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—
Chair

Mr. Pierre Lemieux

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• (1840)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC)): Colleagues, I'd like to welcome you to the third meeting of the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan.

Tonight we have with us His Excellency Omar Samad, the ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to Canada. Ambassador, it's a great honour to have you with us tonight.

First I'd like to congratulate you on the safe arrival of your son, who is only seven weeks old. Congratulations. I also realize, Ambassador, that you appeared before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development on December 4. Thank you very much for your appearance at that point in time as well.

This is the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan. Part of our mandate is to study all aspects of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan and, in doing so, to improve communication regarding our Canadian mission within Parliament and particularly with Canadians. That's why tonight's meeting is a public meeting. We're in televised facilities, so it's a televised meeting as well.

I understand you have approximately an hour with us, but you're able to stay a little bit longer if necessary, so what I would propose to you, Ambassador, and to my colleagues, is that we start with an opening statement of approximately 10 minutes or so. Then we can have one round of seven minutes and a second round of five minutes. Then we'll simply see, because that will bring us to the end of an hour.

On that note, Ambassador, thank you once again for your presence, and I turn the microphone over to you.

[Translation]

H.E. Omar Samad (Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to Canada, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to Canada):

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Honourable members of the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan, please allow me first of all to thank you for inviting me here today. I would also like to wish you good luck; I hope that a great deal of information and a wide range of opinions will be forthcoming, so that you may become better informed about the situation in Afghanistan, something that you will then be able to

share with other members of Parliament as well as with Canadians who have an interest in this strategic mission. You will also be in a position to make decisions on an issue of historic importance for your country as well as for my own.

[English]

I will take a few minutes, Mr. Chairman, to tell you where we stand today and where we hope to be in the not-so-distant future to assure that Afghanistan can and will stand on its feet and take care of its core responsibilities.

I also want to express the gratitude of the Afghan people and government for the continued support provided by Canada, along with its allies and others, over the past six years.

As demonstrated again yesterday when we received the sad news that another member of the Canadian Forces has fallen, the menace is real, and we share the grief with the families and all Canadians. It is a reminder that our histories are now intertwined, forever bound by the values entwined in this mission. That makes it incumbent upon us not to fail, and to strive for a successful outcome as soon as conditions permit.

As reaffirmed lately at the NATO summit in Bucharest, and in line with the spirit of several United Nations resolutions on Afghanistan in a post-9/11 world, we are determined to build, and I quote:

an enduring stable, secure, prosperous and democratic state, respectful of human rights and free from the threat of terrorism

because, as the international community recognizes,

Euro-Atlantic and broader international security is tied to Afghanistan's stability and future.

Your presence in Afghanistan is at the request of the Government of Afghanistan and mandated by the United Nations to prevent extremists and terrorists from regaining control of my country or for using it as a base for attacks on others.

As a result of this partnership, we are in the process of building a young democracy that is not without its inherent challenges and with which we are embracing a free media and women's rights in promoting a functioning civil society.

Since 2002, close to five million Afghan refugees have come back home, and over six million boys and girls are attending new schools, the highest ever in our history. Access to basic health care is widespread, and over 4,000 kilometres of roads were paved. We continue to connect Afghanistan with fibre optics and a communications network to the region and beyond.

Economic growth rates are in double digits for the fifth year in a row, resulting in higher income, but it is still insufficient because of the low base of recovery.

Allow me to highlight some of our immediate challenges and a set of proposed solutions to remedy them using an Afghanized approach and supported by the international community.

Some of these issues will be discussed in the upcoming Paris conference in June, at which the donors and our side will review the development and reconstruction balance sheet and, based on the results, propose a series of activities as part of the national development strategy that will guide our future commitments and priorities.

We are working on an Afghan-led political reconciliation process to give the satisfied elements a chance to give up on violence and reconcile within the constitutional order. We are not, however, dealing with those who are irreconcilable and are determined to bring terror and destruction to my country, nor with the foreign units within those groupings that support them.

Terrorism or violence perpetuated by extremists or criminal groups remains the top concern for Afghans, particularly in the context of the shifting regional complexities that cannot be ignored. We need to go to the source of insecurity and deal with the various aspects of it, using a comprehensive and multi-faceted strategy supported by all entities involved at the level of the region.

We have built up the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police as the guarantors for a stable future. However, the operational capacities of the Afghan National Army have increased, and we need to focus more on mentoring and proper equipping of the forces in the same reinforced manner that we are now improving the quality of training and capabilities of the Afghan National Police.

Despite some hiccups, we believe we can take responsibility for the security of Kabul by fall of this year and gradually assume responsibility for other regions in the future.

Given the systemic institutional weaknesses that endure, we should look at practical ways to help strengthen political leadership and management skills and help bring efficiency to the decision-making process by injecting competencies to reignite parts of the governance and development processes that are lagging.

