



PRESS RELEASE

With UNDP's support,

New Centre for Reviving Old Craft Opens in Bethlehem

Jerusalem, September 30th 2003: Under the patronage of His Beatitude Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, a number of partners including; H.E. Ziad Abu Amr, Minister of Culture; H.E. Mitri Abu Aita, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities; Sir Rateb Rabie, KHS, President of Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation; Mr. Larry Garber, Mission Director of the USAID Mission to the West Bank and Gaza; Mr. Said Abu Hijleh, Chief of Party, USAID Market Access Program – DAI and Mr. Timothy Rothermel, the Special Representative of UNDP/PAPP, will inaugurate Al-Turath Centre for Arts, Crafts and Design in Bethlehem, on Tuesday, September 30, 2003.

As part of the opening celebration activities, the Turath Center will be holding a four day Arts and Crafts Fair at Manger Square in Bethlehem. The Fair will include displays by more than 20 handicraft producers and artists.

The project was conceived by the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and developed in conjunction with the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and US Agency for International Development (USAID) Market Access Programme to support and promote the development of the Palestinian handicrafts industry and to provide them with improved access to international markets.

Championing the initiative for its long term and short term benefits for the community, His Beatitude, Mr. Sabbah stated "we value and support this endeavor for a number of reasons. First, it comes in a time when this handicraft industry, which has survived for centuries, is severely distressed by the pressures of the current crisis. Secondly, we believe firmly in culture and the beauty of the arts not only as liberators of the soul, but also rations for faith. Finally, we believe that this collective effort between so many diverse partners, Palestinian and international, provides a good example of the solidarity between peoples and the oneness of humanity."

The Center aims to increase market competitiveness, quality standards and productivity as well as building capacity in the Palestinian handicraft sector. It will become the principal address for Palestinian handicrafts housing a quality control, packaging and shipping department. Business support services, including financial facilitation, order and inventory management, design and marketing will also be provided to qualified producers. The Turath



Center will also help promote Palestinian cultural heritage through showcasing and marketing arts and design in a wide variety of product categories.

While physically housed in a traditional stone building, the Turath Center is also bridging the digital divide with a state-of-the art Web site at www.turath-center.org. The site introduces the Turath Center product offering of over 150 original handicrafts through an E-commerce engine supporting secure online purchases and an advanced order management system. Visitors can shop, browse or simply view content about local history, tradition and culture.

“This year the UNDP will mark 25 years of partnership with the Palestinian people through its Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (PAPP). Since human development has always been a central pillars of our programme, it is only fitting that we begin marking this occasion through this great occasion that focuses on people” said Timothy Rothermel, Special Representative of UNDP/PAPP. “The Turath Centre will not only help revive the handicrafts industry in Bethlehem for the short term, but will also set a foundation for stimulating this important facet of Palestinian culture for the future. It is a quintessential example of how technology can be used to open local doors to the rest of the world,” added Rothermel.

For further information, please contact:

In Jerusalem: Ehab Shanti, Communications Officer, Tel. +972-2-6268229 - ehab.shanti@undp.org; or Dania Darwish, Tel. +972-2-626-8200 - dania.darwish@undp.org In Gaza: Hashim Hussaini, Assistant Communications Officer, Tel 972-8-2822167. In New York: Nadine Shamounki, Communications Officer, Tel. +1 (212) 906-5171 – Nadine.Shamounki@undp.org; or William Orme, Media Section Chief, Tel. +1 (212) 9065382 – William.Orme@undp.org – To attain more information on PAPP please see: www.papp.undp.org