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U.S. Agency for International Development

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United States Policy in Afghanistan

Mr. Chairman: Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the U.S. Agency for International Development.

I would like to start by thanking you and the Committee for your strong support to the reconstruction of Afghanistan. By passing the Afghan Freedom Support Act, and thereby providing sound guidance on the structure of the reconstruction process, and by ongoing interest in and support for the overall reconstruction effort, the Committee has contributed significantly to the reconstruction effort.

Second, I would like to give an overall assessment of the reconstruction effort. In short, Mr. Chairman, the reconstruction process has been, thus far, a success. I say this with a full recognition of the serious security issues that still persist, and with a full recognition of the serious reconstruction challenges that remain ahead. But, when I recall the condition of the country in January of 2002, just after the fall of the Taliban, when 23 years of warfare had driven the country to almost total collapse of its physical and institutional infrastructure, then consider the state of the nation today, the amount of progress has been very significant.

Rather than take the time of the Committee now to recount those many advances, I have appended to my testimony a fact sheet USAID has prepared illustrating the reconstruction situation in the following sectors in which U.S. taxpayer assistance has helped the Afghan people: (1) restoring infrastructure; (2) rehabilitating agriculture, the lifeblood of the Afghan economy; (3) improving health; (4) enhancing education; (5) empowering women; (6) growing the economy; and (7) promoting democracy and restoring the media. A review of the progress in these seven areas suggests just how far Afghanistan has come in 30 months, after 23 years of war.

Of special importance now, on the eve of elections in Afghanistan, is the development of the political process - an inclusive political process - in Afghanistan. The introduction of legitimate political processes in Afghanistan contributes to the development of democracy and stability in the country. The United States has been a major donor for all the major political process benchmarks mandated by the Bonn Accord. USAID has supported and played an integral role in all the preliminary steps required for Afghanistan's national elections this fall. These steps included the Emergency Loya Jirga; the Constitutional process, the Constitutional Loya Jirga, and the resulting constitution; and finally the national election registration process and voter education.

Support for the Emergency Loya Jirga

USAID provided \$6 million in logistical and technical support for the election of delegates and their assembly at the June 2002 Emergency Loya Jirga, which ended with the announcement of 14 ministerial appointments and the swearing in of President Karzai and his colleagues.

Support for the Constitutional Process

U. S. Government support for the constitutional process totaled approximately \$13 million. USAID's partners included the United Nations Development Programme, The Asia Foundation, Internews, the Institute of War and Peace Reporting, Management Systems International, the International Organization for Migration, and several Afghan organizations. USAID assistance provided technical advisers and funding for Afghanistan's Constitutional Commission and printing the draft constitution for distribution to the Afghan people as part of a nation-wide public consultative process.

USAID support included identification and election of representatives to the Constitutional Loya Jirga (CLJ) in

December. USAID, working with the UN, helped to meet the CLJ's logistical, transport, media and security requirements. USAID-funded advisors helped to develop the CLJ's rules of order and procedure. Currently, USAID is supporting the establishment of a CLJ archive and the physical rehabilitation of the convention site.

Finally, USAID supported public information and debate regarding the draft constitution and the CLJ. USAID funded training for journalists and ensured that regional journalists could travel to Kabul to cover the proceedings. USAID's partners produced a provincial radio talk show and a mobile cinema project that explained the constitutional process in Dari and Pashto, Afghanistan's two most widely spoken languages. USAID also funded a consortium of NGOs that trained community leaders to provide information and civic education on the constitution in their communities.

Support for the National Elections

The United States is the largest contributor to the national elections - \$78 million in 2004. USAID direct support for the national elections includes funding for the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), The Asia Foundation (TAF), the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI). USAID provides technical assistance, training, logistical and organizational support to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the new Afghan electoral body that oversees the legal framework, voter registration, voter education and election administration.