In order to strengthen governance at the subnational levels, the government established an independent directorate for local governance—the IDLG—which has accelerated the reform of the judiciary, and we continue to fight corruption head-on as part of a new strategy. All of these complex initiatives will require time and political will to bring about real progress.

On the narcotics side, we aim to further increase the number of poppy-free provinces and to reduce the poppy-growing fields by at least 25% in 2008-09. As you know, the struggle against poppy cultivation can succeed through increased security, better governance, and, more importantly, a comprehensive program to help the farmers through measures such as alternative livelihoods. While realizing that the Taliban take a cut from the drug business and that the farmer is squeezed between the mafia associated with the Taliban and our desire to move to other crops, we also need to combat the

diffused network of drug trade in the region and beyond that is sustaining the drug economy in Afghanistan.

By now, Afghans expect to see tangible changes. Quality roads, electricity, clean water, health care, and a relatively clean and functioning administration are among their low-level expectations. However, reconstruction has been an undersourced operation. The aid allocated over the last six years amounts to a little less than \$80 per Afghan per year, compared to \$275 for Bosnia and \$248 for East Timor.

Aid has to be responsive to Afghan needs and increasingly pass through accountable Afghan channels. As reiterated by the new United Nations Secretary-General's special envoy to Afghanistan, aid effectiveness will require strong coordination with all sides involved, and we welcome the emphasis on reducing poverty and creating opportunities for Afghans.

As I have stressed on many occasions since I took up my mission here, Afghanistan is an agrarian country with a potential in the future of becoming a natural resource-rich nation, but at this point, without a concerted effort on water management, power generation, rural development, and building infrastructure and human capital simultaneously, we will not create economic sustainability and put the country on the right path for a healthy development.

This is an area in which Canada can proudly look at its accomplishments and focus on future commitments. Your country has done well in terms of channelling aid to specific targets. Can it improve the process? We all can. I'm happy to see that a reassessment of Canadian priorities is currently under way. Canada's mission in Afghanistan may shift its focus to some degree from security to development; however, all efforts need to be coordinated with our side and other major donors via the United Nations, so that aid is effectively and efficiently dispensed while helping us build capacities and institutions. It also should aim to increase our productivity and to create livelihoods.

Let us not forget that Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world, and over two decades of war have brought the country's economy and civil society to its knees. However, as Oxfam, a humanitarian organization, recently said, "The Afghan people have a great strength; a dignity in their lives, and a pride in their culture". I would add that an average Afghan family is no different from any other family anywhere else in terms of their aspirations and dreams.

In order to formulate this vision, I will return to the strategy paper agreed upon at the NATO summit a few weeks ago. It said:

...extremism and terrorism will no longer pose a threat to stability; Afghan National Security Forces will be in the lead and self-sufficient; and the Afghan Government will be able to extend the reach of good governance, reconstruction, and development throughout the country to the benefit of all its citizens.

Merci. I'm happy to take your questions now.

•(1845)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Your Excellency.

We'll now move into the first round of questions. I'll start with the Liberals. Please go ahead, Mr. Wilfert.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): I'll be sharing my time with Mr. Patry.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Excellency. It's good to see you, as usual, and I appreciate your being here this evening.

On the issue of reconstruction, the Manley commission reported that there needs to be an emphasis on immediate-impact reconstruction and better coordination of counter-insurgency to deal with that effort, but they didn't seem to acknowledge a need for political attention to the conflicts or the grievances that fuel that reconstruction.

Canada has Afghanistan as our number one donor partner. You mentioned the underfunding of allies generally to Afghanistan. Obviously there was certainly a concern among many of us in Canada in general about the issue of corruption, and we need to deal with that head-on. Why would we give money that seems to be unaccountable? There is the fact that up to 45% of the key ministries haven't spent it, according to 2006 statistics.

Could you please deal with that issue on reconstruction, and could you please elaborate on what you mean by approval in terms of Afghan channels?

As well, Mr. Chairman, could my colleague put his question on the table? Then they could be answered.

•(1850)

The Chair: Go ahead, Monsieur Patry.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): *Merci beaucoup.* Thank you very much, Excellency.

Six months ago—last December—you came here in front of the other committee, the foreign affairs and international development committee, and you talked about the three different polls: you mentioned that the Afghans are hopeful about their future, you mentioned at that time that they are less optimistic than last year, and you mentioned that they are frustrated about the slow pace of reconstruction. Can you tell us what they are feeling right now?

Second, looking at the central government of Afghanistan, I noticed there is a national reconciliation and peace and stability committee. In a sense, is that reconciliation right now in force? By this I mean, do you already have talks with the Taliban, in a sense, and did you start to sense a reconciliation in the country, broadly?

Thank you. *Merci.*

The Chair: Please go ahead, Mr. Ambassador.

