



Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America

<http://www.fezana.org>

Representing 25 Zoroastrian Associations in the United States and Canada

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**ZOROASTRIAN DELEGATION TO DELIVER PANEL DISCUSSION AT UN HEADQUARTERS
AS PART OF 52ND COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW)**

Technology and private sector bringing solutions in financing to impoverished communities

NEW YORK, Feb 15, 2008 – In 2001, the World Bank reported more than 2 billion people lived on less than \$2 per day. Why does extreme poverty of this nature still exist given over decades of immense international charitable work? The Zoroastrian delegation intends to address the crux of this question at this year's CSW on Friday, Feb. 29, from 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m. They will show that the key to this answer is the manner in which development work in impoverished communities has been taking place. The prevalent top-down approach of charity usually empowers the "givers," in most cases government bodies, as opposed to the individuals in need. The panel will present an example for an alternative approach, namely micro-financing, where the power imbalance is corrected and the true work of development, that is empowering individuals to re-build their own lives and communities, can begin.

The panel will consist of Afreed Mistry, Mantreh Atashband and Shekufeh Zonji (from Toronto, Canada). From cell phone technology to partnerships between the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the panel will discuss innovative ways in which empowering financial services have been and can be provided to rural communities. They will make a case for how the private sector can play a pivotal role in scaling up development endeavors given their vast access to resources. The panelists bring with them a breadth of experience and hope to contribute to the important discourse on resource allocation for gender equality and empowerment that will be taking place at this year's CSW.

The session is open to the public and will take place on the 10th floor of the UN Church Centre on 44th St. and 1st Avenue, New York, opposite United Nations Headquarters.

Zoroastrians have long served as effective bridge builders in interfaith dialogue as they see from their own faith, traditions of truth, righteousness, charity, beneficence and respect for creation reflected in traditions of the religions of both the occident and the orient. Zoroastrianism, founded circa 1500 BCE, is credited to be the oldest monotheistic religion, influencing post-exilic Judaism, which adopted some Zoroastrian beliefs such as the ultimate victory of good over evil and the resurrection of souls. These percepts were then transmitted through Judaism to Christianity, and later to Islam. Zoroastrianism flourished as the imperial religion of three Persian empires, those of the Achaemenians, Parthians and Sasanians, and was the dominant religion from Turkey, and eastward to China during those times. North America's Zoroastrian community includes those who arrived from the Indian subcontinent, known as Parsis, and those who came directly from Iran seeking religious freedom.

About FEZANA

Founded in 1987, FEZANA serves as the coordinating body for 25 Zoroastrian associations throughout the United States and Canada. FEZANA promotes the study, understanding and practice of the Zoroastrian faith in North America., represents the interests of its member associations, and carries out philanthropic and charitable activities worldwide. The *FEZANA Journal*, FEZANA's publication of record, circulates to Zoroastrian households in more than 22 countries, as well as to scholars, academicians and religious organizations worldwide. For more information visit: www.fezana.org.