



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee Inquiry:
Australia's overseas development programs in Afghanistan

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This is the Australian Government's response to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee report entitled *Australia's overseas development programs in Afghanistan*, as tabled on 16 May 2013.

The Government thanks the Committee for its work and welcomes its consideration of the challenges confronting Afghanistan and the best mechanisms through which to deliver Australian aid in this environment. These considerations are timely as Afghanistan undertakes the important transition to Afghan-led security.

In particular, the Government welcomes the Committee's acknowledgement of the Australian aid program's substantial achievements in a difficult and high-risk environment, and its recognition of Australia's contribution to the development gains that have occurred in Afghanistan over the past decade.

Australia's future development assistance to Afghanistan is subject to the Government's review of the aid budget.

The Government will take advantage of future opportunities, in particular the 2014-15 Budget, to provide further details on its approach to Australia's development engagement with Afghanistan.

Review of Australia's civil-military-police role in Afghanistan

Recommendation 1 paragraphs 8.51 and 8.52

The committee recommends that the Australian Civil-Military Centre undertake a comprehensive review of Australia's civil-military-police mission in Uruzgan Province that includes taking submissions from NGOs, local NGOs and civil society organisations working in the province. The scope of the review to include whether, or to what extent, the ADF's involvement in delivering development assistance in Afghanistan has:

- *served counterinsurgency objectives;*
- *affected sustainable development by having short-term, tactical objectives;*
- *influenced the distribution of development assistance (the suggestion is that more funds were directed to insecure areas);*
- *diverted development effort away from poverty alleviation;*
- *placed facilities built with military aid, and those using them, at increased risk from attack by anti-government forces; and*
- *undermined the perceptions of NGOs as neutral and impartial thereby placing the safety of their aid workers at greater risk.*

The committee also believes that it is important for the review to consider whether Australian development assistance had any role in empowering local individuals in Uruzgan and, if so, the lessons to be learnt from it.

Agreed in principle.

This recommendation calls for a comprehensive review, which may require in-country research in Afghanistan. Such a review will have significant cost, logistic and risk implications. The Australian Civil Military Centre (ACMC) was already scoping an Afghan 'lessons learned' analysis for whole-of-government consideration. This project will enable the ACMC to address the Senate Standing Committee's recommendation for a review of Australia's whole-of-government effort in Afghanistan, using existing resources and a process already in train. ACMC is at the concept development stage. The study will be led indicatively by a former senior Australian official. The comprehensive review is expected to take several months, and consultancy fees are expected to be in the vicinity of \$400,000.

More broadly, the specific issues identified by the Committee fall beyond the expertise and mandate of the ACMC, which is to support the development of national civil-military capabilities to prevent, prepare for and respond more effectively to conflicts and disasters overseas. It is beyond the competence and authority of the ACMC to inquire into all the matters identified by the Committee.

Australian Leadership Awards Scholarships

Recommendation 2 paragraph 9.42–9.43

The committee recommends that AusAID conduct its own internal investigation into, and report on, the circumstances around the administration of the Australian Leadership Awards Scholarships program for Afghanistan. The investigation to include, but not limited to, AusAID's due diligence; the adequacy of its oversight of the program; its promptness in responding to indications that something may have been amiss, and the reasons for its failure to inform the committee of allegations of fraud when the matter was discussed in December 2012.

The committee recommends further that, using Mr Niamatullah Ibrahimi's experiences as a case study, this investigation also look closely at the processes for communicating with applicants, including the accuracy and timeliness of advice; the transparency of the application and selection process; and the overall level of competence evident in the administration of this program.

The committee recommends that AusAID provide the committee with a copy of the report.

Recommendation 3 paragraph 9.44

The committee also recommends that AusAID provide the committee with a copy of the report from Protiviti, an independent audit company, following its investigation into the Australian Leadership Awards Scholarships program for Afghanistan.

