



In the eye of the storm: the Canadian High Commission in Islamabad, Pakistan

Afghanistan has suffered over 20 years of war and political, economic and social upheaval. One of the greatest challenges is rebuilding the country's infrastructure; the city of Kabul, for instance, has been virtually destroyed. Reconstruction requires substantial amounts of foreign aid, but impeding the effort is the country's lack of basic security and administrative capacity—which cannot be improved unless aid is received. Canada was among the first countries to offer help to Afghanistan, converting \$447 million in outstanding loans to development assistance. Among the Canadian staff remaining in Islamabad after the evacuation were Canadian International Development Agency officers; their job was to monitor the humanitarian situation along the Afghanistan–Pakistan border, and to assess Afghanistan's assistance and reconstruction needs.

The lack of administrative capacity also becomes a challenge to diplomacy: Afghanistan has little in the way of telephone or fax lines, paper or typewriters, let alone computers and e-mail. This situation complicated planning for the visit of Deputy Prime Minister John Manley to Pakistan, India and Afghanistan in January; poor communications made arranging the Kabul portion of the trip very difficult, and High Commission staff had to adjust to an absence of the customary diplomatic protocol. An example was the response to Canada's announcement that it was restoring diplomatic relations with Afghanistan. When Mr. Manley met with Afghan Interim Administration Chairman Hamid Karzai on January 25, he introduced High Commissioner Sigurdson as Canada's newly appointed Ambassador to Afghanistan. Mr. Sigurdson said that he looked forward to presenting his letters credential in the near future. Mr. Karzai responded, "You just have. Welcome, Mr. Ambassador."

A task unfinished

For staff at Canada's missions abroad, particularly those in the eye of the storm, daily life is now permeated with a heightened sense of security. They take precautions by varying their route to work or avoiding large gatherings. Mail is handled differently since the anthrax scare. In a department geared toward crisis management, says Gerry Lisk, "There is a tremendous call on individuals to exert more effort than was involved before. At the missions, we really rely on teamwork, including headquarters and locally engaged staff."

The evacuated staff and their families were all back in Islamabad by the end of December. The work continues unabated as military operations proceed in Afghanistan. Across the border in Pakistan, a battle of a different nature is under way: to rid the country of terrorism, and restore law and order. On March 17, an attack on worshippers at a church in the diplomatic enclave of Islamabad killed 3 people and injured 40, including 3 Canadians. This was a reminder that the storm is not over. A proposal calls for new Canadian staff to join the mission this summer to help deal with the ongoing consequences of September 11. ♣

To find out more about the work of Canadian diplomats after the terrorist attacks, visit <http://leadership.gc.ca> and click on "Special Edition—September 11: behind the scenes." See also Issue 14 of *Canada World View*: www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/canada-magazine