H.E. Omar Samad: Let me start with the first questions, which touch upon corruption, accountability, the Afghan channels, and the political process, if I'm not mistaken.

We do have a problem, as I said, with corruption, as many countries around the world do. Afghanistan, of course, is no

exception. Our concerns mostly are, and should be, to tackle corruption at the highest levels of government—people with influence and authority who are abusing the system for personal gain or profit, or from whatever motivation they have.

We have put together, with the leadership of the Afghan Supreme Court—which has been reformed in the past year and is led by a very renowned and credible Afghan scholar and judge—a strategy to combat corruption. There are various institutions within Afghanistan that are in charge of fighting corruption; we in the government, of course, and at the behest of the President himself, are taking this very seriously.

I know this is an issue that appears quite often in the media, an issue that touches upon aid issues, aid money, and aid flowing to Afghanistan, but I can assure you of one thing: to a very large extent—70% to 80%—the money your country and others are putting into Afghanistan and investing in Afghanistan goes outside of Afghan government channels. So if there is a problem, some of it exists outside of what the Afghan government controls. It goes through NGOs, multilaterals, even corporations, contractors, and advisors—people who are involved in one way or another. All should be accountable and made accountable. We have a role to play in Afghanistan to make them accountable, and I think the donors also have a role to play to make them accountable.

The rest of the money and the rest of the resources that go through the Afghan government are all strictly controlled, supervised, and overseen by the international community through the trust funds that have been established, whether it is the Afghanistan reconstruction trust fund—the largest channel and mechanism to which money flows—the law enforcement trust fund, or the counter narcotics trust fund. They are all under the supervision of the World Bank, the IMF, the Asian Development Bank, and so on. So the notion that your money ends up in Afghan government officials' pockets does not really translate into reality in Afghanistan. There are other types of resources that may end up in people's pockets, but I can assure you that there's no evidence so far that shows your taxpayers' money ends up in somebody's pocket or somebody's bank account somewhere.

That's one part of the issue.

I mentioned Afghan channels. They're Afghan channels, strict Afghan measures put together by the Afghan Ministry of Finance, that work hand in hand with the World Bank, the IMF, the ADB, and others—including your aid organizations and agencies and their representatives in Afghanistan—to make sure that resources are accounted for.

I would like now to turn to the second set of questions, which were about how I would characterize today's feelings in Afghanistan. I think the Afghan people—and I'm generalizing, of course—continue to remain hopeful and optimistic. They also continue to be concerned about, and frustrated by, a certain lack of progress in some areas or slow progress in other areas.

•(1855)

It's a mixed situation; the situation overall is seen as positive in some regards and not so positive in other regards, so the Afghans' feeling is a mixed feeling. One thing that has changed since you quoted me from the last time is that we have more concerns about the security challenges we face today than we did six months ago.

Yes, the Afghan people are worried and concerned and frustrated by institutional weaknesses, by capacity weaknesses, by corruption issues, by narcotics itself corrupting our systems, and by all of that; they are, but I think they also see Afghanistan in the larger context of a country that has made some progress in some areas over the last six years and needs to do some more.

They also do not blame any one party specifically for those areas that have not made enough progress. It's not just the Afghan government's fault, it's not just the donors' fault, it's not just those countries with troops on the ground that are at fault; if you look at the totality of this and put things into perspective, you see that there's enough to be shared by everyone, including multilateral organizations and NGOs.

The Chair: Mr. Ambassador, thank you very much.

I'm sorry to bring your answer to a halt, but we do need to move on to the other parties. I'll now move to Madame Barbot.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good evening, Ambassador. Thank you, Your Excellency, for being here today.

You have appeared before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development a number of times, and I am happy to have an opportunity to hear you speak at greater length about the situation in Afghanistan.

I am going to raise something that is not often discussed. In the reports that we have received, very little is said about the Afghan people. They are discussed in general terms. This afternoon I went to see an exhibit of photographs and a presentation of documents sponsored by Oxfam, which has a pilot project in a number of regions, obviously outside Kandahar. The exhibit deals directly with poverty. When we say that we want to provide women and children with an opportunity to go to school, I think we are referring to the Afghan people. What I found interesting in the Oxfam presentation was that this organization takes into account the capacity of these groups to find a way out of their situation. They are provided with the means, and the organization works along with them to assess their situation and help them to find their own way out of it.

We don't often hear about this in the areas that are of concern to us. Beyond the general and generous programs to build schools, etc., what can you tell us about the Afghan people and the poorest among them? Are they given any type of special consideration? In my opinion, security is one thing, but if we don't help the people to acquire new skills and develop the ones that they already have, there will always be this gap between the ones who are at the top and who see things in a general way and the rest of the population who are trying to eke out a living.

And speaking of security, the Canadian mission has been criticized for putting security ahead of humanitarian programs to help the Afghan people. What do you have to say about that? In your opinion, how has international aid helped the Afghan government and the poorest among the Afghan people?

