

Members, The United States Congress

President Barack Obama  
1400 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, D.C.

March 22, 2009

Dear Mr. President,

We members of Congress are encouraged by your recognition that the war in Afghanistan will not be won by military means alone. As your State Department spokesman Robert Wood said soon after you took office, "There is no purely military solution to the challenge in Afghanistan so there will be a significant non-military component to anything that we seek to undertake." It has long been clear to many that reconstruction and humanitarian assistance must play a key part in defeating the Taliban insurgency. We would like to put forth a plan to you which recognizes the urgency of the deteriorating situation: an emergency, cash-for-day-labor jobs program, which puts money into the hands of desperate Afghans immediately, who will otherwise be tempted to join the Taliban before this year's spring offensive.

As the snows melt in the mountain passes and the Taliban's favored fighting weather approaches, we are concerned that the cash wage paid by the Taliban to young fighters, estimated at \$8 to \$10 per day, or in other estimates about \$150 per month, will continue to swell the ranks of the Taliban. Vice President Joe Biden said recently in Brussels that 70 percent of the Taliban "are involved because of the money, because they are getting paid." As you are aware, Afghanistan has been suffering from 40-50 percent unemployment and an utterly failed reconstruction. Dr. Barnett Rubin, a member of the Afghanistan Study Group constituted under your predecessor, has said that after being driven into Pakistan's tribal areas in late 2001, the Taliban "reconstituted their command structure, recruitment networks, and support bases ... while Afghans waited in vain for the major reconstruction effort they expected to build their state and improve their lives".

The charitable organization Oxfam, which is at the center of the NGO community involved in the reconstruction, warned in January of this year that the country is now sliding into a "major humanitarian crisis" which could undermine significant peace initiatives now underway between major Taliban factions and the Karzai government. Oxfam America said, in a letter addressed to you:

*"Events have reached a critical juncture in Afghanistan and conditions could deteriorate further unless the United States takes a lead in addressing failures in governance, aid and reconstruction...A humanitarian crisis, affecting large parts of Afghanistan, is emerging...many Afghans are facing some of the worst conditions they have experienced in twenty years. In Khers Khana village in Ashterlai...with no nearby health clinic and widespread malnutrition, eight children from the village died over the last year from preventable diseases. Families in Dakundi and all over Afghanistan are being forced to take exceptional measures to support their families such as selling their animals..."*

We the undersigned include both supporters and critics of the 17,000 troop surge. We can agree, however, that the exact number of troops is not as important as what they are doing there. As a result of the misfortune of thirty years of war, privation, and military occupation, history has many lessons to offer. An officer for the most recent occupier before us, retired Russian General Pavel Grachev, said in a March 9, 2009 newspaper report entitled "Russian advice on Afghanistan: build roads, don't drop bombs":

*"I believed as sincerely as American officers do now that we were fighting there to help make our country safer," said Grachev, who later became defense minister and sent in Russian units to quell Chechnya during the 1990s, a campaign that also ended in disaster. "After the war, as a politician, I could see this war had been pointless." That said, Grachev offered some advice: Post soldiers to guard road projects and irrigation systems, and send in an army of engineers, doctors, mining experts and construction advisers. Pouring billions of dollars into infrastructure would be a lot more productive than firefights in far-flung villages, he said."*

Our feeling is that the nature of our occupation is as important as its duration and magnitude.

We know that your administration is going in the right direction in its policy toward Afghanistan. Our concern is whether real help is getting to poor Afghans fast enough, and on a large enough scale, to avert the tide turning toward the Taliban. It is a short-term plan for job-creation on a large scale which we now put before you. Developing bids for reconstruction projects, putting them out, and evaluating them takes time. But Afghans are hungry and desperate, and need jobs and a sense of participation in building their country, right now.

