



SPECIAL REPORT
JSSP MOCK TRIAL PROGRAM FOR THE
LEGAL AID OFFICE OF AFGHANISTAN
SERENA HOTEL, KABUL, AFGHANISTAN
March 5-7, 2007

On March 5-7, 2007, the Justice Sector Support Program (JSSP) successfully hosted a three day training program for defense attorneys held at the Serena Hotel in Kabul, Afghanistan. The program served as the initial training program for the newly formed public defender NGO, the Legal Aid Organization of Afghanistan (LAOA). JSSP organized and coordinated the training and orientation for LAOA's defense lawyers. Many of these lawyers are new to the field of criminal defense, and have little practical experience. LAOA is principally tasked with representing indigent criminal defendants, a requirement the Government of Afghanistan is required to provide by its Constitution. LAOA's charter also states as an objective the promotion of the interests of public defenders. LAOA has received financial and technical support from the international community, and promises to be one of the leading public defender organizations in Afghanistan. JSSP has been involved in assisting LAOA Executive Director Afzal Nooristani establish office procedures and policies, and JSSP personnel will continue to be involved as technical advisors to LAOA. LAOA comprises four substantive departments: (1) Criminal Defense Services; (2) Women and Juveniles; (3) Training and Education and (4) Legal Research & Legislative Reform Department.

The program began with a two day mock trial program and continued with an intensive working session in which members of the different departments of LAOA discussed their goals and strategies for the upcoming year. The culmination of the program was a panel presentation in which the head of each department within LAOA presented their work for the benefit of the entire organization and the international technical advisors.

The mock trial portion of the program focused on enhancing trial skills and raising awareness of defense strategies for Afghan attorneys who represent persons accused of a crime. One of the highlights of the mock trial program was the introduction of instant video replay providing the participants with the unique opportunity to watch their performances and receive feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of their presentations. The participants were split into groups and each group had a senior trial lawyer facilitating the sessions. The facilitators included internationals and nationals, all of whom are experienced trial attorneys. The exercises and hypotheticals used throughout the program were based on real criminal cases heard in Afghan courts.

Throughout the two days of the program the participants conducted a full mock trial. As in a real trial, participants made legal arguments, presented defense statements and examined witnesses on behalf of a young man accused of breaking into someone's house, stealing items and beating up the residents who were home.

The third day of the program was an intensive working session in which the lawyers were split up by department. International experts from National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Development Law Organization-CIDA (IDLO/CIDA) and JSSP led the training sessions for each of the four departments. The international technical advisors gave trainings relevant to the specific departments and assisted the lawyers in defining their work goals for the next year. The program concluded with a panel presentation by the heads of each of the departments and concluding remarks by the JSSP lawyer mentor, Rachel Saunders, and the Executive Director of LAOA, Afzal Nooristani. Other JSSP team members involved in the training were defense development advisor Scott Ciment, legal education and training advisor Damian Klauss and police/prosecution coordinator Chris Hardaway.