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### **Conclusion**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) SEAL of EXCELLENCE aims to encourage artisans to produce handicrafts, using traditional skills, patterns and themes in an innovative way to ensure the continuity and sustainability of these traditions and skills, in order to promote a wide range of activities to preserve and develop both traditional and contemporary crafts. Although it is the art and cultural step but it could be considered important from the viewpoint of society and economy because it is a flagship for the crafts producers to produce the handicrafts articles to attest the quality and authenticity with the ensured market to preserve the art and cultural values of the different nations.



Artist : Abdoul Hamid Moharrar

City : Zanjan

Field :Fligree

Size : 11 x 25 cm

Weight : 400gr

Source: Iran Handicrafts Organization archive

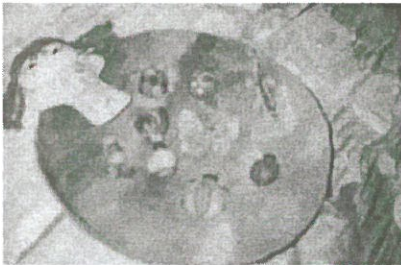
### Few Samples of SEALED Items of the Other Countries:



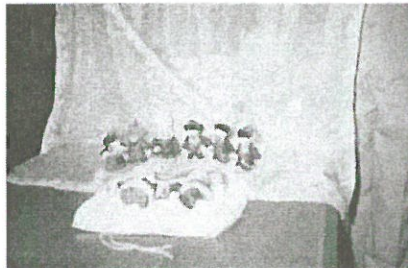
Kyrgyzstan



Uzbekistan



Kazakhstan

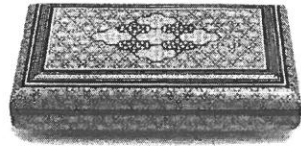


Tajikistan

Source: Author



Artist : Mohammad Gholi Aghaie  
Field : Silk Varni  
City : Tabriz  
Size : 129 x 196 cm  
Weight : 3.7 kg



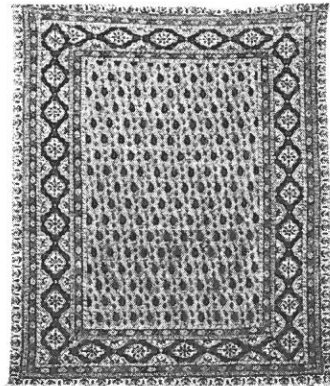
Artist : Mohamad Ebrahim Golriz Khatami  
City : Esfahan  
Field : Khatam  
Size : Frame 21 x 26 cm  
Weight : 550 gr  
Size : Box 22x14 cm  
Weight : 650 gr



Artist : Reza Nezampour  
City : Tabriz  
Field : Silver inlayed prayer beads  
Size : 34 cm  
Weight : 50 gr



Artist : Fatemeh Mohammadi Kashkooli  
Field : Ghashghale Kilim  
City : Shiraz  
Size : 200 x 97 cm  
Weight : 1.95 kg



Artist : Ali Reza Khatami  
City : Esfahan  
Field : Block printing  
Laid Size : 156x221 cm  
Weight : 650 gr

It should be mentioned that each of the 6 criteria (Excellent, Authentic, Innovative, Eco-friendly, Marketable and (social responsibility, ( fair labour law)) reach a consensus to provide a mark between 0 and 5 according to the following scale:

5. Excellent
4. Good
3. Average
2. Poor
1. Very Poor
0. Missing Information

**The product:**

a- Shall be awarded with the seal; (average rating above 3, no criterium rated 0 or 1).

b- Shall receive special encouragements to improve the product and resubmit it, free of charge, on the following year; or

c- Shall not receive the seal because it does not meet the criteria; or

d- Shall be disqualified because the information provided in the entry form is insufficient to fairly evaluate it.

