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*Contributing to peace dividend: the case of the Netherlands in
Afghanistan and Uruzgan.*

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* Notes from CCS's Special Conference on *Peace Through Reconstruction*

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1. I want to begin by complimenting the organisers of this conference for focusing on the issue of peace through reconstruction. This is an issue which has been high on the agenda of my country, the Netherlands, for more than a decade now, as a result of our experience in several peace keeping and conflict management operations, particularly in the Balkans in the nineties. Reconstruction and development are necessary for sustainable stability and security, and at the same time security is necessary for sustainable security.
2. We have learned that we cannot wait for peace to bring development. In fragile countries afflicted by conflict we need to do several very difficult things at once: build government capacity; help restore order and bring security; kick start development and reconstruction; educate children and those who missed out on education when they were young; assist in reconciliation processes; reduce crime and illegal economic activities, just to name a few. Each of these components affects the others and neglecting any of them will endanger progress on others.
3. This means that we have to find ways to implement programmes while the conflict was still on-going. Alternative opportunities have to be presented for those who might otherwise take up weapons. Communities have to be assisted, even if the guns are not silent yet.
4. Let me focus on the case of Afghanistan. The Netherlands has been active in support of security, reconstruction and development in Afghanistan since 2002. As far as the country as a whole is concerned, we have been from the beginning a strong advocate of channeling support through national Afghan programmes. The best way to build capacity is not to deal with dozens of different programmes devised by individual donors, but to have donors fund programmes that are well-coordinated on the basis of Afghan priorities and with an Afghan lead.

The weakness of the Afghan government is a problem here, but it's not always recognised that many of these programmes have been successful. Just to name a few: the National Solidarity Programme reaches nearly every community. Equip, the education programme, has made schools and teachers available across the country, including for girls.

5. In addition to our support at the national Afghan level, we have been lead nation of a Provincial Reconstruction Team in two provinces. From 2004 to 2006 we led the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Baghlan province in the north of Afghanistan, and since 2006 we are the lead nation in Uruzgan, a province located in the Taliban heartland, a province that is the poorest in one of the poorest countries in the world, a province that was the only one the Russians could not occupy because of the fierce resistance.
6. Our activities in Uruzgan are based on an integrated approach, bringing together security, governance and political processes with reconstruction and development. Just as many other partners in Afghanistan, we realized that only such an integrated approach where military and civilian efforts complement and reinforce each other can lead to a stable and secure environment, which in turn is key to achieving development.

7. Let me highlight a few points.

First, we focused our military presence not on the whole of the province, but on those districts where you find most of the population, with the aim to create areas of relative security and stability, where government can function and development can take hold.

In doing so we use military means when necessary, including the heavy weapons we sent to Afghanistan, such as F-16 fighter planes and Apache helicopters, in cooperation with the Afghan security forces, and the Australian and American troops which are also present in the province.

However, winning fights against Taliban does not lead to a victory and to a stabilised country. For that you need an effective local government, a reliable police and a functioning rule of law system, alternative livelihoods to poppy cultivation, and solutions for local tensions and disputes. To achieve that you need civil expertise and civil organisations to work with.

Indeed, in Uruzgan our military learned how important it is not only to work together with civilian partners, but even to integrate civilian and military efforts. That is why our PRT, which is attached to our military forces, is now civilian led. This civilian lead in the PRT has helped improve civ-mil coordination and enables us to plan, implement and follow-up military interventions in an integrated manner, from HQ to ground level. For instance, our civilians in the Uruzgan Task Force now take fully part in the military planning process.

Third, involving the Afghans themselves, and listening to them is crucial. Afghan solutions for Afghan problems. Creating and maintaining a network of human intelligence, and outreach to local population, are essential for ensuring sustainable results. The commitment of local communities to development processes is necessary for success. The Netherlands has employed a range of tools to achieve this, such as tribal liaison officers, field studies by tribal experts, and social/political advisors reaching out to influential local political and tribal leaders.

Where possible we also implement programmes through national Afghan channels, to benefit also other parts of Afghanistan and promote co-ordination of international efforts.

8. Recently, we had an independent Afghan NGO evaluate our activities in Uruzgan since 2006. It's main findings were the following:

- Uruzgan shows area of relative success, with over half of the districts accessible for the government now; these are the districts where the majority of the population lives;
- Civilian actors now working in Uruzgan have increased from 5 in 2006 to over 50 currently, including many ngo's. All these organisations believe that large parts of the province are secure enough to conduct their civilian activities, ranging from education to infrastructure and from health care to agriculture. The UN this year opened office in the province and can now begin to play its coordinating role there .
- Aid - from small scale under-the-radar projects to supporting (national) development programmes- works, and now reaches practically all districts. In fact we are seeing the

first signs of real economic development in the province, with the opening of a bank and the start of commercial flights from Kabul to the province.

The report also underlines that the Dutch focus on a micro-level and bottom-up development strategy that engages community leaders, has been effective. For instance in the district of Khas Uruzgan locals voiced a preference for projects that, though small in scale, have a direct and visible impact at the village level, because they understand that the security situation is too volatile to carry out large scale projects, and more basically, they want the autonomy that comes with determining themselves their needs and then working to meet them.

9. However, many challenges remain. The local population is on the whole pleased with the way things are developing, but will it be sustainable?

Security of course remains a major issue. An increasing Afghan lead and Afghan capacity to provide security and stability will be crucial for our other efforts to succeed. And this is after all also our exit strategy. Helping to strengthen and expand the Afghan army and police are therefore priorities.

While real progress has been made in building the Afghan army, the police is still in a sorry state. Strengthening and expanding the police should therefore get our particular attention.

Secondly, governance. This was perhaps our greatest disappointment over the last years, the continuing weakness and ineffectiveness of the Afghan governmental structures, both at the national and the local level, due to capacity problems, corruption and power brokers. Strengthening the capacity and the legitimacy of the government will be key in achieving sustainable progress.

Let me add, that this does not mean the government has to do it all alone. In Uruzgan for instance, a very good Afghan NGO implements the government health programme and has succeeded in making health, be it basic, available to all.

10. As far as reconstruction and development are concerned, the government can help create an enabling environment, in particular through agriculture. Agriculture is the backbone of the Afghan economy and will be for many years to come. 80% of the labour force is working in the agricultural sector. To fully exploit the existing potential, the sector needs urgent upgrading and modernization. It requires training of manpower in modern ways of production and product quality. And it calls for chain management and creation of added value.
11. Our approach is in line with priorities on agriculture as formulated by the government of Afghanistan and addresses multiple levels. Varying from countless small-scale projects (such as repairing roads and irrigation channels, constructing wells and bridges), through focussing on the introduction of new crops as alternatives to poppy cultivation, on to developing value chains of almonds and dried fruits with assistance of the private sector.
12. Also, the Netherlands has agreed to take the lead, together with the three Afghan Ministries of Education, Agriculture and Rural Development, in supporting a national revival program for the Afghan agricultural education system.

13. To conclude, Mr. Chairman, when aiming at peace through reconstruction the main challenge in the economic field for us, foreign donors, is not just to mobilize resources, because the flow of money towards Afghanistan is already substantial, but even more so to strategically mobilize and coordinate our efforts, while at the same time further strengthening the capacity of the Afghan authorities. And, as I tried to explain through the specific examples I mentioned, investments should be aimed at micro- as well as macro level.

Thank you for your attention.