US\$ 255,775**.

With a variety of factors threatening the future biodiversity of medicinal and aromatic plants in the region, the Ministry of Agriculture, with funding and technical assistance from the United Nations Development Programme/Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP/PAPP) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), initiated the Mainstreaming Biodiversity Management Considerations into Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Production Processes project. The project is aimed at mainstreaming plant biodiversity management in both the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) and Lebanon, through promoting and facilitating the conservation of medicinal and aromatic plants and enhancing sustainable cultivation and production of crops, working mainly with local communities and NGOs.

The region is renowned for its plant diversity, as well as its long history of traditional agricultural practices. The oPt in particular has been identified by agriculture experts as part of the “Fertile Crescent” - an area rich in genetic diversity of a range of crops. Many indigenous plants are known to have medicinal properties, the usage of which goes back thousands of years. Through traditional medicine, medicinal and aromatic plants are widely used in local communities, where they are often prescribed by *Al-Aatarin* (medicinal plant dealers), as well as many rural women whose knowledge has been passed down through generations.

However, today biodiversity in the region is threatened by a number of factors, including urbanization, overgrazing, overexploitation of wild medicinal and aromatic plants and destructive harvesting methods. This project is aimed at mainstreaming the approach to medicinal and aromatic plant conservation in Lebanon and the oPt, which will yield advances in sustainable human development by impacting the livelihoods of the often vulnerable groups involved in this sector, as well as conserving biodiversity. The project will support the establishment of ecologically and economically sustainable medicinal and aromatic plant production systems, to ensure biodiversity values are maintained. The first phase will include a 9 month feasibility study investigating these issues.

“I think that by mainstreaming these issues, we will be able to address the problems and work towards biodiversity conservation in the region,” said Mr. Rothermel. “This project represents a great opportunity to enhance livelihoods and tackle poverty, while playing a role in the conservation of indigenous plant life.”

For further information, please contact:

In Jerusalem: Ehab Shanti, Communications Officer, Tel. +972-2-6268229 – e-mail: ehab.shanti@undp.org; or Dania Darwish, Tel. +972-2-626-8200 – e-mail: dania.darwish@undp.org. In Gaza: Ahmad Abu Nada, Assistant Communications Officer, Tel 972-8-2822167 – e-mail: ahmad.abunada@undp.org. In New York: William Orme, Media Section Chief, Tel. +1 (212) 906-5382 – e-mail: william.orme@undp.org. For more information on UNDP/PAPP see www.papp.undp.org.