Strengthen economic and social development

Summary of AFSC’s Position on Afghanistan

Conflicts can never be solved by military means, and true security will not be gained through arms. In fact, history teaches us that violence leads to more violence. The ongoing war in Afghanistan is another tragic example of this lesson. Based on years of experience in the region and building peace in communities around the world, the American Friends Service Committee believes that the aspirations and well-being of the Afghan people must be at the center of rebuilding Afghanistan. The International community must respect this principle if there is to be a secure, peaceful, and stable future for the Afghan people.

AFSC supports recent movements by our government to engage in creative diplomacy with the government of Afghanistan, groups within Afghanistan, and all of Afghanistan’s neighbors, including Iran and Pakistan. Based on Quaker belief and practice, the Service Committee recognizes that respectful and inclusive discussion and negotiation are the essential steps toward peace and stability. We look forward to early removal of all foreign armed forces from Afghanistan.

Thirty years of war have severely damaged Afghanistan’s economy, weakened traditional structures of governance and created a humanitarian crisis in what was already one of the poorest countries on earth. To heal the wounds of war and begin to restore the economy the international community needs to focus on helping Afghans restore basic services, rebuild a shattered school system, and strengthen the rule of law.

In June 2008, President Karzai announced a national framework for Afghanistan’s development. Due in large part to a lack of donor attention to building national capacity and generating jobs for Afghans, successful results have yet to be achieved. In fact, two-thirds of foreign aid is channeled outside of the Afghan government’s budget, creating a parallel structure a ‘second civil service’ of externally paid consultants. From March 2005-2006 Germany and the United States were the countries who relied most on outside contractors in Afghanistan, with nearly half the aid money spent by USAID going to five major U.S. firms. Only 31%
of the $1.36 billion of overseas development aid spent in Afghanistan had a “local impact” (the proportion of aid spent on local goods and services). Meanwhile, official unemployment amongst Afghans stands at 40%.

Given the small size of the Afghan economy and the government’s difficulties in raising revenue, Afghanistan will be dependent on foreign assistance for a long time. Foreign aid must be sustained, transparent and delivered in ways that stimulate the development of a local economy including the rehabilitation of a once thriving agricultural sector. A growing economy will reduce the financial incentives that attract people to take up arms.

An additional challenge complicating development of the country is the historic autonomy of isolated areas and the difficulties of the central government in providing services to these regions. The National Solidarity Program, in which local councils decide on the use of new government funds, has been successful in building a positive link between local and national government.

**Recommendations**

**Put Afghans at the center** of the design and implementation of humanitarian and development activities.

**Commit to supporting the development** of Afghan institutions in the delivery of assistance. Avoid the creation of parallel structures.

**Enable the UN to play its role** of coordinating the international community’s support to the Afghan government in line with Afghan national strategies.

**Focus on steps to reduce poverty** and unemployment at the local level. Strengthen the government’s ability to deliver services at all levels.

**Support agricultural development** at the local level. Promote alternative crops to supplant income from poppy growing.

**Build on improvement in education** and health care and support women’s traditionally strong roles in these sectors.

SUMMER 2009