•(1900)

[*English*]

The Chair: Please go ahead, Mr. Ambassador.

[*Translation*]

H.E. Omar Samad: Thank you very much.

You are quite correct: the Afghan people, both the poor and not so poor, are at the heart of our plans for the future and the work that we are doing. Everything that is being done, whether by the Afghan government or by the international community, is part of a strategy to combat poverty. As I have already said, in a few days an international conference will be held in Paris with 60 countries participating. International organizations, including the United Nations, will discuss the issue and will try to find solutions to improve the lot of the people and the poor of Afghanistan.

Our National Development Strategy, "Fighting Poverty in Afghanistan", will be introduced at the Paris conference. It is part of the strategy that we will be adopting. Of course, it involves a number of political, economic and social sectors. I believe that the conference is open to anyone who would be interested in learning the specific details of the Afghan government's and international community's plans to improve the situation for the poor in Afghanistan. This is a country where 95% of the population lives in poverty. These are the people whom we must help and whom we must not forget. The international community has agreed to work with us to combat poverty in Afghanistan. This document sets out very specific goals. Moreover, we must not forget the Millennium Development Goals that must be met.

I believe that a combination of all of these factors will serve to improve the lot of Afghanistan's poor. The president is in daily contact with various sectors of the population. The people working on the National Development Strategy have travelled to all of the villages in Afghanistan and have spoken with people from all of the Afghan communities, even in regions that are extremely dangerous, in order to gather their comments.

Afghanistan now has very strong media that reflect public opinion. They often level harsh criticism at the government. We also have a Parliament that has expressed a willingness to help the poor. There are about 260 members, and from time to time, I listen to what they have to say. Thanks to satellite television, I can watch what happens in Afghanistan's Parliament and I know that there are often debates about the poor citizens in Afghanistan. There is a lot happening, but there remains a lot to be done and it won't all happen within a few years. It will take a lot of time.

•(1905)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador.

We now go to Ms. McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Your Excellency, for being here to meet with the committee. I have to say that I feel very much more optimistic about a number of the things that seem to be coming into sharper focus. I'm interested in pursuing a little bit some of the issues raised in this very excellent and quite comprehensive study that's been done. Reference has already been made to the "Unheard Voices" study that has been done by a number of NGOs, supported by the UN, supported by CIDA, and we should acknowledge that. What really emerges is a real cry and a whole set of recommendations for understanding that without really serious aggressive changes in some of the approaches, we're going to see an intensification of the instability, the injustices, and the insecurity. I'm just wondering if you're familiar with the study, which has now been released.

Actually, this afternoon there was a magnificent photo display that I think really helped to tell some of the stories through the faces as well as the voices of Afghanistan's most marginalized, poorest people. Are you familiar with that study and the recommendations?

H.E. Omar Samad: Do you mean the Oxfam study?

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Yes.

H.E. Omar Samad: Yes, I have read the summary of it.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I don't mean the Oxfam study going back to Matt Waldman, but this most recent study that's just in.

H.E. Omar Samad: No, I have not read that one.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Okay. Well, I don't want to put you at an unfair disadvantage at all, but I would just very briefly refer to a couple of the things that I think particularly stand out. One was the major concern about whether sufficient effort was being concentrated on the humanitarian crisis. There are many components to it: dire hunger, inadequate health care, in many cases a complete marginalization of the poor. Some of those concerns were underscored in the Manley report, especially the complete lack of coordination.

You've made the point—and I think we very much agree—that it's extremely important that Canada's contribution here help to strengthen the state, which is part of the confidence-building that people need. And yet two-thirds of assistance from foreign countries bypasses the Afghan government. If I'm not mistaken, almost 100% of the aid from the U.S. bypasses the Afghan government, which makes it impossible, really, to coordinate this.

My question would be whether at this point you're satisfied that there is sufficient attention and concentration on the most marginalized, the poorest of the populations, who then become ripe for recruitment into the insurgency effort in the south particularly.

Secondly, they concentrated a good deal on the concern about whether there was enough being done, really working with the Afghan people on the ground to improve agricultural production so that we're not talking about a never-ending cycle of external aid but really helping to build the agricultural sector.

I wonder if I could ask you to comment on those two particular things.

H.E. Omar Samad: Not having read this new report yet—I am familiar with all the other reports that have come out in the past few months, and there have been several—I would like to stress that we do fully recognize that we have a problem with providing the poorest Afghans with the basics they need for survival. Compounding this issue over the past year or two on the one hand was the very severe winter Afghanistan underwent this year, which caused many deaths and also some amount of resettlement of people.