We urge you, Mr. President, to immediately implement a program, well within reach of the discretionary funding mechanisms at your disposal at various executive branch agencies such as USAID, to create 750,000 day labor jobs in Afghanistan at the base pay of \$10 per day, by June 1, 2009. This is a wage which would compete effectively with the Taliban. Funds such as this are already being administered by the State Department's Bureau for Populations, Refugees and Migration, which has contracted with NGOs such as Caritas and Catholic Relief Services for projects such as clearing canals and irrigation systems in eight villages in Maiwand and Panjwai districts in the province of Kandahar, hiring day labor which provides poor Afghans with much-needed income. There is no shortage of work like this to be done in any province in the country. After 30 years of war, Afghanistan's rural infrastructure is nearly non-existent, even after 8 years of NATO occupation. Much of the basic water transportation infrastructure was destroyed in the war with the former Union of Soviet Republics, by bombing, and rubble now blocks many canals and irrigation waterways. The water problem is paramount in Afghanistan, with one out of four infants dying due to preventable disease caused mostly by lack of clean drinking water. The food shortage is due in part to traditional irrigation systems being useless and in disrepair.

Such a program could be administered by a combination of NGOs, U.S. military units, Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), and Afghan district and provincial authorities. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has worked in partnership

with Catholic Relief Services in the above-mentioned project in Kandahar, and oversaw the distribution of US\$850,000 for the creation of 3,000 jobs. A monitoring system could be implemented through the newly passed Special Inspector General for the Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), which some of our colleagues worked hard for.

A 2009 RAND report prepared for the U.S. Army, "Guidebook for Supporting Economic Development in Stability Operations," of which Army Lt. Col. Jamie Gayton is a co-author, states:

*"U.S. Army and other military personnel should be aware...Some policies, like short-term job-creation projects, are more effective during the initial stages of recovery...In contrast, larger-scale infrastructure projects are usually better suited for later stages after supply chains have been reestablished and local and national governments are in better shape to plan, contract, and manage major projects..."*  
(emphasis ours.)

Lt. Col Gayton is the officer who met with some success in Iraq with his reconstruction philosophy, in one of the most difficult places in Iraq, Sadr City.

The American citizens' advocacy group, Jobs for Afghans, has put forth an "Emergency Works Program" which aims at hiring hundreds of thousands of Afghans for a daily cash wage immediately, and this could provide one possible basis for an employment program. The plan outlines:

**\*Focus on digging paths for "pipeline" infrastructure with hand-tools, meaning thousands of miles of trench which will carry basic water, electricity, and sewage pipeline, which is the foundation of rural infrastructure. Pay a cash day wage of \$10 per day, which is an excellent wage in this country.**

**\*Prioritize Kabul's unsanitary open-trench sewage system, potential to hire thousands of workers in easy-to-secure environment.**

**\*Dovetail the Military Strategy, and focus the mission on using forces to protect work crews rather than chasing Taliban around the countryside, in order to minimize civilian casualties.**

We believe that the infusion of capital to the poorest segment of society will jump-start the informal economy, as Afghans use funds to buy vendor stands, taxis, and other means of earning income, and distribute income through the tribal-clan structure to other Afghans. A \$10 per day wage for work which will require little in the way of capital equipment except work gloves and hand tools and will support not one, but two or three families in this clan-based society, and result in a "multiplier" effect well-known to economists. We know that Afghans are above all enterprising people. The main reason Afghanistan has lapsed into major opium production is that many small farmers have no alternative to feeding their families, and the hardy and fast-growing crop is profitable. Offering alternative livelihoods, as they have been promised for years, is the only meaningful way of putting a check on opium cultivation, which is mostly a small-scale enterprise.

In closing we would like to stress that it is many U.S. military commanders themselves who have perceptively suggested that the only way to stabilize Afghanistan is to address the economic problem as aggressively as we conduct offensive military operations. Former Commander of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan, General Karl Eikenberry, told a congressional committee in 2007: "Much of the enemy force is drawn from the ranks of unemployed men looking for wages to support their families."

This rare concurrence in analysis by a broad range of military and civilian experts, we believe, clears the way to move aggressively on the program we describe. It is most appropriate, of course, to close with the words of an Afghan, as these are the people who are fighting alongside us to secure our safety as well as theirs. Noor Ahmed Qarqeen, Afghan Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, once said: "Men who work, have no time to make war."