Noted

In January 2013, AusAID initiated a comprehensive independent investigation into the Australian Awards program in Afghanistan. This investigation is expected to conclude shortly.

The investigation does not deal with the experiences of Mr Ibrahimi, as the suspension of the Australia Awards Program [*Scholarships and Leadership*] in August 2012 did not impact on the selection of Afghan candidates for the Australia Awards Leadership Program in 2012. The Australia Award Leadership Program is a separate program managed through a separate selection process.

The Government will decide separately on the release of the independent investigation report.

Recommendation 8 paragraph 13.19

The committee recommends further that DFAT together with AusAID encourage, assist and fund the establishment of an alumni organisation designed to foster and strengthen the people-to-people links between Afghan graduates from Australian institutions under the various scholarship programs and the respective institutions.

Agreed

An Afghan alumni organisation for the Australia Awards was established in 2012.

Recommendation 9 paragraph 13.21

The committee recommends that the Australian Government ensure that the Australian Leadership Awards Scholarships for Afghan students, or a suitable replacement, commence as soon as possible.

Recommendation 20 paragraph 14.78

The committee recommends that AusAID monitor its Australia Development Scholarship Program to ensure that its administration is sound; that the selection process is open and transparent; that there is a close correlation between the courses undertaken and the development needs of Afghanistan; and that the students return to Afghanistan to take up positions in that country.

Noted

The Government will decide separately on the future of the scholarships program to Afghanistan.

Resettlement for Afghans who have assisted Australia's mission in Afghanistan

Recommendation 4 paragraph 11.24

The committee supports the Australian Government's initiative to offer resettlement to Australia to locally engaged Afghan employees at the greatest risk of harm as a consequence of their support to Australia's mission in Afghanistan. The committee recommends, however, that the Australian Government ensure that the resettlement program is available to all such locally engaged staff at credible risk and not just those at the greatest risk of harm.

Agreed

On 13 December 2012, the former Ministers for Immigration and Citizenship and Defence announced that Australia would offer resettlement to eligible locally engaged Afghan employees at risk of harm due to their employment in support of Australia's mission in Afghanistan. The policy came into legislative effect on 1 January 2013 and applications are being considered.

The resettlement program is available to local Afghans who are, or have been, employed with Australian agencies, and are assessed to be at significant risk of harm due to their role, location, employment period and currency of employment. Applicants will also need to meet standard visa criteria covering health, character and security checks.

Recommendation 5 paragraph 11.25

In light of problems with the Australian Leadership Awards Scholarships program for Afghanistan and the delay in processing visas for visiting Afghans detailed in chapter 9, the committee recommends that DFAT, AusAID, and DIAC review carefully the procedures and protocols governing this resettlement scheme. The committee recommends that together they build measures into the administration of the scheme that will expedite the process, minimise risks to the safety of those in Afghanistan seeking eligibility for resettlement and uphold the integrity of the scheme (especially guarding against corruption). The committee recommends that all relevant agencies give close attention to strengthening inter-departmental communication, liaison, oversight of the program, and streamlining administrative processes.

Noted

Comprehensive protocols and procedures govern implementation of the policy for resettlement of eligible locally engaged Afghan employees. A standing inter-departmental committee (IDC) comprising members from, Defence, DIAC, AFP, and DFAT/AusAID has been in place since January 2013 to assist each agency develop consistent procedures and protocols for implementing the policy.

The procedures and protocols of each agency cover the administrative and legal requirements to enable efficient, thorough and consistent implementation of the policy.

Education

Recommendation 6 paragraph 13.17

The committee recommends that AusAID should ensure that its support for the education sector includes an adequate focus on education quality, and specifically on learning outcomes and teacher training.

Recommendation 7 paragraph 13.18

The committee recommends that the Australian Government continue to support the Malaysia Australia Education Project for Afghanistan and to explore ways to build on its successes. The committee recommends that the Australian Government give particular attention to achieving a significant quota of women for the program, which may require additional effort to ensure that young women are graduating from year 12 and then have the opportunity to take up the offer of a scholarship.

