

Statement By

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**Afghanistan:  
The War against Terrorism**

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Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen!

It is a great pleasure and an honour to be here today. I am grateful for a very warm and welcoming hospitality that my delegation and I have received here in Copenhagen.

I am also pleased for this opportunity to discuss the situation of Afghanistan with this learned audience. As you know rather well, Afghanistan today is at yet another critical juncture in its history.

Having left a dark and violent past behind us over six years ago, today we continue to struggle for a stable, democratic and prosperous future.

The forces that are challenging our future are menacing and have a global reach. Therefore, the turning we take from this cross-roads, and our success or failure in this struggle, will have important consequences for you here in Denmark and for the world at large.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Just over six years ago, Afghanistan was a country destroyed by invasion, war, interference and terrorism. From the destructive Soviet invasion of our country during the 1980s, to the creeping invasion during 1990s from elements within our region, to the Taliban rule, successive episodes of violence tried to break up our social fabric. Six and half years ago, Afghanistan was an economic backwater. One third of our people were displaced from their homes, millions suffered from hunger, violence and abuse of their basic human rights. Our historical heritage suffered immense losses; our climate and our natural resources were damaged beyond repair.

Our suffering continued until 11 September 2001, when the world realised, in a tragic way, that it had been a mistake to leave Afghanistan so vulnerable at the hands of extremism and regional interference. Six and half years ago, the United States of America and many other countries from the international community came to Afghanistan.

They came not only to fight the forces of international terrorism but also to help rebuild Afghanistan's state, society and economy. Together, we have taken significant steps. We have established a democratic political process which provides a framework for genuine political participation for our people. Today we have a new, democratic constitution, a democratically elected government and parliament, a flourishing media and civil society that enjoys unprecedented freedoms. These are the basic attributes of a democratic society that you in Europe take for granted, but for us in Afghanistan these are historical achievements.

Our cooperation has also ensure that, today, more Afghans enjoy access to health and education than ever before in our history. Of the six million children going to school, over two million are girls. Twenty eight percent of our parliamentarians are women, giving a strong voice to the half of Afghanistan's population that was previously oppressed by the Taliban. We have cut child mortality rate, one of the highest in the world only two years ago, by 25.7 percent.

Over five million of our refugees have returned home; we have implemented more development projects during the past six years than the previous three decades put together.

These are just a few examples of the progress Afghanistan has achieved in six and half years. I believe, at a time when negative and pessimistic perceptions about the progress in Afghanistan are so widespread, and the media is focusing on finding negative stories to tell, it is important to remind ourselves of the remarkable progress we together have achieved.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There are significant lessons to be learned from Afghanistan's history, but none more important than these two lessons: Firstly, that international cooperation is a vital strategy when we are faced with challenges that we share in common; and secondly, that our common response to such challenges must be principled, decisive, sustained and result-oriented.

Today in Afghanistan, despite the massive successes we have achieved together, many significant challenges lie ahead, and it remains a common international responsibility to continue our collective efforts. Our initial victory over the Taliban and Al Qaida, our continued military efforts in the fight against terrorism, and our investment in rebuilding Afghanistan's national army and national police, have not yet produced the assured security and stability that we desire. Terrorists still enjoy sanctuaries and extensive support from networks and entities beyond our borders. They are still able to come and kill our innocent people on a daily basis. They are attacking our schools, mosques and hospitals. They seemed determined to prevent Afghanistan from achieving stability, democracy and prosperity.

Beyond the security aspect, Afghanistan also has a very long way to go before our institutions take root, before our democratic gains become irreversible and before our people can finally enjoy their full rights and freedoms.

Afghanistan remains among the poorest countries of the world. And on top of it all, the narcotics industry is a serious threat to the growth of our legitimate economy.

Addressing the challenges that remain is going to take more time and much more effort: from military action in the fight against terrorism to the promotion of democratization and governance, to addressing the various social root causes of terrorism such as poverty and political alienation. Our work must continue on all these fronts.

On the military side, the war on terror in Afghanistan and the wider region must continue. The presence of international military forces in Afghanistan remains a crucial necessity for fighting terrorism and ensuring the longterm stability of Afghanistan. The presence of international military forces is required until such a time when our own institutions, our army and police forces, are strong enough to take responsibility to fight terrorists and enforce the rule of law on their own.