USAID support is essential to the election and long-term democratic development in Afghanistan, to build a politically active citizenry by helping citizens and political elites develop a shared system of democratic norms through civic education, election oversight, focus group research, polling and training to political parties and civic activists.

After the elections, the government will no longer be considered transitional but democratically elected. Although the elections will be over, the democratic process within the country will have just begun, and USAID plans to provide support to help establish the necessary foundation to make the new Afghan parliament a viable, functioning democratic institution.

Lessons learned since the establishment of USAID activities in post-Taliban Afghanistan and what improvements can be made to providing assistance to the people and Government of Afghanistan:

Beyond the democratic governance issues, and in response to the Chairman's questions, I would like to address more broadly USAID's key lessons from Afghanistan.

First, the process of developing democracy in any war-torn country must view security as priority one - every other development objective is, to a greater or lesser degree, negatively affected by poor security. We have developed a number of innovative techniques - working with our military colleagues, working with our civilian partners, and working with the Afghans themselves - to facilitate work in high-risk environments, and these techniques are paying dividends in the reconstruction program.

Second, there must be local ownership of the reconstruction process, and thus unique country-specific approaches and institutions must be incorporated. In Afghanistan, the use of the Loya Jirga as a mechanism for determining the transitional government's responsibilities and leadership, as well as for ratifying the Constitution is a good example.

Third, the process must incorporate the capabilities of international organizations, including the United Nations. These international organizations can play an important leadership role, especially in countries like Afghanistan with little electoral experience and with a population that is largely illiterate.

Fourth, the process of developing democracy in a war-torn country is a long-term endeavor and is not over when the last ballot is cast. It takes time to change traditional norms and approaches, and to design and build new norms and institutions. It will be many years before democracy takes full-hold in Afghanistan. The USG will need to commit long-term resources to assist the Afghans to ensure that it does take hold.

Fifth, an interagency coordinator, an idea advanced in the Afghan Freedom Support Act, was a useful idea. This approach provides the government one point-person to focus the efforts of several agencies. This concept should be used in other situations as well. We have worked well with Ambassador Taylor and his predecessor, while maintaining the initiative to take on unforeseen developmental challenges.

Sixth, flexibility in funding is critical to operating in wartime environments like Afghanistan. The combination of International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account funds, and reasonable waiver authority is essential to operating in a

place like Afghanistan.

Seventh, we need to continue to pay careful attention to gender issues in conflictive environments like Afghanistan. It is widely recognized that Afghanistan's women have paid a high price in suffering and lost opportunity during the decades of war and Taliban oppression. Not only must we develop women's opportunity programs in such environments, but the gender aspects of all of our reconstruction efforts must be considered.

Effectiveness of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and their ability to respond to the needs of Afghans involved in rebuilding their communities:

Afghanistan is transitioning to a functioning democracy and an economically progressive country. Stability is the biggest obstacle to development. Taliban insurgents, warlords, drug-financed groups, corruption and lawlessness in various parts of the country threaten investment and reconstruction efforts. They also hamper the ability of the government and donors to implement social, economic and political development priorities throughout the country. PRTs are joint civil-military units deployed throughout Afghanistan. They are an interim mechanism to strengthen the reach and enhance the legitimacy of the central government in outlying regions through improved security and the facilitation of reconstruction and development efforts. As such, they are a useful way for USAID to gather information from the provinces to make informed program decisions, and they are a mechanism for improving program monitoring. However, information gathering and program monitoring are partially dependent on the availability of support from the military - vehicles, security guards, etc. - for the civilian USG employees "embedded" within the PRT structure. Otherwise USAID officers are confined to the PRT compound.

PRTs are also a useful mechanism for identifying small, quick impact projects in the surrounding area to demonstrate goodwill and tangible benefits. \$52 million in U.S. Government resources has been programmed this year to support such small scale community reconstruction activities managed by the PRTs.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this information to the Committee, and will be pleased to answer questions.