

Kabul was announced in June 2003. In July, Christopher Alexander was appointed Canada's first ambassador to Afghanistan, and by early August the embassy was up and running. A month later, Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bill Graham, flew to Kabul to discuss Canada's growing commitments in Afghanistan. President Karzai visited Ottawa in late September, and Prime Minister Jean Chrétien travelled to Kabul in October.

When he opened the mission, Mr. Graham said that it would provide critical diplomatic and logistic support to assist Canada's security and aid programs in Afghanistan.

"The embassy in Kabul is a timely contribution to Canada's stabilization and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan," he said. "A firm diplomatic presence is important in enabling us to work closely with our Afghan partners, as well as with the resident international community, to ensure that the country doesn't again become a haven for terrorists."

Canadian diplomats are also busy at work in multilateral forums such as the UN, NATO and the G8, as well as in national capitals, forging international commitment and consensus for the reconstruction and stabilization process.

Development: Improving Lives

Canada recognizes the urgent need to improve the lives of the Afghan people after decades of conflict, drought and natural disaster. Massive rebuilding is necessary if Afghanistan is once again to have a functioning infrastructure and effective economic, political and judicial institutions.

In March 2003, Canada's Minister for International Cooperation, Susan Whelan, pledged \$250 million in new aid for Afghanistan over the next two years—the largest single country pledge ever made by the Government of Canada. This brings to more than \$500 million the amount of humanitarian and reconstruction assistance Canada has provided for Afghanistan since 1990. The money will go toward four main areas: supporting rural livelihoods and social protection; supporting natural resource management and agriculture; strengthening security and the rule of law; and providing continued operating budget support to the Afghan government.

"The people of Afghanistan can count on Canada's support as they build a better future for themselves, their families and their communities," Minister Whelan says.

Looking to the Future

The situation in Afghanistan remains tenuous and volatile, but progress is being made. Canada stands firmly behind the Bonn Agreement as the greatest hope for establishing peace and security, reconstructing the country, re-establishing key institutions and protecting human

rights. Canada is committed to a long-term presence in the country through a combination of defence, diplomatic support and development aid that manifests itself in myriad ways such as the new Deh-e Punbah Bridge—and will help to ensure stability and a better quality of life for the people of Afghanistan. ♣

Find out more about the important diplomatic, defence and development contributions that Canada is making to the security and reconstruction of Afghanistan at www.canada-afghanistan.gc.ca.



Chrétien Visits the Troops

Canada's commitment to Afghanistan and the Canadian Forces stationed there was reinforced in a historic visit to Kabul on October 17 by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien.

Mr. Chrétien spoke to members of the Royal Canadian Regiment at the main Canadian base, Camp Julien, noting that during his term in office the Forces "have undertaken more deployments, to more regions, than at any time in Canada's history." He thanked the troops for their efforts and recognized their sacrifices.

"I am deeply impressed by your contribution. But I am vividly conscious of the dangers you face," he said. "By establishing peace and security, you are also providing the groundwork for humanitarian assistance and development programs that will help Afghanistan rebuild its economic, political and judicial institutions."

Canadian Ambassador Christopher Alexander said that Mr. Chrétien met with interim president Hamid Karzai at a lunch where the two discussed the difficult security situation—underscored by intense security surrounding the Prime Minister's visit—as well as Afghanistan's political agenda.

"It was a very valuable visit," Mr. Alexander said. "By coming here, the Prime Minister showed that Afghanistan is a priority not only for Canada, but for the G8 nations, too, and that we are one of the most active and activist players."

For the Prime Minister's full remarks during his visit to Camp Julien visit: www.pm.gc.ca.

photo: CP (Paul Chiasson)