

Norine MacDonald, QC – Testimony to Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, Ottawa (28 May 2007)

Distinguished members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development,

For those of you who don't know us, The Senlis Council is a security and development and counter narcotics policy group.

We have offices in London, Paris, and Senlis Afghanistan based in Kabul, with field offices in Kandahar and Helmand.

We have now also opened an office here in Ottawa staffed by Mr. Almas Bawar, Ms. Shaima Zakhilwal, and Mr. Hijrat Omar. I am pleased that our Ottawa office is represented by my Afghan-Canadian colleagues, two of whom were instrumental in the establishment of Senlis Afghanistan.

I have been living and working in Kandahar for two years now, where I lead our field research activities with a team of 50 Afghan staff. We spend our days in the villages and camps talking to the Afghans on the ground and conducting surveys and interviews, documenting the situation there.

We recently concluded a survey of 17,000 men and the results are chilling.

Fifty percent of the men surveyed stated they believe the Taliban will win the war.

Over eighty percent worry about feeding their families.

These men are living on about 2 to 3 dollars a day, when they can get work.

These are very bad numbers.

Yesterday we released a report which notes the extreme poverty of southern Afghanistan, and the growing disenchantment of the local population with the international presence.

The province's refugee camps are full of starving people, and have become easy recruiting ground for the Taliban. There has been no substantial food aid into Kandahar since March 2006.

Civilian casualties continue to fuel local resentment against the foreign presence in Afghanistan. Kandahar's hospitals are completely inadequate to deal with the war zone casualties or the basic health needs of the local population.

We have released a study on the Kandahar hospital. This hospital, which is where civilian war casualties are brought and which should provide the basic health care for the province of Kandahar, does not deserve the name hospital: **there is no blood, no equipment, no medicines, no proper operation facilities - and a ward for malnourished babies without proper food or medicine.**

The Afghan people are suffering and they feel we are not addressing their legitimate grievances.

These young unemployed men in the villages and camps are easy prey for the Taliban. The Taliban pay 200 US dollars month to fight and our research has found that many men are fighting with the Taliban for money, not for political reasons.

Our military are doing a remarkable job in difficult circumstances, but we are not doing what needs to be done on development, aid or counter narcotics policies to ensure that we have the support of the Afghan people.

Without winning the hearts and minds of the Afghan people, **we will continue to win battles, but we will not win the war.**

Canada's development and aid failures in Kandahar are endangering our military successes there.

Today we are calling on Prime Minister Harper to dramatically overhaul Canada's development, aid and counter-narcotic polices.

1) CIDA should be relieved of its responsibility for development efforts in Afghanistan, and

2) be replaced by the appointment of a Special Envoy to Afghanistan to coordinate development, aid and counter narcotics policy,

3) with a development and aid budget equal to the military budget.

We need a major and **immediate management overhaul** of our approach in Afghanistan – the government must be clear with the Canadian people what our objectives are and what our critical success factors are.

As Prime Minister Harper recently said, Afghanistan represents Canada's most important foreign policy endeavour. Therefore, to efficiently co-ordinate all of Canada's resources and efforts in Afghanistan, a Special Envoy should be appointed to ensure a successful mission, with the resources sufficient to get the job done.

The crisis situation in Afghanistan is **beyond politics** – we need proper management and financing of the development and aid budget to ensure our military are properly supported in Kandahar.

Canada must not forget that the main objective in Afghanistan is to build a peaceful and prosperous country. This is the only way to avoid any future extremism and instability in that war torn country.

We need a clear plan for achieving critical success factors.

We need to generate measurable positive changes in the lives of ordinary Afghans.

We are actually spending roughly ten times more on security and military projects than we're spending on humanitarian aid and development.

This imbalance is undermining our military efforts and is not bringing us closer to reaching our overarching objective of building a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan.

We will be showing you some short video clips following during the presentation to give you an idea of the plight of the people in Afghanistan and why we need to redefine our objectives. There are further clips and a detailed report released yesterday in packs being handed out.

UN MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In this regard we propose that these objective follow the internationally agreed upon best practices that we helped to develop, the UN Millennium Development Goals.