We also have been faced, as have many other countries around the world, with acute food price increases as a result of the global conditions that exist. The prices of the most basic commodities have gone up incredibly over the past few months. We are trying, and continue to try very hard, to bring in help from the outside. We are actually in the process of purchasing and have purchased millions of dollars' worth of foodstuffs to offset the increasing prices. Countries such as yours have contributed, and millions of dollars' worth of food help has been promised to Afghanistan and is coming to Afghanistan in many different ways. We hope this particular issue, the issue of food—flour, sugar, tea, and rice, the basic staples of the Afghan people—which affects Afghans very directly, can be resolved soon. There's a very concerted effort by our government and by our friends and by our neighbours as well, who are in a better situation, to provide us with foodstuffs.

Overall, there are some elements in Afghanistan who are, or who may feel they are, economically marginalized, and they may also become recruits for insurgents and others. That is one aspect of the armed conflict we're facing: those who have not found a job, or those who may find a job but one that pays such a low salary that somebody else comes along and offers three, four, five times more money to them and they accept it because of dire circumstances.

There are those who have been, and continue to be, affiliated or associated with the drug business also. The farmers, as I mentioned in my presentation, are squeezed from several sides. You have the guy who goes to them and says, "I'm going to lend you money, and you have to cultivate poppies; otherwise I'm going to burn down your home and I'm going to take your children away". And they do this at gunpoint. So they make them beholden to this lender who is affiliated with the mafia. He gives him the crop, and there starts the cycle of being dependent on the mafia for his survival. The next step is, "You give this to me and I give you a percentage", and that percentage, of course, ends up being the least amount that anyone could make.

● (1910)

Then we come as the government and say we're going to eradicate, or we're going to spray, or we're going to make life difficult for them, and at times we come and say we have solutions. We have alternatives for them. We have other crops that they can grow, or they can have other means of livelihood. Overall that also contributes to marginalization. So if you take some time and study this ANDS, you'll see that it is addressing all of the pillars that need to be put together. They need to work with each other in order to create a sustainable economy that would address some of the issues that you brought up.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador.

Over to Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll be sharing my time, if I can, with Mademoiselle Boucher.

Mr. Ambassador, thank you for coming.

First of all, I think it's appropriate to note that your new son's name is Arman, which means "hope", because that, obviously, is what we have for your country.

You talked about getting at the source of insecurity. In your view, what are the key sources of insecurity that are breeding all the rest of these problems?

• (1915)

H.E. Omar Samad: There are several sources of insecurity in Afghanistan. I mentioned one: all of those people affiliated with the drug business. We see that there is a strong correlation between the drug business and the armed conflict, the insurgency, which is made up of various components.

You have, at the core of this, a leadership and patrons who have a political or strategic aim. They are putting together these pieces for their benefit in order to reach their strategic goals—one through economic means, another through social pressure, another through tribal affiliation, and so on and so forth.

But the core that controls this armed insurgency is doing it, as I said, for geopolitical or political reasons. One is to make a comeback in Afghanistan and to basically say, "We want to impose Taliban-style rule in Afghanistan. That is the best formula for this country." This has been overwhelmingly rejected by the Afghans and is not acceptable. The second is to basically provide a platform for some of their associates who have a global agenda of exporting terrorism, using terrorism as a political tool. There are also those who have an economic incentive, trying to make money by affiliating themselves with the most violent elements.

Then you have domestic constituencies that, for one reason or another, are dissatisfied with the governance, maybe, or not making enough money. Or they're part of rivalries that exist—some of them very historic rivalries—and are taking sides and creating instability for their own reasons.

Looking at all of this, you realize—and I will address this now, since I didn't have time to get to that question about reconciliation—that there are some people or some elements with whom the government can engage, and is engaging, in some kind of contact, first, and can then take on the following steps of establishing a dialogue and understanding, if possible. But then there are some elements—they either have a foreign allegiance or a terrorist linkage, or they have, as I said, a political motivation—with whom we know, for very obvious reasons, that we will not reach a compromise even if we try.

Then you have this issue: who is going to be accountable for all the murders that have taken place? Who is going to account for the blood that has been spilled not only over the past six or seven years but over the past 15 years, over the past 10 years in Afghanistan? Who is going to account for that as far as these opposition armed groups are concerned?

So we have to put everything into perspective. We have a door open to address this issue of insecurity, in some of its dimensions, with those elements that we think are amenable to some kind of outreach.

Then there are those who are not amenable. The word is out there; if any one of us thinks they can change.... I hope they can change, but we know that some are not ready to change under any circumstance.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thank you.

I'll pass it on to Ms. Boucher.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You have three minutes.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): You mentioned a high-level conference on Afghanistan to be held in Paris on June 12, that will be attended by the international community. I hope that it will provide us with an opportunity to see how much progress has been accomplished so far, and what is being planned for the future.

Can you tell me what the Afghan government is expecting from this conference? Do the government and the international community have any specific and targeted objectives for the future?

