

Canada is the main donor country behind funding for a micro-credit program, which has given 360,000 Afghans in 23 provinces access to loans to set up small businesses.

Canada has also contributed to hundreds of community development and infrastructure projects in Kandahar province, such as the construction of wells, roads and bridges.

Between 2001 and 2011, we will have allocated more than a billion dollars to development assistance and reconstruction in Afghanistan.

That makes Canada one of the top five donor countries.

Our mission in Afghanistan is about helping people rebuild their lives after years of oppression. It is about ensuring they have the resources to realize their aspirations.

It is a stabilization mission. A development mission. It is our most important mission—a mission that promotes freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

For that to be accomplished, though, there must be security in Afghanistan.

That security is still threatened by the Taliban, who want to bring back their totalitarian regime.

Democracy and political stability cannot exist in a climate of terror.

Health and education services cannot be provided where anarchy reigns.

Contributions cannot be made to economic development where chaos thrives. Security is the essential pillar on which all else rests.

This is why our soldiers are playing such a vital role. True, their mission is risky.

They know the risks—but they are there.

The men and women in uniform are ready to risk their lives to serve their country and help others.

They have been specifically trained to carry out this task.

And all of them are proud to serve Canada and help the Afghan people.

Our Prime Minister has been clear: any extension of our military mission past February 2009 must be approved by Parliament.

To those who call for an immediate withdrawal of Canada's troops from Afghanistan—and to those who remain vague and unclear about their position going forward—I say: