



MAZAR DEVELOPMENT FUND

Newsletter - November 2008 - Fundraiser

As the sun went down on the 4th of October 2008, a buzzing, colourful crowd arrived at the South Melbourne Community Centre. Far from its usual creamy grey appearance, the Centre was decorated from floor to ceiling with tribal carpets, shining colourful bedspreads and a banner, written in Dari, welcoming guests to the inaugural fundraising dinner of the Mazar Development Fund (MDF).

The evening was put together by the committee of MDF, an organisation that aims to raise financial support for health and education programs in Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan. Through partnerships with local and international NGOs that work with local communities in Mazar-e-Sharif, MDF aims to improve health services and educational resources available to the people of Mazar-e-Sharif and its surrounding area.



At the dinner, 130 people and their countless children came together for a night of wonderful food, dancing, music, theatre and laughter. Many women wore colourful traditional dress, and the Afghan (and some non-Afghan!) men impressed in their bright white salwar kameez. Guests were treated to a performance by a traditional Hazara musician, playing drums and dambura, evoking the true spirit of the Afghan *sarzamin*.

The evening was MCed by MDF Assistant Secretary Jessie Taylor, and there were wonderful speeches by MDF founder, Najaf Mazari, and prominent human rights advocate and supporter of Afghans, Julian Burnside QC. Najaf welcomed his guests in his typical smiling style, while Julian remarked at how glad he was to be basking in the hospitality of the Afghan community, even after Australia had been so reluctant to offer its hospitality to them.



The evening ended with an auction, bringing out the real generosity of the guests as they bid for dinners, carpets, and ornate urns. A raffle was drawn by two lovely young Afghan girls, Najaf and Hakima's daughter, Maria, and her accomplice Beena. The prizes were a huge, brightly coloured ornate bedspread, and a traditional Tajik hat, or *pakol*.

At the end of the night, guests filed out with bellies full and cheeks flushed from a night of laughter and happiness. They had generously donated more than \$5,000, which will allow the Mazar Development Fund to buy and fit-out its first ambulance, to commence operation in Mazar-e-Sharif and surrounding areas in December 2008. The ambulance will service a community of more than 70,000 people.

In Australia it is hard to imagine the consequences of dire poverty and damage caused by thirty years of war and unrest. However, the reality is that every contribution that— small or large – can help improve the situation of the people of one of the poorest and most unstable countries in the world.

MDF will be holding many events in future, and the committee would love to bring in more members of the organisation, to support its important work.

To find out more, or to become a member of the organisation, please visit the website at www.mazardevelopmentfund.org.au/join.htm.