• (1920)

H.E. Omar Samad: The first International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan was held in Tokyo in 2002. The second conference was held in Berlin in 2004, the third in London in 2006, and the fourth conference will be held in Paris next June. The aim is for us to work together while building on the experience that has been acquired over the past six years. The donors as well as the Afghan government recognize that a number of lessons have been learned. We acknowledge the existing problems and we want to strengthen the United Nations coordination as well as the coordination between donors and the Afghan government. We want to find real, practical solutions to the problems.

As I said, the National Development Strategy that we will be unveiling in Paris will provide a detailed explanation of our security and socio-economic development goals for Afghanistan for the next five years. We would also like to discuss subjects such as drugs and regional problems with the international community. I believe that it will be a very important conference. We think that our friends around the table all realize that after six or seven years, we must find some other way to deal with situations where we have made little progress or have had little success. It is with that in mind that we will be attending the Paris conference.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador.

We're now moving into round two of questions, and I will start with the Liberal Party.

Mr. Wilfert, you had a short question, followed by Mr. Dhaliwal.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador, as you know, in the March 13 resolution, we said the mission must change, and it must be more than military. We talked about the area of training. That certainly stems from the Manley commission's comments on page 17, where they indicated that in the policing challenge, the need for focusing on training is absolutely critical if in fact we want to demonstrate the "capacity for accountable, honest and effective governance". Could you comment on what you see as the elements needed to ensure effective policing in Afghanistan, given the fact that it is probably the key linchpin, but the worst in terms of effectiveness at the present time?

I'm sharing my comment with Mr. Dhaliwal.

The Chair: By all means.

Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Your Excellency, congratulations to you and your wife.

[Member speaks in Punjabi]...here as well.

My question to you is this. You said that you are trying to handle the corruption and the accountability at the highest levels and among the people who are associated with power. All the news we are getting here is that the people who are involved in corruption are associated with the highest level of the regime there.

You also mentioned that there is two-digit growth there and that only 10% of the people in Afghanistan hold the economic power. So is it only that 10% of the people who are benefiting from all this money that's flowing into that country—the international aid—or is it the 90% of people who are below the poverty line?

• (1925)

H.E. Omar Samad: Thank you.

You're absolutely right that the police are a central core component of the overall security institutions and rebuilding efforts we have undertaken. Unfortunately, for the first three to four years of this effort we relied on weak means of doing the job and a half-cooked approach that did not provide the police forces with the capacity they needed—the skills, knowledge, equipment, logistics, and so on—and, more importantly, the salaries needed to keep them honest and in the service of the people.

We realized this a couple of years ago. Right now we are in the midst of a very deep change taking place, with billions of dollars of resources having been committed by various countries to do this job, including Europeans, the U.S., and Canada. So we are in the process of bringing change.

I hope that within the next year or two we will see the results of this change. Everybody from the President down, and all our friends across the world, are as concerned as you are about this issue, and we are doing our best to manage this. I remain optimistic that in the same manner that the Afghan National Army is relatively successful because of some very clear reasons and the work that was put into the army, we can do the same with the police.

Every day I read—and it happens every day—that so many young Afghan policemen have died as the result of Taliban attacks. I think about their families. We have had thousands of young policemen die

in the line of duty. While I acknowledge that it's easy to target them and call them corrupt, inefficient, and so on, I think that's a generalization. We should avoid that, because the Afghan police have also shown great courage and have made great sacrifices. There are thousands of families in mourning because their sons, and on some occasions their daughters, have died.

The Chair: Mr. Ambassador, we have to move to the next questioner.

H.E. Omar Samad: I just want to say that I think I answered your question to some extent by saying that we have no control over most of the money that flows in. We have control—alongside the World Bank and all of the prestigious international financial institutions you are all part of—over that amount of money that flows to the Afghan government. The moneys that are called corrupt moneys mostly stem from the drug business, arms sales, and all kinds of smuggling. Some money ends up in the pockets of NGOs for fraudulent activities. I'm not trying to pinpoint that all NGOs are fraudulent, but there are some who are and have been shut down by our government. Some individuals are also benefiting from this with very high salaries and perks.

So those are the things that are happening. It's a complex picture, and is not as simple as it's sometimes portrayed in newspaper items.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador.

We move now to Mr. Keddy.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Ambassador, for appearing this evening. I concur that it's seldom as simple as in a newspaper article.

But on a more serious side—taking the tack that Mr. Wilfert started—with the training of the police, security still appears to be the predominant issue in Afghanistan today. Without security you can't have agriculture or manufacturing, and people aren't able to carry on with their livelihoods.

The police obviously are a targeted group. What can the Afghanistan army and Afghanistan's allies do to better protect the police? I expect it would include further training, and I understand that's occurring. But what can we do to further protect them in that initial stage when they're still rookies and getting out on their own?

• (1930)

H.E. Omar Samad: Thank you.

