

Open Letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs

January 21, 2010

The Honourable Lawrence Cannon
Minister of Foreign Affairs
125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, ON
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Re: The International Conference on Afghanistan (January 28, 2010)

Dear Minister Cannon:

We are writing this open letter ahead of next week's meeting in London where delegations from the Government of Afghanistan and donor and troop-contributing countries will meet to discuss international efforts in rebuilding Afghanistan. We welcome the opportunity by the Afghan government and international community to take stock and, we hope, change course. More money and more troops alone will not address the roots of the current crisis, which are embedded in a legacy of unresolved conflict, chronic poverty, weak institutions, and poor governance. The time has come for a change of direction that reflects the current situation in Afghanistan, as well as the lessons and successes from the past eight years of international support to that country.

We urge Canada, as a major financial and troop-contributing donor to Afghanistan, to take leadership in four areas: 1) security and protection of civilians, 2) effective socio-economic development, 3) accountable governance and democratic institutions, and 4) dialogue and reconciliation.

Security and Protection of Civilians

Anticipating the U.S. troop surge and resulting response from the armed opposition, we are gravely concerned that violence will intensify in Afghanistan, leading to more civilian casualties and attacks against aid and aid workers. Any escalation in violence would further limit humanitarian access to vulnerable populations, particularly in the South of the country. We are concerned civilians will increasingly be caught in the cross-fire, deliberately targeted, and suffer the consequences of reduced access to humanitarian assistance.

Canada has been a long-time champion of the Protection of Civilians agenda and should make civilian protection a pillar of its military operations in Kandahar. We encourage you to:

- Leverage Canada's role in training the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to work with other International Security Assistance Force contributing countries, and in particular the U.S., to operationalize civilian protection in all military operations.

- Provide training on civilian protection to the ANSF.
- Advocate strongly with the Afghan government, ANSF, and other troop contributing countries to adhere to the Afghanistan civil-military guidelines and to conduct training on the guidelines with all foreign and national forces.
- Continue supporting initiatives aimed at disarming militias.

Effective Socio-Economic Development

Attention and resources for reducing poverty and meeting the basic needs of vulnerable women, men and children continues to be disproportionately focused on areas of strategic security in the south to the neglect of poor communities across the country, north and south. Growing pressure for aid agencies to work in the south has been paralleled by increasing attacks against aid workers making development initiatives difficult and reducing humanitarian access to vulnerable populations.

Canada's Aid Accountability Act requires all official development assistance to be focused on poverty reduction, take into account the perspectives of the poor, and be consistent with international human rights standards. We urge Canada to take leadership to ensure its program in Afghanistan fully upholds Canadian criteria for aid. To this end, we ask you to work with the Minister of International Cooperation to:

- Re-configure Canada's aid program in Afghanistan to allocate resources based on the assessment of need and poverty throughout the country, without earmarking funds for regions of strategic security interest such as the current 50% aid allocation for Kandahar.
- Fund programming that is accountable to local beneficiaries, long-term, participatory, and aligned with the commitments made in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS).
- De-link military operations from humanitarian and development aid recognizing that perceived collaboration between aid and military actors results in aid becoming a target for attacks by armed groups.
- Support an evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of Canada's aid program in Afghanistan by assessing the transparency, accountability, and efficiency of different mechanisms and implementers including the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team, the Government of Afghanistan, the UN system, and civil society organizations.

Accountable Governance and Democratic Institutions

Democratic structures and institutions have a critical role to play in enabling greater trust and accountability between government and citizens. Greater emphasis on building democratic sub-national governance structures and processes can help increase government accountability with local communities. In the aftermath of the presidential elections, and in light of the upcoming 2010 parliamentary elections, questions of accountable and legitimate representation are likely be on the minds of many Afghans. The parliamentary elections offer a timely opportunity to encourage more legitimate representation in government by supporting Afghan initiatives for legislative and other reforms aimed at preventing individuals responsible for serious human rights abuses from holding office.

We encourage you to take advantage of Canada's expertise in good governance, human rights, and democratic development to:

- Further support the development of sub-national governance structures and processes.
- Seek ways of further supporting transitional justice, including the Action Plan on Peace, Justice and Reconciliation.
- Continue funding Afghan civil society organizations and especially women's groups working on human and women's rights.
- Strengthen the vetting procedures and capacity of the Electoral Complaints Commission and other Afghan institutions to investigate candidate links to Illegal Armed Groups and the commission of grave human rights abuses.
- Support local efforts to enhance the participation of women to run in the 2010 parliamentary election.

Dialogue and Reconciliation

There is now widespread recognition that unless opposition elements, such as the Taliban, are engaged in political dialogue with the Afghan government, an end to violent conflict will not be possible. The lack of inclusivity of the Bonn Agreement and subsequent state-building efforts are key drivers of the current phase of conflict. Despite some progress on political reconciliation supported by different Afghan entities, the Afghan government, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and donors including Canada, the impact of reconciliation efforts has been marginal. Efforts have been marked by a lack of inclusivity and a bias to co-opt fighters rather than to encourage genuine dialogue and reconciliation. Dialogue among adversaries is needed at local, national, and regional levels to address the long term security, political, and socio-economic needs of the population. We, therefore, recommend that the Government of Canada work with the Afghan government, Afghan civil society, and international donors, to make the pursuit of inclusive peace talks a top priority.

Canada has committed to political reconciliation as one of six priorities in Afghanistan until 2011. We encourage that support for dialogue and reconciliation be a long-term priority in Afghanistan, well beyond 2011. To this end, Canada should:

- Urge the international community, the Government of Afghanistan, and Afghan citizens to engage in a sustained peace initiative reaching out to disaffected communities in Afghanistan and the armed opposition.
- Encourage a coordinated regional diplomatic strategy involving Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, India, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan to address cross-border and regional implications of the conflict.
- Support the Independent Directorate of Local Governance and other Afghan entities to improve their dialogue and reconciliation programs.
- Fund Afghan civil society initiatives for peace and reconciliation.
- Encourage the establishment of a multi-ethnic peace-building commission independent of government and customized to the Afghan context tasked with supporting inter-tribal dialogue and managing disputes over land, water, and other issues.

By 2011, Canada will have invested close to \$ 2 billion dollars in aid and likely well over \$ 9 billion in defense spending over a decade. What will be the Canadian legacy in Afghanistan? And, what future role will Canada play in a country that has been at the forefront of its foreign policy for close to a decade?

At the London Conference, we urge you to make a strong statement of long-term Canadian support to Afghanistan, focused on civilian protection, effective development, accountable governance, and reconciliation.

We would be pleased to meet with you at any time to discuss Canada's current and future role in Afghanistan.

Sincerely,

Gerry Barr
President-CEO, CCIC

Michael Casey, Executive Director, Development & Peace
Janice Eisenhauer, Executive Director, Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan
Robert Fox, Executive Director, Oxfam Canada
Alex Neve, Secretary General, Amnesty International Canada
John Siebert, Executive Director, Project Ploughshares
Merrill Stewart, Clerk, Canadian Friends Service Committee
Pierre Véronneau, Executive Director, Oxfam-Québec

c.c. The Honourable Beverley J. Oda, Minister of International Cooperation
The Honourable Peter Gordon MacKay, Minister of Defence
Members of Parliament
Greta Bossenmaier, Deputy Minister, Privy Council Office, Afghanistan Task Force