Noted

Australia is helping Afghanistan to improve service delivery in education by expanding access to schools, improving the quality of education, and improving the Government of Afghanistan's capacity to deliver education services. Education programs include a focus on education quality, including by measuring learning outcomes and training more teachers, especially female teachers.

The Government will decide separately on future support to the Malaysia–Australia Education Project for Afghanistan (MAEPA). MAEPA is *not* a scholarships program – it supports professional development for qualified Master Teacher Trainers (not high school graduates).

Recommendation 10 paragraph 13.28

The committee recommends that the Australian Government expand its support for girls' education in Afghanistan.

Noted

DFAT support for education programs in Afghanistan will continue to emphasise expanding support for girls' education.

Recommendation 11 paragraph 13.29

The committee recommends that the Australian Government support the Afghan Ministry of Education to disaggregate enrolment figures by gender.

Agreed

DFAT supports the Ministry of Education, through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), to strengthen data collection and reporting on school enrolment and attendance, including gender-disaggregated data, through the Education Management Information System and ARTF results reporting.

Recommendation 12 paragraph 13.30

The committee recommends that AusAID increase its support for programs that aim to increase community participation in the management of schools, including supporting local governance structures.

Noted

DFAT supports community-based education in Afghanistan. The community-based education model ensures community participation by establishing village education and school management committees. This is currently being applied through activities such as the *Empowerment Through Education* Program, implemented by CARE Australia.

Recommendation 13 paragraph 13.31

The committee recommends that AusAID continue its support for the 'Children of Uruzgan' program providing a clear commitment to a reliable and secure source of funding post 2014.

Agreed

The *Children of Uruzgan* program is planned to continue until June 2015.

Agriculture and food security

Recommendation 14 paragraph 14.35

The committee recommends that the Australian Government ensure that as Australia's ODA increases in the coming years that the funding for food security and agriculture increases proportionately.

Recommendation 15 paragraph 14.36

The committee recommends that AusAID and DFAT use their influence with the Government of Afghanistan, relevant line ministries and major multilateral organisations delivering agricultural assistance to reinforce the importance that such assistance:

- *ensures that poorer farmers have affordable and easy access to seed centres and appropriate technologies;*
- *takes account of the need to train farmers, especially those in the poorer communities, to apply the benefits of agricultural research and development;*
- *involves women in all aspects of aid funded agricultural projects to enable women and their families to benefit from reforms in agriculture; and*
- *includes disaster risk management, especially building the resilience of poor Afghan farmers to withstand natural disasters, as a necessary component.*

The committee recommends further that the four principles identified above are given priority when designing, planning and implementing Australian-funded agricultural projects in Afghanistan.

Recommendation 16 paragraph 14.38

The committee also recommends that the Australian Government provide direct support for agricultural development programs based on the four principles in recommendation 15.

Noted

Assistance to rural development and food security is a focus for Australia's aid program to Afghanistan.

The considerations outlined in the Committee's recommendation 15 will continue to inform the development of Australian agricultural and rural development programs in Afghanistan.

Mining

Recommendation 17 paragraph 14.75

The committee recommends that AusAID continue to encourage and offer advice and technical assistance to help Afghanistan become and remain a fully-compliant member of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

Recommendation 18 paragraph 14.76

The committee recommends that AusAID continue to encourage and offer advice and technical assistance to the relevant line ministry in Afghanistan to develop a robust legal and regulatory regime for extractive industries in Afghanistan.

Recommendation 19 paragraph 14.77

The committee recommends that the Australian Government should, through the Afghan Government, make itself available to support local community involvement in all aspects of a proposed mining activity in their locality, including matters such as planning and oversight, particularly when it comes to the environment, local employment and investment of some of the mining revenue in local industries.

Noted

Australia is providing support to improve governance of the Afghan mining sector as a well-regulated mining sector that has the potential to unlock significant socio-economic benefits and increased revenues in the medium to longer term.