Look at the map of Afghanistan today. It's obviously a shifting delineation of what is happening from different perspectives. But the belt that separates us from the tribal regions of Pakistan is the most insecure, unstable region. This is a fact. The rest of Afghanistan is relatively stable and peaceful, where normal life continues and takes place with business activity, education, and development. We have a problem along this tribal belt, for obvious reasons, because on one hand we have infiltration and cross-border activity taking place; on the other hand, arms and men and ammunition are crossing into Afghanistan, and there are safe havens to which they can go back to. So we need to look at the situation from a very realistic point of view as to how we can change the dynamics of the situation.

Coming to the police and protection of police, I have to tell you that one of the failures of my government, the international community, and the donors has been to undersource the police for several years, especially in terms of not giving them the most basic means of protection, which is a gun. A policeman in Afghanistan, who is expected to be facing a terrorist coming with all types of armaments—including suicide attacks and suicide bombers—has at times not had enough ammunition to defend his post. A large percentage of police in Afghanistan have died as a result of a lack of munitions, or arms that have malfunctioned, because somebody gave them the wrong arm or an old or dysfunctional arm.

We have a long road to travel and we have a lot of hard work, and we have to really think hard about how to change the situation. As I said, there are thousands of families who are mourning because their son could not defend himself when he was attacked.

Forget about the pay. Some of these people can do their job for several months without being paid. But they say, “If you do not give me a bullet so I can defend myself, or a gun that can function properly, then you’re really doing a disservice to me, to the country, and to your goal as an international community.” These are facts. This is not an illusion.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Ambassador, I know we don’t have much time left, and I know my colleague, Mr. MacKenzie, would like to get a quick question in.

The Chair: Be very quick, Mr. MacKenzie.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): I think you had indicated, Mr. Ambassador, the huge number of people who had departed and have returned back to the country. That in itself is a huge success, but it also must create a huge problem for you from a humanitarian perspective. How is that being handled?

H.E. Omar Samad: It is a gigantic responsibility and task for us, and for the humanitarian organizations involved, including the UN organizations, UNHCR, and so on. For the past 30 years, Afghanistan has produced the largest refugee population in the world, and today, even though five million Afghans have come back home, we still have the largest refugee population in the world.

We are now faced with another dilemma, which is the forced closure of refugee camps in two of our neighbouring countries. We have agreements with the UNHCR and the governments of Pakistan and Iran, where most of our refugees are living, to facilitate the voluntary and honourable return of Afghans back to their homes—voluntary and honourable. We are seeing signs of involuntary and not so honourable forcing of Afghans to come back to their homes under the worst of conditions, including this past winter, when many of them died just because they were pushed out of their homes, and their families didn’t know what had happened to their loved ones. This is a major problem for the Afghan government. There are a lot of sensitivities attached to this, because relations with these two neighbours are a very critical issue, and the Afghan refugees are suffering as a result.

We are trying our best to give those who have come back the minimum we can to start a new life in Afghanistan. They face the prospects of unemployment, land mines that are still buried, villages that have been razed during the Soviet occupation, families whose members cannot find each other, and so on and so forth. If you travel

to parts of Kabul, you will see refugee tent cities emerging because they have no housing; they have nowhere to go. I have to say they’re frustrated, they’re going through very difficult times, but they’re also somewhat relieved that they’re back home, and the one thing they are all concerned about is how safe they are going to be and what security is going to be like for their children. Are they going to be able to send them to school or are they going to be attacked on the way to school?

• (1935)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador.

[Translation]

The last question for this evening will come from Mr. Bachand.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would first like to welcome the ambassador.

I am going to speak to you as a friend. I believe that you are a very good ambassador for Afghanistan. I will be asking frank and direct questions. We have available to us a number of sources of information as well as frequent government briefings. That does not prevent us from seeking information elsewhere. I believe that it is important for a good member of Parliament to check other sources of information, whether it be *Le monde diplomatique*, the Senlis Council, Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International.

My party has always spoken out against the way in which Canada’s mission in Afghanistan is structured, and I am referring to the 3D approach. I won’t deal with that now because it has been discussed almost to death. What I would like to raise is the issue of governance. I have three questions for you, and I hope they won’t be too difficult for you to answer. I think it is important for us to know what is happening.

I have often read and heard that President Karzai’s authority was limited solely to Kabul. People often refer to him as the Mayor of Kabul, meaning that he is incapable of extending his authority beyond that city.

My second question deals with the presence of undesirable elements within Afghanistan’s Parliament. I would like you to tell us honestly if drug lords and war lords have been elected to Afghanistan’s Parliament, and why they are tolerated. Have they been provided with some type of amnesty or is there another reason for it? This is something that we often hear about.

My third question is a rather sensitive one. It involves the case of Malalai Joya. It seems to us that this female member of Parliament was expelled because the government in power could not easily accept criticism. If that were the case here in Canada, I would probably be one of the first ones to be kicked out. If what she said is true, then why is the government refusing to accept criticism, something that is an important tenet of democracy?

