

Afghan Ambassador Addresses the Conference of Defence Associations and CDA Institute Seminar "NATO in Transition: The Impact on Canada" in Ottawa, February 23, 2006. The following is Ambassador Samad's speech:

General Manson,
Excellencies,
Honorable Senators and Members of Parliament,
Distinguished members of the Canadian military,
Ladies and gentlemen,

C'est un grand honneur pour moi ainsi que pour mon épouse d'être ici parmi les amis Canadiens. Je remercie la Conférence des Associations de la Défense et l'Institut de la CAD et les organisateurs pour m'avoir donné l'occasion de m'adresser à vous aujourd'hui.

I say friends because as one example, in my humble opinion, the people of Canada and your military are very fortunate to have a Chief of Defence Staff in the person of Gen. Rick Hillier, who is also viewed half-way across the world, in my country, as a distinguished officer and a friend who understands the importance of Afghanistan, the regional context and the global implications. Moreover, there are many others in Canada, as well as in this room, like Gen. Ray Henault and Gen. Andrew Leslie, whose leaderships have been outstanding.

I am delighted that Canada's commitment was reiterated in this morning's keynote address by The Honourable Minister Gordon O'Connor. I appreciate the reaffirmation of continued support and the commitment the Canadian people and Government have for Afghanistan in the long run. I know that President Karzai and our government also look forward to the possibility of a fruitful visit by The Right Honourable, Prime Minister Stephen Harper to Afghanistan as soon as the opportunity presents itself.

Les sentiments d'appréciations et de rapprochement qui existent déjà entre nos deux nations s'approfondissent d'avantage. Des milliers de jeunes militaires, hommes et femmes, quelques centaines d'officiers qui ont déjà servi et des centaines d'autres qui serviront la noble cause dans la future, aideront à sécuriser et à reconstruire un pays pour donner espoir à des millions d'hommes, de femmes et d'enfants. Ces relations sont d'avantage renforcées par la présence de plus ou moins 100, 000 Afghans, réfugiés ou immigrants, qui vivent activement à travers le Canada.

In addition to that, Canadians from many walks-of-life, diplomats, aid workers, NGO, and UN personnel continue to help us in the democratization, institution-building and overall rebuilding efforts. We are, however, reminded every day by the risks involved as we remember the civilian victims, the fallen soldiers, and more recently, a talented Canadian diplomat, who are targeted by terrorists. Every day, in Afghanistan, men and women, Afghans and our international friends, rise to the occasion to tell the spoilers and the violence-mongers that history and time are on the side of those who bring peace, those who build, those who give hope and opportunity to the needy and destitute.

Unfortunately, the nature of 21st century conflicts necessitates risk-taking. When you face an

invisible enemy, or try to be a step ahead of suicide bombers, or track down various types of WMDs, you run the risk of casualties among innocent civilians as well as military personnel and others. We made this mental and practical adjustment in Afghanistan over 20 years ago during the first invasion of my country. Today, we are re-adjusting to more normal conditions, nonetheless, still dangerous in some parts of the country.

Our common enemy, the extremists and terror-exporters, offer a different vision. The Afghans experienced that vision under the repressive Taliban rule for several years, and suffered alone, but also resisted courageously to deny Al-Qaida and their associates total control of Afghanistan. We know very well that their dark and oppressive vision, where schools are torched and women are enslaved, where cultural heritage is destroyed and the country is turned into a terrorist training camp, is not representative of our people's aspirations or of our culture and religion. Contrary to Islamic principles, theirs is a vision of violence, extremism and intolerance. While we deal with this threat, we should also be mindful of overall people-to-people and trans-religious relations. Collectively, we should make sure that we do not perpetuate a clash of cultures and misunderstanding. We should actively promote dialogue and understanding. That is why it is so critical that we succeed in Afghanistan.

Our enemy's bases of operations in Afghanistan were overrun in late 2001 when a determined Coalition led by the United States and many other, including Canadians, helped us Afghans chase the enemy and liberate the country. Unfortunately, those who survived found shelter in hideouts in our region, and the diehards who continue to recruit, regroup, rearm and re-infiltrate our borders aim to undermine our efforts to bring lasting stability to the country. Their goal is to use time and a battle of nerves to tire us, to intimidate us, make us doubt our objectives, to sow dissention and turn it into a contentious political debate.

In Afghanistan, this debate does not exist. Afghans agree that we need to secure the whole country, secure our borders to the extent possible, stabilize the situation to allow for economic growth, reconstruction and investment to improve the poverty-stricken condition of the people. To this end, under UN mandate, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) now under NATO command continues to play an important role to help the new Afghan National Army and Police stabilize various regions of Afghanistan, and Canada's new role for the next 9 months at the head of the Multi-National Force in five southern provinces is a leadership role that will be challenging, risk-filled but absolutely critical in our efforts to tackle instability.

However, it is not only a peace-building operation. It is also a reconstruction effort, a parallel developmental activity to give the people of these regions the opportunities and conditions to improve their living standards, move farmers away from poppy cultivation and create a business and trade-enabling environment.

We are encouraged that Canada will continue to help us with economic development as envisaged in the Afghanistan Compact document agreed to in London earlier this month by the international community and our Government. We have laid the foundation for a young democracy to flourish. This democracy, which has given rise to a new Constitution, an elected President and elected Parliament and provincial councils can only be nurtured and made to grow if we stabilize the country, and if we help it develop. This is to our mutual interest, and Canadian leadership at the UN, within the G8 and NATO, in conjunction with other nations that are committed to success in Afghanistan, can help us achieve our goal.

Merci beaucoup.