



CHRISTIAN
REFORMED
CHURCHES
IN CANADA

Building a Partnership for Peace with Justice in Afghanistan



COMMITTEE
for CONTACT with
the GOVERNMENT

**Submission of the Committee for Contact with the Government,
Christian Reformed churches in Canada to:
The Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan
December 2007**

For further information contact:
Mike Hogeterp, Research and Communications Manager,
Committee for Contact with the Government
hogeterpm@crcna.ca
800.730.3490 ext 286

Introduction:

Public debate on the scope of Canada's mission in Afghanistan has been narrow. It has focused on the end date of the military mission, and a simplistic polarization between military defeat of the Taliban and development. Peace with Justice in Afghanistan is a complex matter that demands greater nuance in public debate and policy-making. The Government of Canada has argued that security is a prerequisite for development. Security, development and diplomacy are all critical to a sustainable peace. Sustainable security and development depend on addressing the roots of the conflict in partnership with the peoples of Afghanistan. Wise support and empowerment for *made in Afghanistan* approaches to reconciliation/transitional justice and accountable-and-just governance ought to be a key orientation of Canada's engagement now and beyond February 2009.

In 2006 the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) concluded a landmark bi-national study on peace and war. The key finding of that study is a call for governments and the Christian community to dedicate more attention to building peace with justice. Building on this finding, the Committee for Contact with the Government (CCG) of the CRC believes that peacebuilding requires the integration of reconciliation, just governance, development and security. These principles have characterized CCG's perspectives on Canada's mission to Afghanistan and also motivate CRC participation in ecumenical dialogue concerning it.

The CCG is well aware of the complexity of Afghanistan and our limited understanding of its peoples and their struggles. We offer the following comments from a point of conviction - that in spite of the enormous challenges there is hope for peace, and that the

path to peace is through genuine reconciliation. This hope must be realistic and persistent, and be built on the contributions of Afghan peoples.

The Orientation of the Mission:

Behind the simplified public debate are legitimate questions about the orientation and balance of Canada's mission in Afghanistan. Public communication on the mission often centers on military security objectives of defeating the Taliban. Security is indeed a legitimate goal but it is more complex than military victory – a *victory* which an array of policy makers and shapers agree is elusive. We believe that *human security* elements of the mission (including civilian protection, development and reconciliation) need a more explicit and leading profile in public debate and policy making. We say this for pragmatic and principled reasons.

- On the pragmatic side: Canada's counter-insurgency efforts in Kandahar have intensified since 2005 in terms of cost to the national treasury and in significant loss of troops. In the same period security has deteriorated as evidenced by increases in insurgency incidents and in diminished capacity to safely deliver humanitarian and development aid. Reports from the UN, the Red Cross, the International Crisis group and others detail these disturbing trends. The question then: is the investment of Canadian blood and treasure having the intended effect? And if not, what changes are necessary to make tangible progress for genuine security?
- On the level of principle: In light of the CRC's reflections on peace with justice, the CCG has been urging the government to give greater priority and visibility to efforts to build peace in Afghanistan. Security in the fullest sense of the term will come from deliberate actions for reconciliation and restoration of just governance.

These principled and pragmatic ideas suggest that a different orientation is needed for Canada's strategy in Afghanistan. A clear peacebuilding orientation could shape efforts to address the root causes of the conflict in reconciliation and transitional justice initiatives.

Peacebuilding for and with the Peoples of Afghanistan:

In recent history most ethnic groups in Afghanistan have tasted the bitterness of oppression. Testimony of this brokenness, as detailed by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) in *A Call for Justice*, is echoed by representatives of Afghan civil society that we have met here in Canada in ecumenical consultations on Afghanistan. Breaking the painful cycle of violence, oppression, and exclusion is the root of sustainable peace. Deliberate and persistent efforts for reconciliation need to have

priority in Canada's efforts to build peace in Afghanistan. In this light CCG has called for the following in recent interaction with policy makers:

- tangible support for the Afghanistan Action Plan for Peace, Reconciliation and Justice.
- further support for non-governmental and civil society initiatives dedicated to genuine reconciliation between the peoples of Afghanistan;
- direct interaction with the peoples of Afghanistan specifically focused on the connections between reconciliation, just governance, human development and sustainable security.

The Action Plan for Peace, Reconciliation and Justice is a formal element of the Afghanistan Compact. This plan, developed in consultation with Afghan civil society, is a thoughtful and culturally appropriate approach to accountability, forgiveness and reconciliation as a basis for lasting peace. The CCG has been told that Government of Canada supports the Action Plan and other transitional justice initiatives (correspondence with Minister MacKay, March 30, 2007). In subsequent discussion with the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAIT) we have been informed that Canada is supporting three elements of the Action Plan: acknowledgment of suffering; civil service reform and the promotion of reconciliation and national unity. We have, as yet, been unable to get information on the extent of this support. What is clear is that the completion target of 2008 for this plan is unlikely to be achieved (according to available official reports). Ongoing issues of impunity and corruption in state institutions may well indicate a lack of authority and political will in Afghanistan to implement this rigorous Action Plan.

Canadian support for reconciliation and transitional justice most certainly rests on partnerships with peoples in Afghanistan. Their perspectives need to shape any initiatives in order to be reality based, culturally appropriate, and achievable in this deeply challenging context. In this light it is heartening to know that DFAIT is partnering with the International Center for Transitional Justice, an organization with an exemplary track-record of facilitating civil society approaches to reconciliation.

Genuine reconciliation will be a long-term process of trust-building that will ultimately enhance security and human development in Afghanistan. Indeed, the Afghanistan Compact affirms this principle by the very inclusion of the Action Plan for Peace, Reconciliation and Justice within it. The Secretary General has noted an

urgent need for an integrated political and military strategy that compliments the Afghan national development strategy, but also encompasses wider issues and provides sharper focus on the achievement of national reconciliation and regional stability.¹

Canada's continuing pursuit of the Afghanistan Compact and peacebuilding ought, therefore, to include new public profile and well-resourced support for Afghan civil-

¹ <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N07/502/15/PDF/N0750215.pdf?OpenElement> September 21, 2007, Item #4.

society led reconciliation. Canada will exercise profound international leadership by building peace *for and with* the peoples of Afghanistan in this way.

Conclusion:

As mentioned at the outset of this brief, the CCG has noted oversimplifications in public debate on Canada's role in Afghanistan. The weight of public debate and available information suggest that Canada has given priority to the counter-insurgency effort. However the polarization of public discussion does not give us confidence of a fulsome understanding of the nature and balance of the mission. This indicates need for a transparent and non-partisan public and parliamentary debate. Peace with justice in Afghanistan demands a nuanced approach to the mission that includes diplomatic, developmental, transitional justice and security/civilian protection goals. Sustainable peace will be rooted in a balanced approach that addresses the root causes of the conflict in partnership with the peoples of Afghanistan. We hope that such a partnership for peace with justice – shaped by the energetic and realistic pursuit of reconciliation – will characterize Canada's role in Afghanistan henceforth.