



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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April 6, 2011

Mr. Thomas Donilon
National Security Advisor
National Security Council
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. Donilon:

As Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write to express our Conference's concerns regarding the impending transition in Afghanistan and the U.S. partnership with Pakistan. While significant challenges remain, including questions related to the stability and credibility of the current governments and the continuing insecurity, we affirm the Administration's commitment to drawing down military operations in Afghanistan. At this critical time, we offer a moral framework and the insights informed by the on-the-ground experiences of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), our relief and development agency.

The Administration appropriately emphasizes the importance of a responsible transition in Afghanistan. As we noted in our December 18, 2009 letter (attached), a responsible transition should allow the withdrawal of U.S. military forces at the earliest opportunity consistent with the objectives of denying safe havens for terrorist organizations, minimizing further loss of human life, assisting refugees and internally displaced persons, and helping Afghans along a path to recovery from decades of war. The success and sustainability of the military drawdown will hinge upon a successful transition to Afghan leadership, much of which must be exercised at the local level given the decentralized nature of Afghan society. As you embark upon what the Administration calls an "Enduring Partnership" with Afghanistan, we encourage you to emphasize citizen participation, civil society capacity, accountability and good stewardship.

Our faith tradition emphasizes the importance of participation. Human dignity means people have a right to participate in decisions that impact their lives. We commend the Administration's renewed emphasis on country-ownership in Afghanistan and Pakistan and would expand it to include community-ownership. Channeling funding and decision-making through the institutions and people closest to a situation, and most affected by it, helps ensure more sustainable and effective actions. Building broad participation and the capacity of local civil society to encourage governmental transparency and responsiveness are particularly important. Without a stronger civil society the future of the Afghan and Pakistani people is at risk. We encourage the Administration to think broadly and critically about how best to transition to full country-ownership that fosters local community ownership and accountability. Building local capacity helps establish a foundation for future security, political stability and economic prosperity.

Flourishing societies are built upon good *governance*. While open and independent government institutions are the foundation of such societies, their brick and mortar consists of civil society, including religious institutions, local councils, universities, women's groups and others. International private voluntary organizations, such as CRS, have longstanding relationships with local partners. Even where strong governmental capacity exists, local and international civil society organizations help to hold governments accountable, and monitor and oversee projects. CRS, and many similar agencies, continue to help local communities determine their needs and priorities and to foster local ownership for long-term sustainable development. We urge you to incorporate national and international civil society into your definition of "country ownership," and rely on their expertise and access to help to ensure a successful transition.

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The principle of participation must be balanced with that of good stewardship, including accountability to both donors and recipients. U.S. funding to Afghanistan and Pakistan has been generous. As U.S., Afghan and Pakistani citizens increasingly question how U.S. funds are spent, it is critical that the government, contractors, and private voluntary organizations demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness. If national ministries or districts lack capacity, country ownership must gradually be facilitated through local and civil society capacity-building. Premature transitions to fledgling institutions could result in gaps of critical services like health or education, or may overwhelm institutions they are meant to support. The lives and legitimacy lost through such a premature handoff will have long-term repercussions for good governance and the U.S. partnership. Just as important, local accountability helps assure dignified and sustainable transitions.

While the military drawdown will significantly reduce U.S. costs in Afghanistan and Pakistan, a comprehensive commitment to continued development is critical to long-term success. A responsible transition requires that development and reconstruction funding currently allocated through the Department of Defense be transferred to the Department of State/Agency for International Development. Such funding should be targeted based on need, with particular preference for poor and marginalized persons. For example, aiding Pakistani flood victims, refugees and IDPs remains a critical priority, and this should be emphasized with the Pakistani government.

We recognize that U.S. military engagement in the region will inevitably cost the lives of more dedicated members of our armed services, Afghans and Pakistanis. For this reason, our nation must continually review the use of military force – whether and when force is needed to protect the innocent and resist terrorism – to insure that it is proportionate and discriminate. In particular, we encourage the U.S. to review the use of unmanned drones.

We remain deeply concerned about religious freedom in Pakistan and urge it be a major priority in U.S. policy. The failure to protect the religious freedom of all, especially minorities, and to build a pluralistic tolerant society emboldens fundamentalist terror groups. The assassination of the Pakistani Minister of Minority Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti, the only Christian in the Cabinet, is a grim reminder of this threat. We hope the recent appointment of Paul Bhatti as Special Advisor for Religious Minorities will mean his brother's legacy of defending minority rights will continue.

A responsible transition will require a strengthened civilian commitment by the United States and the international community to improve citizen participation, civil society capacity, accountability and good stewardship to promote development and good governance in Afghanistan and Pakistan. With so much at stake during this transition, we assure you of our continued prayers. In the words of our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, we pray for "security and respect for human rights in Afghanistan and in Pakistan."

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard
Bishop of Albany
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace

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