



Remarks at the Afghanistan Compact Meeting

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

London, England
January 31, 2006

Thank you very much, Mr. Prime Minister, and let me thank our British hosts for the warm welcome and hospitality and for hosting the conference, and also to you, Prime Minister Blair and your government, for playing a decisive role to help make this moment possible.

President Karzai, Secretary General Annan, fellow members of this group, ladies and gentlemen: What brings us together today is a monumental achievement of our young century: the ongoing transformation of Afghanistan from tyranny to democracy. This triumph is a credit, first and foremost, to the noble Afghan people, to the leadership of President Karzai, and it is, as such, an example of what the world can achieve when we all work together.

We all remember the Afghanistan of the past. A country ravaged and ruined by the Taliban's cruelty. A country completely isolated from the world and home to al-Qaida. A country where human dignity was trampled, where liberty was deemed an impure thought, and where soccer stadiums became killing fields for women guilty only of learning to read.

After the United States and our allies removed the Taliban regime, the Afghan people set out to liberate themselves. They did so with the international community by their side. And today, we mark the fulfillment of the ambitious vision that we all set out together four years ago in Bonn, Germany: a fully functioning, sovereign Afghan government.

Who among us could have imagined what the people of Afghanistan would achieve in this short time? A new, democratic constitution. An emerging free economy. A growing, multi-ethnic army that is the pride of the Afghan people. Successful presidential and parliamentary elections, in which millions of citizens -- men and women -- voted freely for the first time.

The international support for Afghanistan has been extensive and impressive. Many different countries are lending their expertise and resources to reconstruction. Regional partners are joining together to help, along with the United Nations and the European Union. And many countries, like Japan and Great Britain, and of course Germany, have distinguished themselves through their overwhelming generosity and dedication.

On the security side, NATO is leading the international effort to help the Afghan people secure their new democracy. Our hosts, the United Kingdom, are stepping up to lead this deployment, as it expands throughout Afghanistan. And our friends in Canada deserve special thanks for their essential contribution to this important NATO mission.

With so much progress, some could be tempted to think that the hard work is done. President Bush and I do not share this view. Nor do the American people. The United States is fully devoted to the long-term success of Afghanistan. For us, this is a strategic partnership. We have committed tens of thousands of our troops to help stabilize the country. We have sacrificed precious American lives. And now, in addition to our current commitment of nearly \$6 billion, today, I am proud to announce that President Bush will ask our Congress for \$1.1 billion in new assistance to support the Afghan people in the next year.

The Compact that we endorse here today sets out an inspiring vision for the future of Afghanistan -- a future of liberty and tolerance, and permanent peace. Today, we renew the purpose of our multilateral partnership: to empower the Afghan people to guarantee democracy's enduring success -- not just as a form of governance, but as a way of life.

To ensure the security of Afghan democracy, the country's army and police must be fully capable to act on their own, to protect the lives and liberties of their citizens, and to defeat the terrorists and militants who still threaten democracy's progress.

To ensure the prosperity of Afghan democracy, the country's economy must continue to offer greater opportunities for farmers, and traders, and entrepreneurs to succeed in the legal free market -- without being driven into the underground economy or narcotics trade. And Afghanistan must again find its rightful place in the region's economy and economic development.

Finally, to ensure the integrity of Afghan democracy, the country's constitution, and the laws that its National Assembly will soon pass, must translate into an effective system of justice for all Afghans.

The transformation of Afghanistan is remarkable but, of course, still incomplete. And it is essential that we all increase our support for the Afghan people.

In Afghanistan today, the world is witnessing an unprecedented moment in the history of freedom. The impatient patriots of Afghanistan are helping to lead the expansion of liberty throughout the Broader Middle East. They are affirming -- just as Europeans, and Asians, and Africans, and indeed Americans themselves did at earlier times -- that the longing for liberty and self-government is universally desired, and universally deserved.

This remarkable journey, which many thought impossible only four years ago, will one day, in retrospect, seem to have been inevitable. So let us recommit ourselves, let us redouble our efforts, to the future of Afghanistan, knowing that in a safe and secure and democratic Afghanistan the world will have a lasting friend and a lasting fighter for peace. Let us achieve that future together. Thank you.

2006/T2-6

Released on January 31, 2006

