



June the 30th 2009

Dear
Hirobumi NAKASONE, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Sadako OGATA, Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan aid
Hideo SATO, Special Envoy in Afghanistan
cc: Section manager of the second Middle East division of the Middle East and Africa section in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Subject: Key proposals of NGOs operating in Afghanistan

As a group of large non-governmental, non-for-profit organization working in Afghanistan, we wish to bring to your attention some proposals that could improve our ability to carry out essential humanitarian and development work, and thereby, enable us to assist more Afghans who are vulnerable.

As highlighted in the Afghanistan Humanitarian Action Plan 2009, expectations are for escalating insecurity prior to the Presidential elections and the continued intensification of the armed conflict across the country. This follows the significant deterioration in the security situation in 2008, where civilian casualties rose by 40 percent and NGO fatalities doubled to 31 casualties compared to 2007. Meanwhile, access to people in need of protection and assistance has diminished with almost half the country inaccessible to the UN.

We urge you in your capacity as Special Envoy Ms. Ogata, Mr. Sato, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Nakasone to pay special attention to the following proposals:

Afghanistan requires more effective and efficient aid focused on meeting the needs of Afghans:

- **Aid distribution in Afghanistan should be based on projects that meet the needs and promote the rights of Afghans across the country.** The current approach, which allocates a disproportionate amount of aid to insecure areas in order to complement military stabilisation efforts, is creating perverse incentives to increase insecurity in safer areas. The use of aid for combating armed insecurity is discriminatory and poor development and humanitarian practice contravening the Paris and Good Humanitarian Donor principles
- **The focus of development in Afghanistan should be long term sustainable approaches elaborated by professionals in partnership with the Afghan people and institutions, without political or military interference.** Short term quick impact projects with stabilisation or counter-insurgency objectives are expensive, unsustainable and fail to address the underlying causes of poverty. In contrast, NGO development projects are designed to meet Afghans long-term needs with a participatory and sustainable focus. Examples of mainly NGO implemented needs based projects include, the National Solidarity Programme, the Basic Package of Health Services and education and community-based school support. There is also concern that NGOs are being required to link programmes with PRTs in terms of reporting, monitoring and information exchange. Such linkages may compromise NGO independence, security and programmes, such as attempts to compel NGOs to engage in post-battle field clean-up operations via funding agreements.
- **Policy makers should ensure regular dialogue with aid agencies by setting up necessary platforms.** The current coordination and policy making forums such as JCMB and ARTF do not have involvement of aid agencies, despite their vast experience and understanding of Afghanistan. Involvement of aid agencies, as observers or through consultations, may promote further accountability and transparency in aid allocation and more pro-poor policy and program implementation.

Military forces are required to clearly distinguish themselves from civilians:

- **Military forces should clearly distinguish themselves and their assets from the civilian population and civilian assets.** An important means for protecting civilians is for the military to clearly identify and separate its personnel, assets and activities from civilians. Where military and civilian identities are blurred, as they are in Afghanistan, it increases the danger for civilians and contravenes International Humanitarian Law. The requirement for clear identification of military forces is restated in the Afghanistan National Civil Military Guidelines endorsed by ISAF, UNAMA and the NGO consortium body, ACBAR.
- **Military facilities should not be located in, and military convoys should not transit through urban areas.** Military facilities located in, and military convoys transiting through, urban centers, especially during the daytime, not only cause severe traffic disruption but also increase the risk of civilian casualties and destruction of civilian property. Casualties and damage arise from attacks on military facilities and convoys by the armed opposition and shootings at perceived threats by international and national forces.

Blurring of aid actors, activities and objectives with the military should be avoided:

- **Officials should exercise caution to avoid comments, especially public statements which blur lines between humanitarian and military or foreign security actors.** Non-governmental aid actors rely heavily for their safety on the acceptance of their independence and impartiality by the public and combatants. The recent statement by Brigadier Hook, deputy Commander of NATO-led forces in South Afghanistan that military forces *'...will have created the humanitarian space to allow the agencies to come in behind and do the reconstruction and development,'* undermines humanitarian independence by misrepresenting aid organisations as being part of a military stabilisation plan, places aid workers lives at risk, and may further restrict access to vulnerable Afghans.
- **The proposed so-called US led civilian surge should be reconsidered.** Media reports describe the surge as mass civilian deployment for the purpose of winning the conflict in Afghanistan. As with the UNAMA-ISAF-IDLG Integrated Approach, such civilianised military stabilisation or counter-insurgency strategies can compromise, by association, the security of humanitarian and development actors, even if they involve deployment within civilian agencies. Further, deploying more non-military personnel to PRTs with limited experience of Afghanistan or hiring costly private sector consulting firms is likely to do more harm than good. There is undoubtedly a need for more funding and resources for programmes aimed at meeting humanitarian and development needs in Afghanistan, however, this funding and civilian capacity should be clearly separated from military strategies and programmes. Increased support for Afghanistan should be based on independent project responding to Afghan needs, including greater support for long-established organizations familiar with the Afghan context and communities, and who are not profiteering from aid.
- **Military forces should not use white vehicles.** White vehicles, especially white Land Cruisers, are associated with humanitarian action in most conflict zones. The white colour has come to represent impartial and independent actors who provide humanitarian aid to civilians irrespective of political, religious or military factors and who *are not* combatants. The recent ISAF directive that all NATO owned vehicles must not be painted white after June 2009 is a positive step. As advised by ISAF, all international military forces should follow this example and not use white vehicles.
- **Military forces should not use relief or development activities to attempt to win people's hearts and minds for tactical, counter-insurgency or other military objectives.** Instead, military resources should be focused on activities where the military has a comparative advantage such as physical security and support to the security sector. Hearts and minds military activities are expensive and unsustainable, they contravene the Afghanistan National Civil Military Guidelines and the PRT Executive Steering Committee (ESC) Policy Note No 3 and there is little evidence that they achieve their tactical or strategic objectives.
- **At a minimum, military forces and their contractors should refrain from relief activities when there are civilian actors capable of delivering assistance.** The provision of basic services by military and associated private contractors where civilian NGOs or government actors are operating, such as health facilities and projects in East Afghanistan, have compromised the security of vital humanitarian programmes. These activities contravene the Oslo Guidelines, the Afghanistan National Civil Military Guidelines and PRT ESC Policy Note No 3 which requires military to engage in relief only as a last resort.

As insecurity worsens and the conflict intensifies in Afghanistan, your nation could greatly assist with improving the delivery of impartial and independent aid to Afghans in need by supporting our proposals.

We would be very happy to meet you during your next visit to Afghanistan to discuss these proposals.

Yours sincerely,

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