

Afghanistan: A Call for Security

June 17, 2003

We the undersigned humanitarian, human rights, civil society and conflict prevention organizations call on the international community to accord NATO a robust stabilization mandate in Afghanistan. This mandate should include the expansion of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to key locations and major transport routes outside of Kabul and the active support for a comprehensive program of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of all militia forces outside the control of the central government. Current efforts to train representative, professional Afghan national security forces must be accelerated.

In the past six months, security has deteriorated and violence against civilians has increased. Unless security conditions improve, progress made to date in Afghanistan will be in jeopardy. Reconstruction efforts have already been impeded. Without a shift in the current security paradigm, conditions for free and fair elections are not likely to be in place by June 2004.

Progress in Jeopardy

Much has been accomplished in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban and the signing of the Bonn Agreement in December 2001. After 23 years of war, an Afghan Transitional Administration, headed by President Hamid Karzai, was selected through a nationwide *loya jirga*. The central government has since adopted a national development budget, completed a currency reform, and begun the important work of drafting a new constitution. Furthermore, more than two million refugees have returned to Afghanistan in the world's largest voluntary repatriation effort in the last 30 years. After a concerted back-to-school campaign in March 2003, a record four – five million children have returned to school, up from three million last year.

Despite important progress in these and other areas, efforts by the Afghan Government to further implement the Bonn Agreement and rebuild the country economically and politically are now jeopardized by a deteriorating security situation.

Inadequate Security Framework

The international community must continue to build the capacity of the central government to maintain the peace and provide for the rule of law. Sustainable security can only be achieved by a unified Afghan Government with control over internal and external security matters. Efforts to create an Afghan National Army have faltered, with only 4,000 of the 70,000 proposed force trained to date. According to the most optimistic assumptions, the central government will only have 9,000 soldiers – a fraction of the forces currently under various regional commanders – to deploy by mid-2004. Training a new police force has also proven to be daunting. The German-led training program began in March 2003 with a first class of 500-600 people. These programs must be accelerated and undertaken as part of a comprehensive approach to security sector reform that includes the demobilization and reintegration of all combatants currently serving in militias outside of effective government control.

International peacekeepers in Afghanistan have been largely limited to Kabul, where the ISAF contingent of 4,800 soldiers from 29 countries operates pursuant to a UN mandate. U.S. and other Coalition forces are attempting to extend security outside Kabul through "Provincial Reconstruction Teams," which combine military and civilian personnel. These teams, deployed to a few locations, are each comprised of between 50-100 personnel and lack the resources to really address the security threats posed by warlords and other armed spoilers. Some 11,500 U.S.- led Coalition combat troops hunt down armed opposition groups without a corresponding mandate to protect the civilian population. For the majority of the Afghan people, security is precarious and controlled by regional

warlords, drug traffickers or groups with terrorist associations. The situation is getting worse, and there is no comprehensive plan in place to halt the spiral of violence. Both UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and his Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi have called for an expansion of ISAF to bring security to all of Afghanistan.

Situation Deteriorating

The peace process is jeopardized by daily harassment and intimidation of ordinary Afghans, fighting between ethnic groups and factional leaders, and a recent surge in attacks blamed on Al-Qa'ida and Taliban fugitives and the Hisb-e-Islami forces of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. There has been a sharp increase of activity by elements hostile to the Afghan Government and the international community, particularly in the southern and eastern border provinces. A water engineer with a humanitarian organization was murdered in March, while in April, assailants threw grenades at a United Nations children's agency compound. UN offices in Gardez and Kandahar have also incurred grenade attacks. In April, Afghan mine-clearers were ambushed four times in southern Afghanistan. Rivalries between regional and factional leaders are ongoing and numerous. In the west, the forces of Herat's Governor, Ismael Khan, clash with local commander Amanullah Khan and local governor Gul Mohammad. In the south, forces loyal to the Kandahar Governor, Gul Agha, clash with those under the command of General Akram. In the north, Generals Dostum and Atta continue their rivalry around Mazar-i-Sharif.

In May, the UN required its staff to travel with armed escorts in six volatile southern provinces. NGO travel and activities are routinely suspended for two or three days in specific locations although security conditions have not yet deteriorated to a level that requires complete cessation of local operations. However, the security spiral is downward, and the people of Afghanistan are now speaking of the "days of better security under the Taliban." The current situation must not be institutionalized.

Unsafe for Elections and Voter Registration

In one short year, elections are scheduled for Afghanistan – June 2004. The conduct of free and fair elections – in which fundamental human rights are respected and the "playing field" is reasonably level and accessible to all electors, parties and candidates – is central to the success of the Bonn process. Free and fair elections require an environment free from violence, intimidation and coercion. Continuing challenges to the authority of the central government by regional warlords and terrorist groups, and the persistent security vacuum in many parts of the country, make it difficult to prepare for elections, including voter registration. Urgent action is required by the international community to support the Afghan government's efforts to create conditions so that the Afghan people can freely choose their own government next year.

Stability by NATO

NATO has long recognized the need for a robust force to stabilize post-conflict situations (e.g. in the Balkans). Just as a force in Sarajevo alone could not have stabilized Bosnia, a force in Kabul alone cannot stabilize Afghanistan. If Afghanistan is to have any hope for peace and stabilization, now is the time to expand international peacekeepers to key cities and transport routes outside of Kabul. ISAF can accomplish this task, but to do so it requires the mandate and resources. In August 2003, NATO will assume control of ISAF. An expanded ISAF presence requires time for force generation and deployment. The order must be given now for NATO to have impact in August.

We call on the international community to expand the ISAF mandate and provide the resources needed to secure Afghanistan so that democracy can flourish. Doing so will improve the prospect for peace and stability for the Afghan people and the world.

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Asian Institute For Rural Development
AUSTCARE
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Campaign for U.N. Reform
CARE International
Caritas Internationalis
Catholic Relief Services
Center for Victims of Torture
Center for Humanitarian Cooperation
Children in Crisis
Christian Children's Fund/ Child Fund
Afghanistan
Church World Service
Church Women United
Coalition for International Justice
Coalition of Afghan Associations of Northern California
Committee for an Effective International Criminal Law
Congressional Hunger Center
Concern International
Concern Worldwide
Cordaid
Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
Danish Refugee Council
Episcopal Migration Ministries
Equality Now
Ethiopian Community Development Council
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Global Action to Prevent War
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Institute on Religion and Public Policy

International Catholic Migration Commission
International Crisis Group
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International Medical Corps
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