

## **Afghanistan and the Netherlands: a long-term partnership**

President Karzai, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

Two and a half years ago after the Bonn and Tokyo conferences you and your interim government embarked on a very challenging road toward the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Today the Bonn agenda has almost been completed with great success. In a few months time the Afghan men and women will elect their new legitimate government. I would like to echo other speakers before me in praising you for this successful implementation of the Bonn roadmap.

The aim of this conference here in Berlin is to seal the future partnership between Afghanistan and the international community. To guide our future work, the Afghan Government, in conjunction with key international players, have drafted an excellent document entitled Securing Afghanistan's Future. This document forms a very solid basis for our discussions here today and outlines a very clear strategy for the years ahead. It stresses the importance of two elements, namely (i) Afghan ownership and (ii) close partnership with the international community. These are vital components of the development policies that I promote.

As a demonstration of our Dutch commitment, I have decided to include Afghanistan on the list of partner countries receiving development assistance from us. This implies a long-term partnership from our side. To this end, the Dutch government also recently decided to raise our presence in Kabul by opening a full-fledged embassy headed by an ambassador.

Mr President, the Netherlands wholly endorses the Berlin Declaration and working-plan which sets out specific, realistic targets for reform and development. I know of no other post-conflict country prepared to enter into such a unique partnership with the international community. This commitment prompts us to come forward with our share of the partnership. Mr President, it gives me great pleasure to announce today that the Netherlands is pledging EUR100 million for the next three years. As has we have done in the past, most of our funds will be channelled through the ARTF which places your Government in the driving seat. I would like to take this opportunity to strongly appeal to some other key donors around this table to increase their contributions to this important multilateral reconstruction mechanism.

The Netherlands has played an important role in the security sector and intends to continue doing so in the future. From January 2002 to August 2003, the Netherlands provided a substantial contribution to ISAF in Kabul. Like all the speakers before me, I also emphasise the importance of real disarmament and sustainable reintegration of former combatants. The rule of the gun must be replaced by the rule of the law. Further to a request from NATO, the Dutch government have recently approved the deployment of six Apache helicopters for ISAF. The helicopters will be operational in Kabul as of next month. The Netherlands is also seriously considering participation in a PRT. A first reconnaissance mission to this effect has recently returned from Kabul.

Mr President, our financial and political commitment to the next stage of the reconstruction process is very much based on your commitment to reform and democracy. For the Netherlands there are four key issues that we will be paying specific attention to:

- First off all I want to stress the importance of social policy and effective poverty alleviation. The Process of nation building can not be only about building institutions and increasing the

security. It must also be about lifting the people out of their abject poverty. It must be about providing education to all boys and girls and providing basic healthcare for women and girls in particular. In my view the private sector has a distinct role to play in this development process and so I endorse your view that the private sector must be the driver of economic growth.

- Secondly we will pay a lot of attention to the position of women and the just implementation of international human rights norms. The position of Afghan women has improved but a lot to remains to be done.

- Thirdly, we continue to stress the importance of good donor coordination. The Consultative Group mechanism must be strengthened even further. Progress has been made since we met in Dubai for the mid-term review of last year's development budget. We must however all continue to work together to further strengthen and give substance to the coordination of aid-flows to Afghanistan.

- Finally I want to stress the importance of the maintaining the right political climate. You and your government are fully committed to head in the right direction. We all fully support you in that! But we must however also find a way to reign in the power and destructive influence of warlords and other self appointed local leaders who still have a negative impact in many parts of your country.

In conclusion, Mr President, I believe that this conference marks the beginning of a new stage in the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan. The road ahead will still be long and difficult. But we must travel it together in order to reach a stable democratic Afghanistan where all women and men can live and work in peace.