



Massachusetts Non Profit Receives \$2 Million to Empower Iraqi Women

Prosperity Catalyst, Massachusetts based non-profit that works to empower women in regions of conflict, has been awarded a grant for \$2,035,900 from the U.S. State Department's Office of Global Women's Issues under Secretary of State John Kerry. The funding will be used to provide economic opportunity to nearly 600 Iraqi war widows over the course of the next two and a half years in Baghdad and beyond through artisan-made home décor, personal accessories, candles and beekeeping.

Prosperity Catalyst works in partnership Prosperity Candle, a Massachusetts based social business created to empower women entrepreneurs through access to export markets. The two organizations work together to meet the needs of women in regions of conflict and natural disaster, including Haiti. Prosperity Catalyst (501c3), which launched in 2012 and is headed by Executive Director Siiri Morley, provides training and mentoring to women in entrepreneurship, while Prosperity Candle, led by President Ted Barber, focuses on opening sales and distribution to global markets for the products they make.

The Prosperity mission is not new to Iraq. In 2009, Prosperity Candle implemented a year-long pilot project in which 50 Iraqi women were trained to make high-quality pillar candles from the safety of their homes. At a time when few other businesses were willing to engage with Iraqi civilians, this young start-up successfully exported handmade products for sale across the U.S.

Ted Barber, co-founder and President of Prosperity Candle, knows from personal experience – he created the first Prosperity Candles in his Northampton, MA kitchen – that candles are uniquely designed to move women out of poverty. Says Barber, "There is no other product that can be made in distressed parts of the world with such ease and export readiness as candles. Candles are consumable products that easily attract repeat customers, both locally and globally. And unlike many other microenterprises making handicrafts, which are beautiful but often provide only supplemental income, candle production is highly scalable, enabling women to earn a living wage *and more* – enough for the basics of food, healthcare, housing, and children's education, plus savings and a better life."

But the work is not about business alone, despite the importance of a strong business model being the foundation for Prosperity's work. Siiri Morley, Executive Director of

Prosperity Catalyst and Founding Partner of Prosperity Candle, knows this firsthand from her work with women's groups throughout Africa. As a Peace Corps volunteer she saw many businesses suffer due to poor health or family crises. Morley says, "When businesses only look at the financial bottom line they may be able to meet their business objectives in the short-term, but without looking at the health, well-being, education and safety of the people behind the scenes, a business will not thrive. Yes, we are incubating women-led businesses around the world, but we are also using business as a vehicle for greater change. We see every business we launch as a classroom where women can gain confidence, build skills and, ultimately, take ownership of the work one day." As a 501(c)3, Prosperity Catalyst focuses on launching women-led businesses and providing the additional support and training that women need to succeed.

Prosperity Catalyst and Prosperity Candle will return to Iraq with the ultimate goal of establishing a market-driven, Iraqi-women led export enterprise hub in the heart of Baghdad. This enterprise will support a network of widows seeking to rebuild their lives with access to training, raw materials, design inputs and market connections. The team expects to begin importing handcrafted home décor, personal accessories and candles by the end of 2014, for sale through national retail chains.

For more information about Prosperity Catalyst, please visit www.prosperitycatalyst.org, or email siiri@prosperitycatalyst.org

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