The report recommends that Canada adopt the UN Millennium Development Goals as critical success factors to assist in managing and measuring progress of the mission in Afghanistan.

In carrying out our mission in Afghanistan, we ought to be leading the way in the development of practical, on the ground nation-building solutions, just as we did when we led the way with the Land Mines Treaty,

The achievement of these key Millennium Development Goals is pivotal to bringing peace and economic prosperity to the people of Kandahar, and helps ensure that they are immune to the anti-West Taliban propaganda.

The list of development goals is set out in the report and includes eliminating extreme hunger and poverty, decreasing the number of children dying before the age of five, reducing the number of women dying in childbirth, clean water, and a sustainable economy,

STARVATION

The people of Kandahar are starving, particularly those living in the squalid refugee camps dotted around the region. Providing families with immediate food aid is possible and inexpensive, especially compared to the cost of our military budget.

CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

As well as providing immediate food aid, mobile field hospitals are needed to deal with civilians casualties along with the immediate renovation of Kandahar's Mirwais hospital.

There is mounting concern and anger in Afghanistan regarding the increasing number of civilian casualties and the bombing campaigns that are leveling villages and leaving thousands homeless.

The Millennium Development Goals also address human rights, education and the rule of law and make a very effective list of critical success factors to guide us in our work in Kandahar.

COUNTER NARCOTICS SPRAYING

Opium poppy cultivation is the mainstay of Kandahar's agricultural economy. The counter-narcotics programme in Afghanistan is based on US policy and dominated by the US approach.

This has meant a forced poppy crop eradication programme.

The United States is now proposing planned chemical spraying operations for the next planting season.

To date, forced crop eradication in Afghanistan has left the poorest farmers with no means to feed their families, and overall opium cultivation levels have gone up. We believe chemical spraying will add to the growing hostility against the international presence in Southern Afghanistan.

There should be no crop eradication, manual or chemical, until the poverty stricken farmers have other means to feed their families,

Crop eradication has destroyed livelihoods and generated extreme poverty for entire communities, and has cost hundreds of millions of dollars. It has also proved to be wholly ineffective – last year cultivation was up by 60% despite large-scale crop eradication.

By sitting back and allowing this destructive and counterproductive US policy to be prosecuted in Kandahar, Canada is complicit in a policy which is undermining its own military forces, who are doing a great job in a very hostile environment

The Senlis Council has proposed an economic development initiative – Poppy for Medicine project at village level - under which poppy grown in Afghanistan would be used for the supply of the essential pain killer morphine, for which there is a global shortage. This proven counter-narcotics strategy would replace the current highly destructive policy of forced crop eradication.

Poppy for Medicine projects would also serve to support another of the Millennium Development Goals which calls for enhancing access to affordable essential medicines in development countries. At the moment, there is hardly any morphine or codeine in Afghanistan.

Poppy for Medicine will also cut links with drug traffickers and insurgents. This development initiative would directly support the efforts of our troops to bring security and reconstruction to Kandahar.

A similar system was put in place by the United States in Turkey and India, where it has successfully contributed to drug control.

Our field research indicates that Poppy for Medicine project at village level is feasible, but the only way to find out if it really works is to test it in carefully selected villages in Kandahar.

We are willing to undertake such a pilot project in Kandahar, and to share the research findings and expertise with the Canadian government and the international community, and ask the Canadian Parliament for their support of our proposal to run those pilot projects.

We reiterate our request to ALLOW us to implement a scientific pilot project in Kandahar to further investigate the parameters of this scheme. We believe this would send out a positive message to the rural communities which would in turn generate support for the Karzai government and reduce support for the insurgency.

ON A FINAL NOTE

From afar I have followed the Canadian debate about whether we should stay or go from Afghanistan.

But, as a Canadian, from my experience on the ground, I firmly believe that Canada should not pull out.

What is needed is to radically overhaul its mission in Afghanistan, clarify its objectives and measures of success, and deliver on its commitment to both the Canadian and the Afghan people.

What happens in Afghanistan in the next year will have an impact on our own security for generations to come.

We have to be clear what our objectives are, how we will measure our success.

And we should stay until the job is done.

Thank you.