
2nd Annual Conference on Rural Development in Armenia Held

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July 11, 2008. On July 10, 2008, the Second Annual Conference on Rural Development in Armenia was convened at the Business Center of American University of Armenia (AUA). The conference was organized jointly by the AUA Turpanjian Rural Development Program and United Nations Armenia Country Office. The event was opened by AUA President Dr. Haroutune Armenian and Ms. Consuelo Vidal, UN Resident Coordinator/UNDP Resident Representative. The keynote speaker this year was Dr. Nerses Yeritsyan, RA Minister of Economy.

The objective of this year's event was to discuss some of the challenges faced by development programs and initiatives implemented in Armenian rural communities and to discuss the existing problems and opportunities in rural communities. The panel presenters spoke on educational and health issues at the community level and canvassed the legal aspects such as the approaches and challenges in current legislation, community property management in rural areas, and agricultural trade of the European Union with developing countries.

In her welcoming remarks, Ms. Consuelo Vidal stressed the importance of directing joint efforts towards the reduction of regional disparities as a major prerequisite to overall country's development. She noted, "The potential of rural Armenia is immense, and I would like all of us today to concentrate on identifying how each one of our institutions can support the unleashing of its potential."

Minister Nerses Yeritsyan talked about the importance of rural development and the need to increase agricultural output and for the application of new technologies. He explained that it is crucial to change the thinking of rural citizens in order to give them an impetus for locally-based economic activity. "It is not only agriculture that needs boosting up in Armenian communities," said Dr. Yeritsyan, adding that the work of the Armenian Government will be aimed at labor diversification in Armenian villages along with paving the way to vocational education development, organization of organic farming and modern service delivery.

AUA President Armenian welcomed attendees and talked about the successes of the AUA Turpanjian Rural Development Program, which works to improve the lives of poorer families in Armenia through the development of economic opportunities and education. The Program develops economic opportunities in rural areas by supporting individual entrepreneurs in the development of businesses. The Program trained more than 250 new rural businessmen in its first full year of operation in the villages of the Shirak and Tavush Marzes and in Nagorno Karabagh and has plans to fund 150 businesses through loans and grants by the end of 2008.
