

US vows to help rebuild Musa Qala

By Akram Noorzai - 14/01/2008 - 17:38

LASHKARGAH, Jan 14 (Pajhwok Afghan News): The United States has pledged to help rebuild Helmands Musa Qala town, a former militant stronghold that NATO and Afghan forces recaptured from Taliban fighters in the wake of a joint offensive in early December.

US Ambassador to Afghanistan William Wood, who headed a delegation to the southern district on Sunday, held out the assurance at talks with local officials, provincial police chief Brig. Gen. Muhammad Hussein Andiwal told Pajhwok Afghan News on Monday.

During the hour-long visit, Andiwal said, the ambassador met the district chief, tribal elders and locals. The diplomat promised full US support for efforts at bringing peace and development to Musa Qala, according to the districts administrative head.

Mullah Abdul Salam, a regional Taliban leader who landed the powerful position after defecting to the government just before the operation, said the US would launch a series of reconstruction schemes in the district. The Kajaki dam would be rehabilitated to supply electricity to dwellers of the area, he added.

Speaking to his interlocutors, the envoy referred to reports he received from UN and Afghan officials regarding the cultivation of poppies in Helmand, also called Afghanistans drug capital. He likened narcotics, particularly heroin, to poison while asking the tribal elders to stop growing poppies.

Wood quoted Afghan authorities as claiming the seizure of heroin worth \$500 million and destroying a large number of drug labs during the Musa Qala assault.

Problems of the war-weary nation could be addressed but a solution would eventually depend on what kind of Afghanistan it wanted, he remarked, saying: We are ready to extend you all sorts of assistance if you desire a peaceful Afghanistan where the rule of law is enforced.

Salam said he had suggested to the envoy the government must completely enforce its writ in the district by sending an additional 200 policemen to boost security there.

The erstwhile Taliban leader complained: Previously, policemen were involved in thefts in Musa Qala. But now we need honest officials to serve the people.

In a chat with this news agency, a disillusioned tribal elder grumbled many Afghan and foreign dignitaries would visit Musa Qala but the problems of its residents would remain unresolved.

Haji Khuda-i-Dad said: Our hardships have multiplied during the last one month and a half. Facing hunger, we are short of fuel and firewood. Our houses are willfully being searched by Americans.

Another dweller, Farhad, sounded equally pessimistic about Woods pledge. In the past too, he recalled, many foreign visitors had made similar promises which were never kept.

Translated & edited by Syed Mudassir Ali Shah