**SEALED Articles Table of Tajikistan Session**

Country	Submitted	SEALED
Kyrgyzstan	45	16
Uzbekistan	28	11
Iran	19	6
Tajikistan	10	2
Kazakhstan	8	2
Turkmenistan	7	-
Total	117	37

Source: Author

**SEALED Articles as per the Material Classification and the Relevant Countries**

RAW Materials	Countries	Per-cent
Textile	Kazakhstan - Kyrgyzstan Uzbekistan - Iran	27
Natural Fiber	-	-
Ceramic	Tajikistan - Uzbekistan	2
Wood	Iran - Kazakhstan - Uzbekistan - Kyrgyzstan	5
Stone	-	-
Metal	Kyrgyzstan - Iran	2
Other	Tajikistan	1

Source: Author

Iran which was participating in the programme for the first time at 2007 Tajikistan session, received six seal certificates as per the following table. The table provide information with due attention to product, producers, province and the average marks obtained by the presented items.

**Table Of Iranian SEALED Articles**

Product	Province	Producer	Average
Silk Varni	W. Azarbayjan	Mr. M.Aghaie	3.60
Marquetry (Khatam)	Isfahan	Mr. M.G Khatami	3.56
Silver Inlayed Rosary	W. Azarbayjan	Mr. R.Nezamipoor	3.52
Ghashghaic Kilim	Fars	Ms. F.M Kashkooli	3.32
Block Printed Material	Esfahan	Mr. A.R. Botlani	3.28
Figree (Silver)	Zanjan	Mr. M.Moharar	3.16

Source: Author



## Handicrafts

Handicrafts are defined as products that are produced either completely by hand or with the help of tools. Mechanical tools may be used as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product. Handicrafts are made from raw materials and can be produced in unlimited numbers. Such products can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally expressive, decorative, functional, traditional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant.<sup>1</sup>

The SEAL will be awarded only to handicrafts produced from one or a combination of natural materials. Following is a list of some of the natural materials from which products can be made. This list is provided as a guide for producers and is by no means exhaustive:

- Ceramics (e.g. clay, earthenware, pottery, stoneware, porcelain)
- Metal (e.g. silver, gold, bronze, iron, pewter)
- Natural fibres (e.g. bamboo, vietiver grass, rattan)
- Stone (e.g. precious, semi-precious, jades)
- Textiles (e.g. cotton, silk, linen)
- Wood (including paper and lacquer ware)

### The sub-regional partner organizations Of UNESCO in Asia

Sub-regions	Participating countries	UNESCO sub-regional partners
Southeast Asia	Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor, East and Vietnam	ASEAN Handicraft Promotion and Development Association (AHPADA)
Central Asia	Afghanistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan	Central Asia Crafts Support Association (CACSA)
South Asia	Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Maldives, and Sri Lanka	Crafts Council of India (CCI)
East Asia	China, Democratic People's Republic Of Korea, Japan, Mongolia and Republic of Korea	National Crafts Association in East Asia (NCAEA)

Source: UNESCO Publication

1 - (UNESCO/ITC - International Symposium on "Crafts and the international Market: Trade and Customs Codification," Manila, Philippines, October 1997)

### **Programme regulations and eligibility<sup>1</sup>**

1. The SEAL is awarded on a yearly basis by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in collaboration with regional partners.

2. The SEAL is open to: individual craft producers, community groups, cooperatives, private businesses and agencies that produce commercial handmade product lines, and are capable of maintaining adequate stock levels to fulfill sales orders.

3. The applicant must reside permanently (for individuals) or be registered (for businesses) in one of the participating countries.

4. Only “handicraft” products will be accepted. (Refer to the definition of handicrafts below). Products of a purely artistic nature are not eligible.

5. Products submitted without a complete application form will not be considered for the award.

6. The SEAL is only valid for one product or one product line and the SEAL certificate or SEAL logo cannot be used for the promotion of other products manufactured by the same programme.

7. The SEAL certificate is valid for a period of 3 years, which can be extended upon confirmation that the product or product line is still available, and meets the same characteristics and quality level. Without confirmation from the producer, the product will be removed from the website and other promotional materials.

8. The certificate can be reproduced in unlimited number for promotional purposes.

9. Craft samples or prototypes submitted for consideration for the SEAL – regardless of whether they are awarded the SEAL or not will be retained for educational purposes and cannot be sold by the programme.

