

## Announcement 07, Session 2007-08

### INQUIRY INTO AFGHANISTAN

The International Development Committee has today written to the Secretary of State for International Development to highlight the key issues which the Committee has identified so far in its inquiry into Afghanistan.

The Prime Minister has indicated that he plans to make a statement on Afghanistan in the next few weeks. Drawing on what it has learned from its week-long visit to Afghanistan in October and the evidence it has received to date, the Committee wished to contribute to the current discussions within Government and to flag up what it believes should be the areas of focus for the UK's development policy in Afghanistan.

The text of the letter is set out below. The programme for the Committee's visit to Afghanistan is available at Annex to Announcement 07a.

#### **Letter to the Secretary of State for International Development from the Chairman of the International Development Committee, 20 November 2007**

As you know, the International Development Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into Afghanistan which included a seven-day visit to the country at the end of October. We are very grateful for the assistance we received from DFID staff in organising a programme which enabled us to meet a wide range of key people in Kabul, Helmand and Balkh and to visit local development projects.

We had hoped to report our findings to the House early in the new year. We have, however, noted the Prime Minister's comments in the debate on the Queen's Speech on 6 November that he intends to make a statement on Afghanistan, including on the Government's proposals for development there, in the next few weeks. We may therefore need to adjust the timescale for the rest of inquiry to ensure we take full account of any change in Government policy. As you are aware, this has also affected the timing of the oral evidence which you have agreed to provide.

Our visit and evidence to date have enabled us to form some preliminary views on the key issues affecting development in Afghanistan and we wished to make these known to you now so that they can inform the Government's current discussions.

- The UK's role: we believe that it is right for the UK to be involved in Afghanistan and that this should be a long-term commitment. This needs to be restated to both the UK and the Afghan people.

- Donor activity: there is a problem of perception in that the Afghan people do not appreciate the full scope and scale of what the international community, and the UK specifically, is contributing in terms of aid and development. This communication problem needs to be addressed and the Afghan people need to be properly informed about how donor funds are being spent.
- Relationship with the Government of Afghanistan: the international community must operate in Afghanistan in a way that strengthens rather than undermines the Government of Afghanistan (GoA). One important aspect of this is ensuring that Provincial Reconstruction Teams and donors align their work programmes with the priorities of the GoA and regularly consult with the relevant Afghan institutions.
- Civil/military co-operation: the balance between military engagement and civil and development activities needs to be reassessed. It is important that the pace of military engagement does not exceed the capacity of local governance structures and civil society in relation to stabilisation and development activities.
- Sub-national governance: Community Development Councils are an important building-block of local governance and much has been gained from the involvement of local people in development projects from which they directly benefit. It is not yet clear, however, what their future role will be nor how they might fit into provincial and district structures whose own roles need to be clarified and their institutions strengthened.
- Women: insufficient progress is being made on the status and rights of women who are too often the victims of domestic violence and who are not yet properly protected by the justice system.
- Counter-narcotics: this is a complex issue which requires a multifaceted approach. Tackling poppy cultivation is inextricably linked to better governance, economic growth, improved security and rural development in its broadest sense. Alternative crops can only be one element in any effective strategy.
- Afghan National Army: the Army is making good progress towards being an effective force and should be capable of some independent operations in the next three or four years but the continued support of the international community will be needed, particularly for logistical and medical support and for operational back-up.
- Police: lack of training and corruption are significant obstacles to the Afghan police being an effective, national force capable of providing the necessary security for people to go about their daily lives. Lack of security is impeding development and diminishing the people's faith in government. This needs to be addressed.
- Justice: insufficient progress has been made in establishing a state justice

system which the Afghan people trust. They are resorting to traditional and informal justice systems which may not support the rights of women and children. Disillusion with state justice may also increase local support for the Taliban and other insurgent groups.

- UK civilian effort: given the difficulties of travel within Afghanistan, UK efforts would be assisted by the provision of a dedicated aeroplane for use by DFID and British Embassy staff.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence.

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**FURTHER INFORMATION:**

**Committee Membership is as follows:** Malcolm Bruce MP (Chairman, Lib Dem), John Battle MP (Lab), Hugh Bayley MP (Lab), John Bercow MP (Con), Richard Burden MP (Lab), Mr Stephen Crabb (Con), James Duddridge MP (Con), Ann McKechin MP (Lab), Mr Jim Sheridan MP (Lab) Mr Marsha Singh (Lab), Sir Robert Smith MP (Lib Dem).

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