However, terrorism was not born in Afghanistan. Therefore, it cannot be eliminated if our focus remains limited to Afghanistan. In fact, much of the elaborate terror infrastructure, including their networks, are situated outside our borders. Over the past six months, we have seen a relative reduction in the number of terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, but this is mainly because terrorist activities in Pakistan, across our eastern and southern border, have increased considerably. Pakistan is as much vulnerable to, and affected by, terrorism as is Afghanistan. A strong and sustained cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan is vital for success in the war against terrorism. In this context, the success of recent elections in Pakistan is a promising prospect for even stronger and broader cooperation.

There must also be no doubt in our minds that it is not just Afghanistan or its surrounding region that is threatened by terrorism. Threats such as terrorism can never be contained within boundaries. The ultimate goal of terrorism is to reach you here in Europe and attack the foundations of your stability, your democracy and your progress.

Therefore, if you don't fight this scourge in Afghanistan, sooner or later you will have to fight it at your doorsteps!

On the other hand, Afghanistan's plight is not just about insecurity and terrorism, and military action is, therefore, not a sufficient solution.

Only a fully democratic, irreversibly stable and economically prosperous Afghanistan can be immune against the forces of terrorism in the future.

Therefore, economic development, the empowerment of poor communities, uprooting the narcotics economy, reducing poverty and disease and restoring the Afghan people to their basic rights must make the corner-stone of the international community's assistance strategy for Afghanistan.

In this context, I am pleased to acknowledge that Denmark has had an extremely valuable contribution to make to both the military and development efforts in Afghanistan. I wish to take the opportunity to express my deepest gratitude, on behalf of my people, to Denmark for your friendship and support over the years.

We in Afghanistan are particularly grateful to your sons and daughters in uniform who are currently serving in the Helmand province of Afghanistan, perhaps the most critical battle field in our collective war against terrorism. I pay tribute to the memory of those Danish soldiers who have paid the ultimate price, including Mr Morten Krogh who lost his life in a tragic accident only a week ago. Those brave soldiers have sacrificed their lives in order to secure the lives of our people.

The continuation of these contributions is vitally important. This is particularly so in the development sphere because, when it comes to effectiveness of development aid, the Nordic countries have set an example that can, and must, be replicated. Therefore, during my current visit to the Nordic countries, I have tried to explore the possibility of getting our Nordic partners even closer together in a more organised effort, alongside the Afghan government and other partners from around the world, to lead the development agenda in Afghanistan.

Given what is at stake in Afghanistan, the future of an entire nation as well as the security of the whole world, this cause is worth any contribution you are able to make.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today in Afghanistan, there is a unique opportunity for the civilised world to prevail over the forces of violence and terrorism by denying them a space to exist, and by helping the Afghan people build a stable, moderate and democratic state. The opportunity is also there for the international community to help one of the youngest democracies of the world to become a cultural bridge in our divided world today. Earlier today, I joined my colleague Foreign Minister Moller in a lively public debate. The most interesting contribution in the debate was made by a Danish military officer who had just returned from Helmand and who spoke about the progress Danish forces stationed in Helmand are making in building partnership with local communities. To me this officer is a true hero of freedom and democracy.

Regrettably, whereas our world needs to come together across dividing lines in the face of common threats, there are extremists in our societies who damage this process. In our part of the world, it takes only a handful of militant extremists to miss-represent the identity and aspirations of one billion Muslims in the world. They misuse religion to justify their criminal behaviour.

Also dangerous are those elements here in the Western societies who promote division, hatred and violence. As an advocate of human rights myself, and as someone who has spent a lifetime in struggle for enlightenment, freedom and human rights: I am particularly pained to see the abuse of these values. The case of the cartoon drawings of Islam's holy prophet here in Denmark is one such abuse. Of course, freedom of speech is the most fundamental value in a democratic society, but no freedom can allow insult to people's dignity, or a mockery of people's religious beliefs.

Far from furthering the process of enlightenment, such abuses of freedoms in democratic societies are provocative and dangerous, serving the cause of extremism in the same way that fundamentalisms of other type do in other societies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our world today is in dire need of examples like Afghanistan. As a Muslim society that aspires to democracy and progress alongside the rest of the world, Afghanistan can be the anti-thesis to the concept of clash between cultures and civilisations. Uniting the world behind a shared goal, Afghanistan can be a test case of cooperation and the fulfilment of international responsibility as the alternative way forward.

We in Afghanistan have the vision, but to succeed in achieving our vision, we need your continued engagement and support. Already, we have come a significant distance in this journey, but the way forward is long and hard.

I take heart in the fact that, over the past six years, we have together achieved important results in Afghanistan. The key is to continue along the course we have taken. To do otherwise, would be to take the wrong turning at this critical cross-roads.

I thank you for your attention.