



## **Aid to Artisans Launches First Distance Learning Training Program in Iraq**

**CONTACT:** Joanna Smiley, Communications Manager, Aid to Artisans  
T: (860) 756-5550, ext. 418, [Joanna\\_Smiley@aidtoartisans.org](mailto:Joanna_Smiley@aidtoartisans.org)

**WEST HARTFORD, CT, MARCH 19, 2009**—On March 10 and 11, Aid to Artisans (ATA) became the first organization to lead a virtual business training out of the three-month old U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

Through webcams, Adobe Connect Pro technology and an Arabic translator provided by the U.S. State Department, ATA staff in West Hartford, CT virtually trained 9 Iraqi entrepreneurs who are working with as many as 100 artisans. Several of these participants were women war widows with children to feed, making it even more critical that they learn how to earn lasting income.

ATA's trainings focused on costing and pricing, how to develop products so they can sell to global consumers, how to tell consumers compelling stories that include details about Iraqi traditions and one key skill: how to use the Internet for businesses. Under Saddam's rule, many Iraqis were forbidden to access IP addresses.

"It is difficult for women as they do not know what their future holds. Historically, there is a constant pain, war, continuous war, sanctions which affected women's lives," says Halima Faraj, a training participant whose husband was killed last year.

Telside L. Manson, Public Diplomacy Officer with the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Baghdad, applauds the training for taking bold steps towards assisting Iraqi women by teaching them employable skills.

"The response from the women was clear as they scribbled notes, asked for website references, and profusely thanked the trainers at the conclusion of the event. With this success, the PRT hopes to conduct similar trainings in the future," she says.

ATA is currently the only organization in its sector working to launch distance learning initiatives so that it can increase its scale and impact within the global artisan community.

"ATA is in the process of launching a Virtual University that will offer all of our training modules online in up to 8 languages to artisans anywhere in the world. Using the resources of the Internet allows us to help craftspeople in countries we may not work in, and is especially beneficial in war afflicted regions such as Iraq," says David O'Connor, ATA President.

**About Aid to Artisans:** ATA teaches skills to low income artisans around the world through its Market Readiness Program, design mentoring and global market links- efforts which have leveraged nearly \$230 million in retail sales over the past 10 years and raised the incomes of artisans in more than 40 countries. For more information, please visit [www.aidtoartisans.org](http://www.aidtoartisans.org).

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