

OPEN LETTER TO PRIME MINISTER STEPHEN HARPER

March 26, 2009

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper  
Prime Minister of Canada  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

RE: NATO Heads of State and Government Summit, April 3-4, 2009

The Canadian Council for International Co-operation is encouraged by prospects of NATO reviewing the international mission in Afghanistan during the April Summit. As an umbrella organization of development and humanitarian agencies we hope Canada will take leadership in promoting measures to increase the safety and protection of civilians caught in the conflict, and in particular those involved with development and humanitarian work inside Afghanistan.

According to UN figures, there were at least 120 attacks against aid workers in 2008 resulting in 30 deaths and 92 abductions. According to UNICEF, there were 256 attacks against schools resulting in 58 deaths and 46 injuries in 2008. More than 600 schools in southern Afghanistan were closed due to insecurity last year. These attacks and threats reveal significant setbacks in development progress. While we unreservedly condemn the actions of armed opposition groups in causing civilian casualties, including the use of suicide bombers, summary executions, and attacks on aid groups, we believe that the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians rests with the Afghan government and the international troops that support the government.

Perceived association between international military forces (IMF) and civilian aid in Afghanistan has led to threats against development and humanitarian organizations by anti-government groups. In turn, this has affected the security and sustainability of programs and impeded their ability to work with vulnerable communities. We recognize that insecurity in Afghanistan arises from multiple factors, including economic criminality and corruption. However, with reports of increasing raids on aid agencies we are profoundly concerned that military involvement with aid is increasing risk for civilians.

In May 2008, the *Guidelines for the Interaction and Coordination of Humanitarian Actors and Military Actors in Afghanistan* was endorsed by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), UN agencies, International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF), and non-governmental humanitarian organizations. The Guidelines establish a division of labour between military and humanitarian actors, reiterating the importance of not conflating security objectives with humanitarian imperatives. Canada has its own Guidelines on Civil-Military Coordination in Humanitarian Action, which similarly upholds a distinction between the role of humanitarian aid and military operations. Given the growing insecurity for aid agencies, we consider it imperative that these guidelines be put into practice by Canadian Forces and other troop contributing countries in Afghanistan.

We are also alarmed that the geographic distribution of humanitarian and development assistance is, in part, influenced by military imperatives over needs-based allocation of aid resources. Canada for its part has allocated 50% of its aid to Kandahar province. As a major donor in Afghanistan, we are troubled that this rather arbitrary division of Canadian aid might have a detrimental impact on poor and vulnerable communities in other parts of the country, and in turn could heighten rivalry between the North and South.

With growing recognition of the importance of humanitarian and development assistance in building the foundations for peace and stability in Afghanistan, we urgently call upon you to raise the following issues during the Summit:

1. Recommend a clear separation between civilian aid and military actors in Afghanistan. In particular, that the comprehensive approach adopted by International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which seeks to integrate military, political and other civilian efforts, be clearly separated from the humanitarian functions of the UN, the Red Cross Movement, and civil society organizations.
2. Urge all troop contributing countries involved in the NATO-led ISAF and Operation Enduring Freedom operations to respect and implement the Afghanistan Civil Military Guidelines and abide by the strictest standards of international humanitarian law.
3. Recognize and promote the importance of a balanced, 'needs-based' approach to the distribution of humanitarian and development aid in all regions of Afghanistan, emphasizing the role of Afghan citizens and government in determining priorities for donors.

Please find enclosed a briefing note, *Aid in the Crosshairs: Civil-Military Relations in Afghanistan*. The paper synthesizes research findings on civil-military relations undertaken in Afghanistan, Europe, the U.K. and Canada. We would be pleased to meet with you and discuss our recommendations further at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Gerry Barr  
President-CEO

c.c: The Honourable Lawrence Cannon, Minister of Foreign Affairs  
The Honourable Peter MacKay, Minister of National Defence  
The Honourable Stockwell Day, Minister of International Trade and Chair of the Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan  
The Honourable Beverley J. Oda, Minister of International Cooperation  
Ambassador Robert McRae, Permanent Representative of Canada to the North Atlantic Council  
Lieutenant-General Christopher J.R. Davis, Canada's Military Representative to the NATO Military Committee  
Mr. David Mulroney, Deputy Minister, Privy Council Office  
The Honourable Michael Ignatieff, Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada  
The Honourable Jack Layton, Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada  
Mr. Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc Québécois