Funding through Afghan's National Budget—Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund

Recommendation 21 paragraphs 15.7–15.9

The committee recommends that the Australian Government continue to channel a substantial proportion of its ODA (at least 50 per cent) to the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund.

The committee also recommends that the Australian Government use its influence with other donor countries to encourage them to abide by the Kabul communiqué and channel 50 per cent of their ODA through the Afghan national budget.

The committee recommends further that, in light of the findings of the recent 2012 independent review of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, the Australian Government continue to encourage the World Bank to implement the review's recommendations.

Noted

The Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) is an effective mechanism for assisting the Afghan Government to deliver basic services and provide economic opportunities for its people.

Local NGOs

Recommendation 22 paragraphs 15.35

The committee understands the importance of ensuring that development assistance reaches the local level and the most vulnerable. It recognises that Australia works through multilateral organisations and NGOs that in turn team up with local organisations. The committee, however, is of the view that more could be done to foster the use of local NGOs. The committee recommends that Australian agencies providing development assistance in Afghanistan place a high priority on selecting international partners that have deep connections and relationships with the local community and use local organisations to help deliver aid.

Recommendation 23 paragraphs 15.36

The committee recommends further that any proposed cut to the aid budget to Afghanistan should take account of the need to defend the gains made to date. One key means of doing so, is by building the capacity of local communities to assume responsibility for delivering front-line services such as education and health. In this regard, the committee notes the deferral of the Australia Afghanistan Community Resilience Scheme and recommends that the Australian Government strengthen not weaken its efforts to involve local NGOs in the delivery of development assistance.

Noted

Australia's aid program makes significant use of civil society and NGOs that are effective in achieving results and delivering value for money.

The Australian Government has stated that Afghanistan remains an enduring interest and that Australia will continue to support Afghanistan's development.

The *Australia Afghanistan Community Resilience Scheme* Request for Submissions was publically released in April 2013. The five successful tenderers were advised on 3 December 2013.

Afghanistan's private sector

Recommendation 24 paragraph 15.44

Considering the commitment that Australia has given to help Afghanistan rebuild and the important role of the private sector in this recovery, the committee recommends that DFAT consider establishing an Australia-Afghanistan Institute. The intention would be for the institute to have a business and education focus that would help pave the way for increased academic and business engagement between both countries and strengthen institutional links between their universities, research institutes and NGOs.

Noted

DFAT has considered this recommendation but has no plans at this time to establish an Australia-Afghanistan Institute.

DFAT has welcomed the establishment of an Australia-Afghan Business Council (AABC).

Recommendation 25 paragraphs 15.46–15.47

The committee recommends that AusAID and DFAT look at implementing concrete and practical ways in which they could assist members of the Afghan community in Australia to contribute to the development of Afghanistan. The proposed Australia–Afghanistan Institute could provide one such avenue.

The committee recommends further that AusAID look carefully at the requirements for an organisation to be accredited as an overseas operating NGO with a view to giving positive encouragement and support (both funding and administrative) to Afghans in Australia seeking to assist Afghanistan with its recovery.

Noted

DFAT supports the development of people-to-people links between Australia and Afghanistan, within the constraints imposed by the current ‘Do Not Travel’ recommendation of the travel advice.

Women in Afghanistan

Recommendation 26 paragraph 16.23

The committee recommends that the ADF and AFP take the opportunity in their training, mentoring and advisory role with their Afghan counterparts to help create an awareness of the importance of gender equality and human rights and to encourage greater participation of Afghan women in Afghanistan's military and police forces.

Agreed

Defence supports greater participation and empowerment of Afghan women within their local communities. The ADF has encouraged this by employing a variety of measures, including deploying female ADF personnel to work in Female Engagement Teams to meet with Afghan women to develop vocational skills, health services and employment opportunities. Female Engagement Teams and female personnel from the Uruzgan Provincial Reconstruction Team have engaged with local women to discuss security concerns. Additionally, the Special Operations Task Group has deployed patrols of female medics to provide health services to women and girls. The ADF has also constructed the Malalai girls’ school in Tarin Kowt and developed the Dorafshan Basic Health Centre, which has specialised female clinics and separate staff accommodation.

