

Intervention by the Netherlands, delivered by the Minister for Development Cooperation, Bert Koenders, at the 'International Conference on Afghanistan: a Comprehensive Strategy in a Regional Context', The Hague, 31 March 2009

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Today we reassess the contract between Afghanistan and the international community, and reaffirm the central role of the Government of Afghanistan - in close cooperation with UNAMA - in ensuring a more coherent and efficient international engagement, on the basis of equitable burden sharing. That is now of major importance, 8 years after the liberation of Afghanistan from terror and oppression. In recent years many solid foundations for sustainable development have been laid. In Uruzgan, for example - the province where the Netherlands, supported by our good friends the Australians, is currently involved on the basis of a successful 3D approach - the number of children attending school has risen from 12,000 to 50,000, and one hundred new health centres have been built. Agricultural- and private sector development are taking off.

The challenge is now to build on these results by increasing and improving our efforts. More than before we need to look beyond provincial borders, and promote confidence-building measures with neighbouring countries. Effective coordination is key, we therefore firmly

support UNAMA and you Kai, in coordinating cooperation and forging unity.

We welcome the shifting of the role of the international community from an implementing to a supporting presence. Afghanistan's future should be based on Afghan ownership and national reconstruction. This cannot be stressed enough.

We need to shape the process of increasing civilian input further. The Netherlands is already working in this direction: our Provincial Reconstruction Team in Uruzgan is now under civilian leadership, and the 'Afghanisation' of our efforts is under way.

What we need now is a 'civilian surge', a better balance between our military efforts and effective development cooperation. This is more important than ever. Transparent elections, strengthening Afghanistan's national and local government institutions, stepping up the fight against corruption, improving the human rights situation and transitional justice and focusing more effectively on the position of women, and promoting development and the private sector are key components of this surge. Reconciliation and dialogue are also crucial, as is support to a vibrant civil society. Let us never forget in these meeting the Afghan people themselves.

This process needs to be matched - at the very least - by capacity building within the Afghan authorities. Governance, the army, the police and the judicial sector need to be strengthened. The trust and confidence of the people are essential to the development process and are at stake here.

Far-reaching reforms are needed to inspire that trust at every level. For its part the international community, supported by UNAMA, should reduce overlap, and endeavour to respect and work in harmony with Afghan reality.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This conference is a significant step towards a new deal between the international community and Afghanistan. Let me assure you once again that the Netherlands intends to fulfil the promises it has made to the Afghan people. I thank you all for coming to the Netherlands.

Thank you very much.