

Speech to the “Small Group”
H.E. Mr. Eklil Hakimi
Ambassador of Afghanistan to Japan
January 20, 2010

Esteemed Colleagues,

It is a pleasure to meet with you all this morning and a welcomed opportunity to speak with you about recent developments in Afghanistan.

News reports often suggest that the problems facing our nation are either getting worse or at least not getting better. The Taliban and their partners are said to be getting stronger, and the numbers show that 2009 was the deadliest year in the war on terror for Afghans and our international partners.

Now, 8 years since our people came out of a dark age and began to rebuild, I have the honor of stating that, despite the often one-sided view of Afghanistan in the media, development, growth, and optimism are alive and growing in our nation.

President Karzai was recently sworn in for his second term in office and a survey jointly conducted this month by the BBC, ABC, and ARD shows that **72%** support the President, **70%** think the country is heading in right direction, and **71%** expect that their lives will be better a year from now – these are the highest marks ever in this annual survey.

Despite media often measuring our success based upon the fight with the Taliban, our long-term battle is not with them. We beat the Taliban long ago, and while they are creating destruction and suffering, they have no chance to take the country again – no, our battle is for the hearts of the people. We must gain and keep their trust, because the average insurgent is not a fundamentalist Taliban, it is a person with no job or a grievance with the government being exploited by rogue elements. If we reconcile with these people, if we provide them jobs and security, the fighting will end. No one will choose the Taliban – they do not improve the lives of our citizens. They never have. The Afghan government has and is bringing electricity, water, health services, education, and more to people that the Taliban neglected and were incapable of caring for.

GDP per capita income has increased from US\$150 in 2002 to US\$500 now; domestic revenue collection has increased by 60% during the past 6 months alone; about 7 million children attend schools, 35% of which are girls; our basic healthcare package covers 85% of the population; 80% have access to telecommunications; 13,150 km of rural roads have been made, restored, or repaired; access to electricity has increased from 8% to 62%; we have established our first national park at Bamiyan’s Lake Band-i-Amir; Ghazni has

been selected by UNESCO to become the capital of the Islamic World by 2013; 220 artifacts are touring the world in an exhibition called “The hidden treasures from the National Museum;” our press is without limitations or restrictions; we have more than 500 publications, 50 radio stations, and 20 TV stations; more than five million refugees have returned since 2002; 28% parliamentarians are women and 3 have been nominated to cabinet posts and are awaiting approval; we are building a new, modern Kabul city called Dehsabz which will be completed in 2025; and continuing the successful development of our democratic process, we are preparing for this summer’s parliamentary elections.

In security, our international partners have once again shown their commitment to working with us to realize our goal of making our forces large and skilled enough to take over operations on our own. Various nations have declared troop increases and we expect more to do the same as a result of the conference later this month in London. The new shared plan by our government and our partners calls for a refocus based more on protecting the people than trying to eliminate insurgents – instead we want to welcome those Taliban who will lay down their weapons and accept our constitution back into our communities and into the political process. Additionally, the plan will call for a reduction of foreign forces in the country as early as this year, provided that our forces are properly prepared by then. It is our goal to physically be able to handle all security alone in five years. Nonetheless, two messages about our partnership with foreign nations are clear: they have no intention of keeping a permanent presence in our territory and they will not abandon us while we are in need.

Japan has proven itself to be a solid partner in our development. With the recent pledge of up to US\$5 billion dollars over 5 years, Japan will help us with job trainings, support our police forces, and continue to be involved in the Dehsabz project. We wish for Japanese industry to follow the example of interaction that Japanese government and people have set and invest in our country.

Afghanistan’s development still has challenges ahead, but we have already accomplished so much. We have a proper system in place to meet our goals, we have a government that is dedicated to the people and to improving its own governance, and we have the support of our people; peace is very achievable. The final pieces we need are more investment into our institutions, development of our abundant resources, and partnerships with our private sector; I count on all of you here today to support these areas.