As part of the ADF’s mentoring, Afghan National Security Forces personnel also receive human rights training and advice on the correct procedures for handling detainees. They are also trained on the applicable international legal obligations for the treatment of detainees and the protection of the local civilian population.

Afghan National Security Forces personnel in Uruzgan also receive specific human rights training from the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, which specifically covers the application of those rights when conducting detention operations.

Defence supports greater participation by Afghan women in the military by providing a concrete example of women undertaking these roles. For example, the ADF has employed women ADF members in mentoring roles for the senior leadership of the Afghan National Army’s 205 Corps based at Kandahar. Female ADF members have also worked alongside Afghans with the Afghan National Army’s 4/205 Brigade in Uruzgan province.

Australia is a partner with the United Kingdom, New Zealand and other countries in establishing an academic institution within the Afghan National Security University in Kabul dedicated to graduating officers for the Afghan National Army. While participation by women is currently low, the university as a whole anticipates having 10 per cent of the enrolled cadets being women by 2017. The ADF is also planning to deploy women members to assist with the integration and training of women at the officer academy.

In compliance with Government direction the AFP Mission in Afghanistan formally ceased on 9 January 2014; however the AFP supported this recommendation for the duration of its Mission.

The AFP is committed to supporting the five strategies as set out under the 'National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security' and principles of development effectiveness and is represented on the Women, Peace and Security Interdepartmental Working Group which is chaired by the Office for Women (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet). Through to the end of the AFP's Mission in Afghanistan in January 2014, the AFP maintained involvement with the Afghan National Police (ANP) executive in the development of strategies applicable to gender related issues. The AFP ceased direct training and mentoring roles in August 2013, deploying a smaller contingent focusing upon strategically influential positions with ANP and Ministry of Interior counterparts. Development of two year plans and ten year visions by AFP secondees to the International Police Coordination Board encouraged the ANP to provide female ANP officers with greater levels of access to formal training and opportunities within the organisation.

The AFP had previously developed and implemented a 'Violence Against Women Program' which was adopted as a mainstream program of the European Police Union in its support for the Afghan National Police. The European Police Union continues to provide the training, albeit without AFP support. The program is designed to teach the participants specific skills to deal with offences which directly impact on women in Afghanistan.

The AFP International Deployment Group is currently developing a Gender Strategy which will guide the IDG in its implementation of the recommendations of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and the 'National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security'. This Gender Strategy will also be used as a guiding tool during the design phase of IDG's capacity development missions overseas and will address women in policing, access to policing services for women and the involvement of women in the peace process.

The IDG Gender Strategy will also be incorporated into the Pre-Deployment Training undertaken by all members prior to their deployment into overseas capacity building missions.

Implementation of Australia's *Elimination of Violence Against Women Program* in Afghanistan commenced in June 2013. This Program includes two projects which provide training and mentoring support for police and other legal sector actors on the implementation of the Afghan government's Elimination of Violence Against Women Law (2009), as well as on women's rights more broadly.

Recommendation 27 paragraphs 16.27

The committee recommends that the Australian Government continue to provide funding for the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

Noted

Australia has provided \$4.5 million, since 2004, to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) to monitor, promote and protect human rights, particularly the rights of women and girls, through advocacy, training and education.

Recommendation 28 paragraph 16.28

Considering that gender equality is an objective that cuts across all sectors covered by development assistance, the committee recommends that all relevant recommendations in this report give special attention to promoting gender equality and protecting the rights of women.

Recommendation 29 paragraph 16.29

The committee recommends that AusAID prioritise long-term support for the delivery of services for women and girls and for programs that advocate for women's rights. It recommends further that the Australian Government include Afghanistan as a key country focus for implementing Australia's National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security in order to address the related issues of violence against women and women's political participation.