10. Products not awarded the SEAL can be returned to the producer at their own cost upon written request.

11. All patent, copyright and other reproduction rights are retained by the producer.



● **Authentic**

**Expression of cultural identity and traditional aesthetic values:**

Demonstrated by a well-achieved application of aesthetic and cultural expression or traditional crafting technique

● **Innovative**

**Innovation in design and production:**

Demonstrated by an effective and successful blend of traditional and contemporary, or inventive and creative use of material, design, and production processes

● **Eco-friendly**

**Respect for the environment in materials and production techniques:**

Exemplified through the use of natural dyes, natural fibres, recycled materials and the use of materials and production processes that are environmentally friendly

● **Marketable**

**Marketability of the craft products with potential for the world market:**

Related to the functionality of the product, the safe use by potential buyers, a balanced price-quality relationship or the sustainability of production

● **Fair**

**Social responsibility:**

The producer must affirm that no labour law was violated and no individual or group exploited unfairly at any stage in the production of a handicraft submitted for the SEAL.

A product which meets all of the criteria will be certified with the "Seal of Excellence". This recognizes the highest level of craft excellence and distinguishes a product as a benchmark for craft production.

- **Training and capacity-building**

UNESCO assists national and sub-regional partners in organizing workshops on design, marketing and support mechanisms for the producers of SEAL-certified products.

- **Intellectual property and copyrights**

Producers of SEAL-certified handicrafts are provided with advice and support from UNESCO to register their products under intellectual property rights regimes.

### **The SEAL Process**

- **Submission**

Producers of handicraft products and product lines from participating countries could submit their highest quality items for consideration annually.

- **Judging**

The judging takes place in September each year. Products that meet SEAL standards are certified with the “ Seal of Excellence.”

- **Awarding**

Products that are awarded the Seal of Excellence will be announced on 1 October of each year. The form and number of certificates awarded is at the discretion of the judging panel, UNESCO and the sub-regional partners, and may vary from year to year.

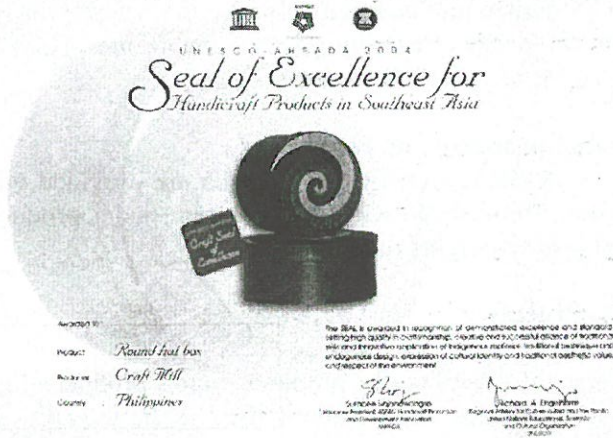
- **Judging Criteria**

A product that is certified with the “ Seal of Excellence “ meets the highest level of craft excellence and is distinguished as a benchmark for craft production. An international selection panel, nominated by UNESCO, judges submissions annually based on meeting ALL of the following 6 criteria. To be certified with the SEAL, a product must be:

- **Excellent**

**Demonstrated excellence and standard-setting quality in craftsmanship:**

Determined by the use of high quality materials, a high standard of technique and the special attention to manufacturing detail



Source: UNESCO Publication

● **Trade fairs and exhibitions**

Producers have the opportunity to display and sell the SEAL – certified product at the annual exhibition and trade fair organized for SEAL products and will receive guidance about participating in international trade fairs.

● **Promotion and marketing**

Producers benefit from the promotion and communication campaign coordinated by UNESCO and its partners. Promotional materials, such as brochures, catalogues, and product tags in the respective languages, will enhance the product visibility and marketability.

● **Website and e-commerce**

All SEAL – certified products, together with producer’s information data, are listed on the UNESCO Bangkok website so that interested buyers can directly communicate with producers and place orders.

It should be mentioned that 30 countries in Asia are now taking part in this initiative. This growth has been accompanied by a new, region – wide branding and increased promotion and distribution channels.

## **OBJECTIVES**

### **1-Provide market opportunities to ensure sustainability of handicraft industries:**

The handicraft sector plays an increasingly significant role in local economic development. The SEAL programme aims to provide market opportunities in order to develop networks of handicraft producers and buyers through exhibitions, trade fairs, website etc.