We members of Congress stand ready, through the powers vested in us as United States senators and congressmembers, to help you make this vital prong in the multi-point attack on the Afghan insurgency a reality, before the window for peace and victory closes. Let your administration be the first to come through with the promises we have been making to this embattled people for far too long.

Signed,

Ralph Lopez for Jobs for Afghans

And Members of the United States Congress:

Exhibits

Exhibit A: Selected Quotations from News Reports

Exhibit B: Sources and Links

Exhibit C: Powerpoint Presentation from Jobs for Afghans

## Exhibit A: Selected Quotations from News Reports

*“Poverty also fuels the fighting. Several elders said the Taliban was offering upwards of 20,000 rupees (\$360) a month to local unemployed men. Western officials are beginning to scrutinise the source of the funds.*

*Mr Khan told the Guardian the militants have bigger guns and more fighters. They have powerful friends. Several times he had collared Taliban fighters only to discover days later they had been released following a call from a powerful politician or influential tribal leader. They also have surprising amounts of money.*

*Last year, he said, he captured two insurgents, "one of them alive". Mr Khan asked him why he was fighting. The man replied: "You are being paid 5,000 Afghanis (\$110.) I am making 20,000 Pakistani rupees (\$360.) So now you tell me why you are fighting." --“Better Paid, Better Armed, Better Connected - Taliban Rise Again,” UK Guardian, Sept. 16, 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/sep/16/afghanistan.declanwalsh>*

*“A 25-year-old man we will call Shakir has told IRIN he rues rejecting an offer of “work” from a Taliban agent whereby he would get 500 Afghanis (about US\$10) a day for carrying out attacks on government offices in Farah Province, southwestern Afghanistan. Those who accepted the offer are better off, he thinks. “People are jobless, hungry and destitute so they agree to do anything for a small payment,” he told IRIN, refusing to give his name for fear the insurgents would kill him.”--“Afghanistan: Tempted by a Taliban Job Offer,” IRIN News Agency, March 22, 2009 <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=83310>*

*“Policemen in Afghanistan are not happy with their lives. The highest-ranking officer makes about \$80 per month, and “the Taliban pay better,” one policeman tells me. Would he go fight with them? “They haven’t asked me. But I have to survive. If they asked me I would,” he replies.” --“Taliban Threatens 'Grow Poppy or Die!,'” Newsmax, Nov. 16, 2006, <http://archive.newsmax.com/archives/articles/2006/11/16/162941.shtml?s=lh>*

*““These insurgents are always on the top of the mountains,” says Kunar governor Fazlullah Wahidi. “Here smaller groups of command and control people bring in specialised equipment and finances to pay very poor and uneducated people that live in the mountains to attack,” he said.*

*This includes an Al-Qaeda element from mainly Arab countries who have had some form of training in Pakistan, says Ostlund, the most senior US military commander in Kunar.*

*"They will sit on the hill and tell the young fighters what to do and how to do it but few of them engage in the fighting themselves."*

*The incentive for these fighters is cash, he says. And the US government-funded trade school aims to help "fighting-age males" to match, through legitimate jobs, the money they would get from insurgent activity.*

*"We need to pay construction workers more than the Taliban are paying their soldiers, fighters and porters," says Ostlund, putting porters' pay at about 100 dollars a month and fighters' at 150." --"Afghans Learning a Better Way to Match Taliban Pay," AFP, March 23, 2008, <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5hsVZExc0XaqQlfKcSpcweL5SbIuA>*

*"In some areas, thanks to the canal cleaning initiatives, farmers have irrigation for their farms for the first time in 20 years. Many of their irrigation systems were destroyed by the Russians. They had never been able to afford the time and man-power to repair them until now. Juma Gul, one of the workers on the CRS Nakhunai Canal project shares that view. "I am 18 years old. I don't mind the hard work. I have been cleaning out the canal for a month now and I will stay on until the job is finished. I support my family with the money I earn, this is an important project for me. I thank everyone who made this possible. My mother cried when she knew I had this job and that we would have water." --"Changing Lives - Caritas in Kandahar," Caritas Press Release, May 28, 2003, <http://reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/0/e02c834bd9190aa249256d440024c1d5?OpenDocument&Click=>*