• (1940)

H.E. Omar Samad: I will answer candidly, like a friend, but I hope you won't mind if I express myself in English, since I am more comfortable in that language.

[English]

On these three questions, President Karzai started out as an interim leader. He oversaw the holding of two *loya jirgas* in Afghanistan, he oversaw the process of constitutional reform and the adoption of a constitution in Afghanistan, he took the country to elections and was elected by almost 54% of the Afghan people—more than eight million Afghans voted for the first time in their lives—and he has a five-year term, which will end next year, when we will again be facing elections in Afghanistan, hopefully *inshallah*.

He started out as an interim leader, when Afghanistan was divided, politically and militarily. Today there is one army, but still there are small groups of armed men who are going through the process of being disarmed; tens of thousands of others have been disarmed from these private armies.

Today, in 34 provinces we have 34 governors selected by the President. We have district chiefs, police chiefs, and representatives of various ministries running the institutions in almost all of the districts of Afghanistan. For you to tell me that he is the mayor of Kabul flies in the face of reality. His authority today, compared to six years ago, is on a national scale.

Does he have challenges to his authority? Yes. Are there people who try to undermine him? Yes. Is he not able to, for example, enforce something in Afghanistan, anywhere in Afghanistan? He is able to enforce it, sometimes under difficult conditions, sometimes by wheeling and dealing politically, like what happens in most democracies and parliaments.

From that point of view, that is my short answer to that.

Regarding warlords and drug lords in Parliament, we are a country that came out of 30 years of warfare, of hundreds of thousands of people who were, in one way or another, either victimized or were themselves part of the armed groups that fought the Soviets, fought the Communists, fought each other, fought the Taliban, fought al-Qaeda, and eventually some survived and are part of the new Afghanistan.

Our choices are either to go and fight every one of them again in the name of whatever—reconciliation by force and through violence—or to say that the tent is now large enough to accommodate everyone, including, as I mentioned earlier, so-called Taliban who are willing to accept the constitutional order in Afghanistan and lay down their arms.

We have choices, and the Afghan people have made that choice to accept, to deal with people under new conditions in Afghanistan. This doesn't mean that some of these individuals who may be involved or may have been involved in grave human rights violations or massacres or so on and will not one day account for their deeds. There is a process called transitional justice that is in place in Afghanistan that is supposed to take care of this issue.

You may call somebody a warlord. To most Afghans, that person may have been a freedom fighter, or whatever other term you want to give them. Drug lords are a different issue. I think anyone involved in drugs should be out of office and prosecuted. Anyone involved in continued human rights violations today should be out of office and prosecuted. Anyone breaking the laws of Afghanistan and international laws should be prosecuted.

Malalai Joya is an Afghan woman who rose during the first *loya jirga*—and I was there, a witness to that—and attacked and accused some people in that gathering of being warlords and violators of human rights, and so on. She rose to prominence and became a member of Parliament from a western province of Afghanistan. I am not going to either defend her or attack her.

• (1945)

All I want you and those who think they know Malalai Joya to do is go and study what she says, but study it thoroughly: what it represents, what the message means, what the origin of this message is, what it is trying to accomplish, and finally, whether it offers any solution to Afghanistan's thousands of problems or whether it is trying to exacerbate the situation and add to the problems of Afghanistan. All I want you to do is go and study her case, without my taking a position on her in this gathering, and to be very honest about what she is saying, what it means, and whether it is helping the Afghan cause at all. Then at the end of the day, let the Afghan people—and not somebody outside of Afghanistan—judge her.

The Chair: Your Excellency, thank you so much for appearing here before us tonight. I appreciate your taking time out of your schedule. It is a Wednesday night as well. I also thank you for the time and effort you put into your opening statement, but also for the direct and forthright way in which you've answered questions that have been put to you by the members of Parliament around this table.

H.E. Omar Samad: Thank you very much for this opportunity.

The Chair: I am going to suspend this meeting for five minutes so that you have the opportunity to thank Mr. Samad as well for his presence. Then we're going to move in camera, because we have some committee business that we'd like to finish the meeting with.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Chairman, a point of order. I'm not a regular member of the committee, but it is my understanding that in previous meetings of the committee, Ms. Black, on behalf of the New Democratic Party, had a second final brief question. Am I not correct about that?

The Chair: No. In one of our earlier meetings, we had set out a list of parties and in which order they would ask questions. When we get into round two, it alternates between the Bloc and the NDP, so in round one every party is able to ask a question. In round two, since the Bloc has two members, it has precedence over round two.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I don't wish to hold up the committee. It was just my understanding that that was not the case.

The Chair: I can discuss it with you after if you wish. Thank you.

The meeting is suspended.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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