



January 24, 2008

We Believe God Desires Peace in their Land as in Ours

The Manley Report, sadly, has missed the opportunity to guide Canada towards a truly constructive role in securing a long term sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

The Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan, known as the Manley Panel, accepts the premise that Canada's role in counter-insurgency combat is key to global and Canadian security. They recommend that this approach be sustained in Kandahar by, initially, supplementing Canadian Forces with another battle group (1,000 troops) from a NATO/ISAF ally, and ultimately transferring that counter-insurgency fighting to the Afghan National Army once adequately trained.

While mentioning the need for diplomacy and reconciliation in the body of the Report, the Panel members fail to recommend that Canadian diplomatic support be focused on assisting Afghans and the international community in building a comprehensive peace negotiation that includes those elements of Afghan society that were excluded from the Bonn Compact. Canada, with its NATO/ISAF partners, is a party to a civil war in supporting one side in an internal conflict that precedes 9/11. A way must be found for the largely excluded Pashtun from the south and east of the country to join the political process. We believe that a comprehensive peace building, reconciliation and diplomatic approach offers the best hope for peace in Afghanistan, including the Kandahar region.

The Canadian Council of Churches is the largest ecumenical body in Canada, now representing 21 churches of Anglican, Evangelical, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions.

In a letter to the Prime Minister dated 25 Jun 2007, the President, The Rev. Dr. James Christie, and the General Secretary, The Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton, expressed concern for the people of Afghanistan and our shared hope for reconciliation and sustainable peace in that long troubled country. The letter emphasized three points:

- 1) the primary goal of Canadian engagement in Afghanistan must be the pursuit of peace for the people of Afghanistan rather than forwarding the war on terror;
- 2) a political solution for reconciliation among the people of Afghanistan must be found using all available diplomatic means, including engaging civil society and religious networks; and
- 3) the efforts of Canadian Forces must be directed to the protection of lives and the preservation of civilian infrastructure.

A letter signed by a number of Canadian church leaders dated 16 Aug 2007 elaborated on the role of Canadian Forces in Afghanistan: “We believe that The Canadian Forces should focus on enhancing protection of vulnerable Afghans rather than on aggressive engagement with insurgents in areas where the local population is suspicious or alienated from the central government.”

We agree with the Manley Report when it states that this is a complicated situation, and that people of good will and high principles may disagree on how Canada may best proceed in Afghanistan. The Canadian Council of Churches together with Project Ploughshares looks forward to participating in the continued debate on these important issues with their member churches, in Parliament and among Canadians.

We offer prayers for the safety and the well being of The Canadian Forces and civilians serving in Afghanistan. We also pray for the people of Afghanistan regardless of the groups with which they identify, believing they are loved by God, and that God desires peace in their land as well as in ours.

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