

NETWORKING HELPS SREBRENICA WEAVERS WIN THEIR FIRST MAJOR INTERNATIONAL ORDER FOR CARPETS

AdvocacyNet

News Bulletin 49, October 14, 2005

Tuzla, Bosnia, and Washington DC: The Bosnian women's organization Bosfam, a partner of The Advocacy Project (AP), has secured an order for 100 traditional Bosnian carpets (kilims) from the online company Worldstock, to be completed in time for the Christmas season.

Thirty displaced Bosnian women are now weaving the carpets. Many are survivors from the 1995 Srebrenica massacre, which claimed the lives of over 8,000 men and boys.

The order is a big boost for the Srebrenica weavers, who have been struggling to find a market for their carpets. It came as a result of networking by AP's Outreach Coordinator Stacy Kosko and AP intern MacKenzie Frady, who took samples of Bosfam carpets to Worldstock.

According to Beba Hadzic, Bosfam's Director, the Worldstock order will not only produce an income for the weavers but also help them regain their dignity. "This is real economic support," she said. "These women can now send their children to school, put heating in their houses. It's really incredible."

"When we first received the order, I sat everyone down and explained the situation," continued Ms. Hadzic. "Each woman said in turn what she was capable of doing. I don't impose anything upon them. But when they tell me: 'I can finish these carpets in ten days or twenty days,' they always do it."

Jan Moat, Worldstock's Buying Representative, told AP that this is the first time that Worldstock has worked with a Bosnian organization and said that Worldstock will use this first consignment to determine which Bosfam designs are popular with customers. According to Ms. Moat, carpets are one of Worldstock's best-selling products.

Worldstock.com sells handcrafted products from artisans in developing countries, and is the charitable arm of Overstock.com, a leading online wholesale trader.

The carpets are being produced by 18 core Bosfam weavers in the Bosnian towns of Srebrenica and Tuzla, with support from another 12 apprentice weavers. Almost all of the weavers are Bosniaks (Muslims), although two Serb women (also former refugees) recently joined the Bosfam team in Srebrenica. The Dutch Refugee Foundation Stichting Vluchteling has supported Bosfam's Srebrenica weaving center.

The colorful kilims are made of wool and cotton fiber that are purchased from a manufacturer in the town of Breza, near Sarajevo, and woven on looms. The Srebrenica center has four looms, while 15 looms are in use in Tuzla.

Each of the designs is unique to an individual weaver, and Worldstock will post a short biography of the weaver alongside her carpet on the Worldstock website – much as Bosfam has done on its own website. This will help buyers to make a direct connection with the weavers and their remarkable stories.

Bosfam and AP hope that the order will generate interest in weaving in Srebrenica, and create an incentive for more weavers to return home. This has been one of AP's goals since it first profiled Srebrenica refugees in 2000. AP has since raised over \$34,000 for the Bosfam weavers, helped Bosfam to build a website, made a promotional film about the weavers, organized events for Bosfam in the US, and sent three interns to work with Bosfam.

In June this year, AP organized a promotional tour in the US for Beba Hadzic and Magbula Divovic, a leading Bosfam weaver who lost a husband during the massacre. Bosfam met with leading US-based media and human rights groups, including Physicians for Human Rights and Amnesty International/USA. The delegation also met with Aid to Artisans (ATA), a well-known organization which helps community-based artisans with their production and marketing.

Bosfam is now seeking to strengthen its capacity to produce large orders, manage its business and promote its message of reconciliation to an international audience. Starting in January, Bosfam also hopes to develop a project to train more weavers, under which the 18 core weavers will each mentor two apprentices. Bosfam and AP are seeking sponsors for the scheme.

- View the Bosfam [website](#)
- To sponsor a Bosfam weaver, contact dcoffice@advocacynet.org
- Read the [blogs](#) by 2005 AP intern MacKenzie Frady
- View an excerpt of the AP film, [Weavers for Hope](#)