

January 31, 2005

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Rice:

We commend the Administration's decision to devote greater attention and resources to help the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan address the country's growing drug trade. We strongly agree that this trade poses a serious threat to Afghanistan and the rest of the international community. Nevertheless, we are writing to express concern that the current counternarcotics policy places premature and excessive emphasis on crop eradication, which could undermine the remarkable progress Afghanistan has made since 2001.

An effective counternarcotics strategy must contribute to the stabilization of Afghanistan and help authorities build a legitimate state and economy. It should foster respect for and inspire confidence in the government, by providing Afghans with alternatives to cultivating opium and by prosecuting leading drug traffickers and corrupt officials. Massive eradication efforts in 2005 could risk destabilizing large areas of the country, thereby undermining critical alternative livelihood and law enforcement initiatives.

Millions of Afghans are directly involved in the narcotics business, which accounts for about 40 percent of the country's total Gross Domestic Product. A recent UN report found that the amount of land cultivated with poppies rose 64 percent between 2003 and 2004 and had spread to all 34 of Afghanistan's provinces. Estimates by the U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy paint an even darker picture, asserting there was a 239 percent increase in land under poppy cultivation and a 73 percent increase in opium production from 2003 to 2004.

It is precisely because the narcotics industry is so entrenched in Afghanistan – and because the newly-elected government is still vulnerable – that the United States should prioritize alternative livelihood and interdiction efforts rather than crop eradication. Widespread eradication in 2005 could undermine the economy and devastate already poor families without giving rural development projects sufficient time to provide alternative sources of income. It has the potential to turn millions of Afghans against a government which is struggling to extend its reach and strengthen its authority.

Threats of eradication have already resulted in higher opium prices, enriching traffickers who have large inventories from three previous bumper crops and spurring a shift in production to more remote areas. Eradication without viable alternative livelihoods and programs to minimize farmers' debts to local merchants and money lenders will likely force them to mortgage their land to traffickers. This could also jeopardize efforts by the

U.S. and others to restore the rights and dignity of Afghan women, as girls have been sold to pay off opium-related debt.

We recommend the following:

- Alternative livelihood programs related to counternarcotics efforts should be implemented throughout the country. Solely focusing these programs in traditional poppy growing regions could inadvertently result in the crop's expansion if farmers believe they can obtain assistance by entering into poppy cultivation themselves.
- Alternative livelihood programs should be integrated with provincial and national development plans and should create genuine opportunities to access other sources of income. These programs should be well established and shown to be effective before ground eradication efforts are initiated.
- Aerial eradication should not be used under any circumstances. Aerial eradication damages licit as well as illicit crops, poses health and environmental hazards, fosters mistrust and creates or exacerbates tensions.
- Focus law enforcement efforts on interdiction and arresting or dismissing major traffickers and their political protectors. Commit U.S. and other funds to build appropriate capacity for these tasks.
- Request the Coalition and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to focus intelligence collection efforts on identifying major traffickers. The U.S., including military and intelligence agencies, should cease all payments and support to such people. Coalition forces and ISAF should assist in the destruction of laboratories and interdiction of imports of precursor chemicals and exports of narcotics.
- Encourage the Afghan Government to strictly implement the provisions of its Constitution requiring the disclosure of assets by high officials, and to extend this requirement to their families and top military commanders. Those with unexplained assets should be dismissed.
- Request the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and International Monetary Fund to assist the Afghan Government in carrying out a study of the macroeconomic impact of reducing or eliminating the opium economy in Afghanistan, and to devise policies to mitigate its economic impact.

Referring to Afghanistan's drug trade, John Walters, Director of the U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy, recently wrote, "the stakes [in Afghanistan] are high, not only for the future stability of Afghanistan but also for the United States, our allies and partners." And that is why it is so critical for the U.S. and others to ensure that their

response to this trade is appropriate and effective, taking into account both the short and long-term implications for the stability of Afghanistan and the success of the Afghan people.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Actionaid Afghanistan	Foundation for Culture and Civil Society
Afghanaid	Handicap International-Belgium
Afghan Civil Society Forum	Help the Afghan Children
Afghan NGOs Coordination Bureau (350 member organizations)	International Crisis Group
Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit	International Rescue Committee
Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (83 member organizations)	Learning for Life
American Friends Service Committee	Marie Stopes International
CARE	Mercy Corps
Caritas Italiana	Norwegian Afghanistan Committee
Catholic Relief Services	Ockenden Afghanistan
Concern Worldwide	Open Society Policy Center
Coordination for Humanitarian Assistance	Oxfam International
Coordination of Afghan Relief	Rights & Democracy
Cordaid	Southern Western Afghanistan and Baluchistan Association for Coordination (70 member organizations)
DACAAR: Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees	Tearfund
	Women's Edge Coalition

cc: Secretary Donald Rumsfeld

Administrator Andrew Natsios
Senator Mitch McConnell
Senator Patrick Leahy
Senator Richard Lugar
Senator Joseph Biden
Representative Jim Kolbe
Representative Nita Lowey
Representative Henry Hyde
Representative Tom Lantos
Assistant Secretary Robert Charles
Assistant Secretary Christina B. Rocca
Ambassador Maureen Quinn
Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad
Assistant Administrator James Kunder