### **2 - Establish rigorous standards of excellence for handicrafts :**

The UNESCO SEAL aims to establish a credible quality control mechanism that upholds rigorous standards of excellence. It aims to ensure that when consumers buy UNESCO SEAL–awarded handicrafts, they are buying high quality, culturally authentic products that have been manufactured in a socially-responsible manner with respect for the environment.

### **3 - Encourage innovativeness**

While it seeks to promote the continuation of traditional skills, the UNESCO SEAL also encourages product innovation in order to ensure that handicrafts remain relevant, valuable, and marketable in modern life.

### **4- Offer training and support services**

UNESCO SEAL aims to provide capacity-building and training workshops to assist craft producers in the improvement of their product design and marketing, development of their markets, and protection of their intellectual property rights.

## **Benefits**

**The producers of SEAL–certified products benefit in the following ways:**

### **● Promotional certification**

Each product recognized with the UNESCO SEAL is given a certificate. The SEAL certificate can be used as a promotional tool ( for this specific product or product line only) to attest the quality and authenticity of a product.

and raise awareness of the artisans to produce handicrafts articles to attest the quality and authenticity with the ensured market, to preserve and promote the art and cultural values of different nations.

Iran which took part for the first time in the 2007 seal programme session, being held in Dushanbeh, Tajikistan from 24 – 27 september, received 6 seal certificates for the Iranian handicrafts articles. Due to the importance of the matter (Seal ), this paper attempts to take a step for further introduction of the SEAL in order to prepare ground for better participation of the relevant capable products in the future sessions.

### **The SEAL of Excellence**

Productivity aims the improvement of the quality and the higher quality is the means and way for better productivity. There are several means and manners to improve the crafts people in order to develop the quality of their products. Meanwhile handicrafts are being considered important from the viewpoint of society, culture, arts and economy and are able to play a significant role in local economic development and poverty eradication. By providing new market opportunities, the SEAL programme aims to enable handicraft producers to establish sustainable livelihood. This will be achieved through developing networks of handicraft producers and customers, including the higher – end of the market, and through exhibitions and trade fairs.

The Seal of Excellence for Handicrafts programme was established in 2001 by UNESCO (UNESCO Office Bangkok)<sup>1</sup> in collaboration with the ASEAN Handicraft Promotion and Development Association (AHPADA) for piloting in Asia. Referred to as the “SEAL” this programme aims to ensure the continuation of traditional knowledge and craft skills which help to preserve cultural diversity in the region.

Since 2006 the SEAL programme has been launched globally with the SEAL being introduced in Africa, Europe and America. The Asia programme has expanded over the last few years to south Asia (2004), central Asia (2004) and was launched in East Asia in 2006.

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1 -SEAL of Excellence Programme, UNESCO Office Bangkok – UNESCO Publication 2001



# **The UNESCO Seal of Excellence for Handicrafts**

**Abdul Hamid Haji Pour Shoushtari (Ph.D)\***

## **Abstract**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) promotes a wide range of activities to preserve and develop both traditional and contemporary crafts. This includes a ten – year plan of action for the development of crafts in the world (1990 – 2000), the annual UNESCO crafts prize to recognize the creative talents of craft producers, as well as programmes to identify and bestow on the world’s most outstanding artisans the title of “ Human Living Treasure.”

On the other hand, creativity is the humankind’s most widely and evenly distributed resources. All people seek outlets for self – expression and have the capacity to create objects to uplift the spirit and enhance peoples lives.

**Keywords:** Quality, Authenticity, Handicrafts, UNESCO, Seal of Excellence, Tajikistan Session.

## **Introduction**

The Seal of Excellence for Handicrafts was jointly established by UNESCO and the ASEAN Handicrafts promotion and Development Association (AHPADA) in 2001. Owing to its success the programme has been expanded worldwide.

The programme aims to encourage artisans to produce handicrafts, using traditional skills, patterns and themes in an innovative way, in order to ensure the continuity and sustainability of these traditions and skills. It should be said that the SEAL is UNESCO’s flagship programme for supporting craft producers.

The UNESCO’s Seal of Excellence for Handicrafts is based on the criteria such as: Excellent, Authentic, Innovative, Social responsibility (fair labour law), eco – friendly and marketability, in order to guide

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