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**AFGHANISTAN**

## SNAPSHOT

# By the Light of a Cellphone

**Future Afghan lawyers overcome the odds to compete for international award**



*The team from Panjsher Institute poses with their coaches at the Afghan National Round of the Jessup International Moot Court Competition.*

**Students from the newly established Panjsher Institute overcome a lack of electricity and classroom resources to achieve success at the Afghan National Round of Jessup International Moot Court Competition.**

Five students from a rural Afghan college decided to enter a grueling legal competition but they faced a few problems:

1. The contest was in English, a language they didn't speak;
2. They didn't have a coach; and
3. They had to study at night, but without a reliable power supply the lighting often failed, plunging the rooms into blackness.

Yet, by working 14 hours a day, and reading by the light of their cell phones, the team placed third in the Afghan National Round of the prestigious Jessup International Law Moot competition.

Panjsher Institute was established in 2012 on the former site of a US Provincial Reconstruction Team in Panjsher province. Classes are held in refurbished shipping containers without internet, adequate desks and chairs, and with only intermittent heat and electricity. The Jessup is the world's largest moot court contest. National winners converge on Washington annually for the international competition. USAID funds the event in Afghanistan, and this year USAID expanded the competition to include Kandahar, Khost, Takhar and Panjsher, in addition to Herat, Balkh, Al Biruni, and Nangarhar universities. The Panjsher boys were going to be facing tough competitors.

Nonetheless, the students from Panjsher competed with tenacity at the Afghan National Round, displaying their newly developed written and oral advocacy skills. When the judges announced the results, the team placed third, surpassing the winner from last year. The students exploded with delight as if they had won as their peers applauded in respect.

Chancellor Saifullah Ziaee of the Panjsher Institute described the participation of Panjsher students in Jessup as a great achievement. "The significance of their performance cannot be overlooked; this will bring hope to other students of this institute."

The enthusiasm and ingenuity of the students proves: it's not whether you win or lose; it's how you compete that counts.