*"Joining the Taleban gave Mahmud a chance to save up enough money to start his own small business. Nowadays, he buys goods in the provincial capital Lashkar Gah and sells them in the districts at weekly "mila" or markets. "Now that I have work, I am not with the Taleban any more." -- "Few Choices for Helmand's Troubled Youth," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Nov. 9, 2007 [http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=340496&pc\\_state=henh](http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=340496&pc_state=henh)*

*"There is a low percentage of the total Taliban force who we would call ideologically driven. We refer to them as Tier 1 people who believe their ideology, that what they're doing is right. The vast majority of Taliban fighters are essentially economically disadvantaged young men." - Col. Tom Collins, PBS Frontline, April 2, 2007, [http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/afghanistan604/interview\\_collins.html](http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/afghanistan604/interview_collins.html)*

*"Most Afghans, after the dispersal of the Taliban, were full of hope and ready to work. The tangible benefits of reconstruction --jobs, housing, schools, health-care facilities --could have rallied them to support the government and turn that illusory "democracy" into something like the real thing. But reconstruction didn't happen." ---***[Journalist Ann Jones, "The Road to Taliban-Land"](#)**

**[http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/116512/ann\\_jones\\_on\\_the\\_road\\_to\\_taliban\\_land](http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/116512/ann_jones_on_the_road_to_taliban_land)**

*"We know many faces have come through here over 30 years...the question we have to answer to you is how we are different."* – **Captain Sean Dynan to village elders, Kandahar Province, , 24th MEU, PBS report "The Forgotten War."**

*"19-year-old Jaan Agha in Helmand Province told the Institute for War and Reporting in November of 2007 that it was either the Taliban or watch his family starve. "I couldn't find a job anywhere. So I had to join the Taliban. They give me money for my family expenditures. If I left the Taliban, what else could I do?" --***"Few Choices for Helmand's Troubled Youth,"**

**Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Nov. 9, 2007**

**[http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=340496&apc\\_state=henh](http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=340496&apc_state=henh)**

## **Exhibit B: Sources and Links**

"Drought and Hunger Kill Nine People in Northern Afghanistan," RAWA report, May 25, 2008  
[http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2008/05/25/drought-and-hunger-kill-nine-people-in-northern-afghanistan\\_8494.html](http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2008/05/25/drought-and-hunger-kill-nine-people-in-northern-afghanistan_8494.html)

"Children Eating Grass, Ghazni," IRIN News, March 10, 2008  
<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=77195>

Combined Joint Task Force 101 (CJTF101) Power and Water Conference, an expert said:  
<http://www.aed.usace.army.mil/news/releases/CJTF101.pdf>

"Guidebook for Supporting Economic Development in Stability Operations," says how important public relations can be, saying:

[http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical\\_reports/2009/RAND\\_TR633.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/2009/RAND_TR633.pdf)

"DACAAR trains 460 water and sanitation engineers from all over Afghanistan"  
<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/SODA-6PT325?OpenDocument>

"AFGHANISTAN: Water a serious problem nationwide"  
<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=20150>

"OXFAM TO PRESIDENT OBAMA: NEW STRATEGY MUST AVERT A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN AFGHANISTAN"

<http://wap.alertnet.org/thenews/fromthefield/220803/fe304c23953614463670db1992142e7f.htm>

STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL KARL W. EIKENBERRY, U.S. ARMY FORMER COMMANDING GENERAL COMBINED FORCES COMMAND-AFGHANISTAN BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE ON DEFENSE AN ASSESSMENT OF SECURITY AND STABILITY IN AFGHANISTAN, FEBRUARY 13, 2007,

[http://armedservices.house.gov/pdfs/FC\\_Afghan021307/Eikenberry\\_Testimony021307.pdf](http://armedservices.house.gov/pdfs/FC_Afghan021307/Eikenberry_Testimony021307.pdf)