

News Release

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Back to Basics: Reshaping Canada's Mission in Afghanistan

The coming Throne Speech is an excellent opportunity for the Government to re-orient Canada's mission in Afghanistan. Better development, more diplomacy and real security must become the focus of our involvement.

"The debate over whether Canada's troops should stay or go obscures the real reasons for Canada's presence in Afghanistan," says Gerry Barr, President/CEO of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation. "It's not primarily about Western security, but about Afghan security - building a lasting peace, strengthening Afghan government, human rights and the rule of law, combating poverty and supporting sustainable development."

Canadian non-governmental organizations are already deeply involved in that effort. But Canada's focus on military objectives without efforts for a lasting peace for Afghans, has made the task more difficult.

Efforts to win the "hearts and minds" of the Afghans for short-term security reasons must not be confused with genuine humanitarian assistance and longer term development efforts. When humanitarian efforts become politicized – no longer considered neutral – then aid workers, Afghans and development itself are put at risk.

Canada's strong military presence in Kandahar and its role as a major donor in Afghanistan means we can be a leader in diplomatic efforts to build peace in Afghanistan. Canada needs to do more to pursue diplomatic avenues to a lasting peace.

Gerry Barr, President/CEO, The Canadian Council for International Co-operation, Ernie Regehr, Project Ploughshares, Kevin McCort, Care Canada, and Peggy Mason, former Canadian Ambassador to the UN on Disarmament will speak to these ideas in the Charles Lynch Room, 10:30 a.m. October 12, 2007.

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