Recommendation 30 paragraph 16.30

The committee recommends that the Australian Government directly fund Afghan women's organisations with both core and project funding, to enable these organisations to develop their capacity to hold their government to account and realise their leadership potential.

Noted

Australia's development assistance programs to Afghanistan will continue to support activities which aim to achieve both long-term development outcomes for women and girls, and promote and protect women's rights.

Gender equality is integrated into the design of all of DFAT development activities in Afghanistan along with targeted policy dialogue, to improve the lives of women and girls.

Recommendation 31 paragraph 16.31

The committee recommends that AusAID works closely with the Afghan Education Ministry and relevant NGOs to encourage the implementation of community-based education schemes with the objective of increasing the accessibility of schooling and bridging the gender gap with respect to illiteracy.

Noted

Australia supports community-based education activities which target the inclusion of women and girls, particularly in remote and rural areas.

Recommendation 32 paragraph 16.32

The committee recommends that the Australian Government commit adequate funds over three years towards the National Priority Program: 'Capacity development to implement the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan'.

Noted

Australia aligns all of its development programs in Afghanistan with relevant government policy and planning documentation, including the *National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA)* and the *Ministry of Women's Affairs National Priority Program: Capacity Development to Accelerate NAPWA Implementation (MoWA NPP)*.

Oversight and evaluation of Australia's ODA

Recommendation 33 paragraph 17.63

The committee recommends that AusAID review its Afghanistan Annual Program Performance Report in order to ensure that the document reflects its title—program performance report. This means that the report's main aim would be to convey information on:

- *the performance of programs—value for money;*
- *the program's effect on the lives of its recipients;*
- *the benefits delivered to intended recipients and how they align with their needs;*
- *the sustainability of the benefits; and*
- *how programs relate to and complement other Australian-funded programs.*

It should contain a section providing a comprehensive account of the effectiveness of Australia's whole-of-government effort in Afghanistan.

Recommendation 34 paragraph 17.64

The committee recommends that the Australian Government implement new reporting and evaluation requirements for departments and agencies delivering Australian ODA that are timely, consistent, transparent and more stringent. They should also require information on:

- *the aid program's objectives and how it contributes to a coherent, whole-of-government development plan;*
- *the medium and long-term prospects for the sustainability of each project within the program including allowances made for continuing operational costs—such as salaries, maintenance and repair; and*
- *the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for tracking and assessing the effectiveness of projects after their completion.*

Unless there is a compelling reason otherwise, reporting and evaluation reports should be publicly available from AusAID's website.

Recommendation 35 paragraph 17.65

The committee recommends that the Office of Development Effectiveness conduct a critical analysis of the effectiveness of Australia's ODA to Afghanistan with a particular emphasis on the sustainability of projects and Australia's whole-of-government effort.

Noted

The Annual Program Performance Report (APPR) provides a thorough assessment of performance of Australian aid in Afghanistan. The APPR is a key performance report at the country/regional program level, and an important management tool to improve the effectiveness of Australia's aid by providing an annual assessment of how the program has performed against its objectives.

'Lessons learned from aid to Afghanistan' is identified in the Office of Development Effectiveness' Rolling Evaluation Work Plan: 2013-14 to 2015-16. It is part of the Reserve List of Evaluation Topics, which may be progressed in future years. This Work Plan is endorsed by the Independent Evaluation Committee.

Recommendation 36 paragraph 17.68

The committee recommends that the Parliament consider establishing a parliamentary standing committee or dedicated subcommittee of an existing standing committee charged with examining and reporting on Australia's ODA. Among other benefits, this committee could be the catalyst needed to improve the standard of reporting on Australia's ODA, especially Australia's whole-of-government effort in delivering overseas aid. It may also be a means of raising public awareness of the work being done with Australia's ODA.

This is an issue for Parliament to consider.