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Backgrounder on Canada's Approach to Helping Afghanistan

Canada is a major participant in the Afghanistan Compact --- a five-year agreement between the Government of Afghanistan, the **United Nations** and the international community. The agreement provides a framework for coordinating the work of the Afghan government and its international partners by outlining expected results and timelines in the areas of **security, governance and development**. Canada pledged its full support and was instrumental in ensuring that the January 2006 Compact included a mechanism to monitor programs and promote forward momentum.

Canada's reconstruction goals follow the principle of **enabling** Afghan communities to lead and take ownership of the development projects themselves. Governance objectives are likewise focused on helping Afghans establish institutional capacity to bring about long-term and sustainable progress – instead of temporary fixes. This development model is an approach that works and one which Canada is committed to.

Canada also plays a major role in the **UN-sanctioned** 37-nation International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Approximately **2,500** members of the Canadian Forces are currently serving as part of Joint Task Force Afghanistan. They play a key role in the **NATO-led** ISAF mission whose goal is to help bring security and stability, and foster development in Afghanistan. Approximately 15,000 Canadian soldiers have served in Afghanistan since 2001 – in Kabul and Kandahar.

Security is necessary for development and reconstruction to move forward successfully. While the Taliban insurgency is a challenge for Afghanistan and the international community, it mainly affects the five southern provinces, including Kandahar; the other 29 provinces are largely unaffected.

A key security objective is the training and enabling of Afghan police and military forces to gradually assume responsibility for security from the international community.

Canadian Projects and Contributions

Canada is one of the top five donors to national Afghan development programs, a key partner in United Nations de-mining work, and a leading nation in decommissioning regional militias and securing the storage of heavy weapons and tanks.

Canada also maintains key bilateral programs such as the Vocational Training and Food Aid for War Widows and is the lead donor for the highly successful microfinance

program for small businesses - which has benefited 300,000 Afghans (72 percent women).

Canada supports Afghan-designed and -led national programs that bring benefits and basic services to Afghans across the country. Sustainable progress is achieved when Afghans themselves are leading the way. By supporting projects for water wells, roads, schools and health clinics, or by helping the Afghan people create jobs, Canada is helping to improve the lives of all Afghans.

Canada also helps fund the **National Solidarity Program**, through which more than 17,000 villages, or half of all Afghan villages, have had a say in the construction of schools, clinics, roads, irrigation canals and wells in their communities. This program has the double advantage of helping Afghans elect village councils (some 16,000 to date), comprising men as well as women, and helping them build infrastructure to improve their access to health services and education for their children.

Provincial Reconstruction Team

Canada assumed responsibility for the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in August 2005. Twenty-four PRTs throughout Afghanistan help the democratically elected government of Afghanistan extend its authority and ability to govern, rebuild the nation and provide services to its citizens.

Based in Kandahar City in the southern province of Kandahar, the Canadian PRT is located in the former heartland of the former Taliban regime, which previously controlled much of Afghanistan. Kandahar is arguably the Afghan province in greatest need for support and also the province most targeted by insurgent activities.

The 330-person Canadian team utilizes the expertise of diplomats, development experts, the police and military. Its mandate closely mirrors the priorities of the Afghanistan Compact and **Afghan National Development Strategy, namely security, governance and development**. The PRT supports key national Afghan programs such as the National Solidarity Program (which Canada helps to fund). The PRT also carries out a broad range of enabling roles such as police training and strengthening all areas of local governance capacity, justice and human needs assistance.

The PRT concurrently works on projects that have impacts in the long, medium and short term. The most important achievements will be those which bring about long-term sustainable benefits to the Afghan population. That being said, immediate need, "quick impact" projects are also being carried out across the Province.

The Canadian Embassy

The Embassy provides the resident diplomatic and consular presence required to effectively support Canadian defence and development efforts in Afghanistan in close coordination with Afghan partners and the international community.

Conclusion

Rebuilding Afghanistan after decades of war is a slow and complex process. The results of our efforts to date are encouraging and demonstrate the will on the part of the people

of Afghanistan and the international community to succeed. Canada continues to stand with the UN, our international partners and the Government of Afghanistan in our collective commitment to a secure and sustainable future for Afghanistan.



Key Facts:

- Afghanistan is a land-locked country in southwest Asia, bordered by six countries, including Pakistan and Iran. It has a population of about 30 million (slightly less than Canada). It is one of the poorest countries in the world, having suffered through more than three decades of war, oppression and drought.
- Its two major cities are **Kabul** (the capital) in the north and **Kandahar** in the south.
- Afghans belong to several different ethnic groups and speak two different languages – Dari and Pashto.
- Canada re-established diplomatic relations with Afghanistan in January 2002, following the fall of the Taliban regime. The following year (September 2003) the Canadian Embassy was opened in Kabul.
- Canada’s current development, reconstruction and security efforts are focused in the Kandahar region in the south (Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team - PRT).