



Dear readers,

I am very happy to be appointed as Afghanistan's Ambassador and representative in Oslo-herby introducing and representing the real Afghanistan to the world. My goal is to have strengthened relations between Afghanistan and the Nordic contries in addition to supporting each other in different issues. I will personally do my utmost to fulfill these tasks.

My objectives are to concentrate on Afghanistan and the multilateral relations with the Nordic contries, to show the life of people in Afghanistan to the people in Nordic countries, and to help and facilitate Afghan immigrants with the problems they might be met with. On the other hand, discussing the life of Afghan women is also one of my very significant jobs. Moreover, I am here to build a strong network of intellectuals in Norway.

Due to lack of resources, the newsletter of Afghanistan's Embassy was put on hold and was not published on a regular basis. Now, the media section at the Embassy has started its work again. The newsletter will be a source to inform people about the situation in Afghanistan, the relations between Afghanistan and Nordic countries, and the Embassy's activities and achievements.

In the recent months, Afghanistan has been experiencing a lot of problems and challenges. Despite a lot of problems, the second round of the presidency election went well; the president was elected and a part of the new cabinet has started to work.

The government of Afghanistan is happy to have the support and trust of the international community. To reach all our goals, undoubtedly, we need time and patience. Strategic patience is something which can lead us to our goals and wishes.

I hope, from now on, that I would be able to reach out to all of you through this channel as well.

Manizha Bakhtari

Ambassador

The Arrival and The Road Ahead

Manizha Bakhtari was appointed as Afghanistan Ambassador to the Nordic countries in September 2009. Prior to her ambassadorial assignment, Ms Bakhtari was the chief of staff of the Afghan foreign minister and a part time lecturer at Kabul University.

She holds a bachelor degree in journalism and a Masters degree in Persian Language and Literature from Kabul University. In 2002, she was accredited as lecturer in the faculty of journalism in Kabul University.

Afghanistan and issues related to the country are of great interest to the world, especially to the countries that have their forces deployed there.

Ambassador Bakhtari has been the main speaker at several gatherings and been a part of different panels among leading intellectuals of Norway, discussing Afghanistan and the road ahead.

These events and arrangements have been an important tool for the Ambassador to reach out to the Norwegian public in Oslo.

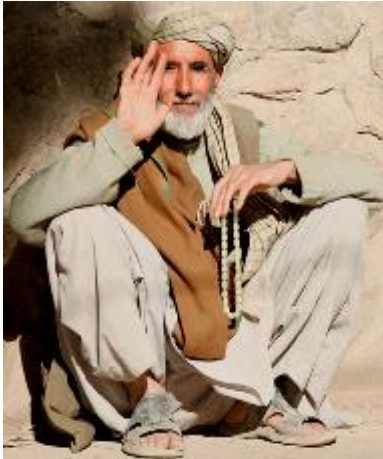
And as one of few female ambassadors after decades of war, it is also crucial for the ongoing debates to have a gender focus. With a lot of experience and much to say about women in Afghanistan, Mrs. Bakhtari is also able to continue her engagement for the women she now represents.

In addition to her personal engagement for the sake of Afghan women and their rights, the Ambassador has a good pen which she has been using to reflect upon and convey messages about the challenges and problems of Afghan women. Ambassador Bakhtari believes it is necessary to be active and to give a voice to the faces we see, but cannot hear.



Ambassador Bakhtari delivering her speech at NUPI.

Sudden optimism in Afghan Hearts and Minds



According to an article published by the BBC a national opinion poll in Afghanistan has recorded results dramatically different and surprising from other years, the poll suggesting that Afghans feel much better about their lives and increasingly confident about the future. Support for the re-elected President Karzai has rallied, the Taliban remain deeply unpopular, and there has been a softening of attitudes towards foreign troops.

34% of people in Afghanistan believe scarcity and unemployment is one of the major challenges, while 32% of those questioned think security is the main threat. The shifting of blame from foreign forces and towards the Taliban is one of the key features of the results. Approximately half of those questioned supported the presence of US forces in Afghanistan, an identical sum of people had a positive view about Iran. A very high quantity, 81% of those questioned had negative view about Pakistan. And 10% wanted to fight against the US forces.

The poll was commissioned by the BBC, ABC News and ARD of Germany, prepared via face-to-face interviews with 1,500 Afghans in all of the country's 34 provinces.

The poll is in fact indicating that the people of Afghanistan support the president.

The outcome of the national opinion poll is very satisfying; as the Afghan people are openly sharing their views about challenges related to scarcity, security and unemployment, Ideally the results of the poll would help the government and the United Nations to pick their priorities according to the challenges identified by the Afghan people themselves.

Afghanistan among donors to Haiti



The government of Afghanistan, with their own crisis to manage will donate 200.000 \$ in aid to the people of Haiti, to help the Haitians with the 7.0 magnitude earthquake.

In a statement from Afghanistan presidential office, it was stated: "The sum of two hundred thousand dollars will be sent as soon as possible to the victims of Haiti's earthquake, to convey the concern and sorrowfulness of Afghanistan's people to the victims of the earthquake."

It is worth mentioning that this is not the first time Afghanistan is donating money to a crisis outside its borders. Afghanistan sent rescue workers and humanitarian supplies directly to the earthquake damage zone in Pakistan, Kashmir to provide medical assistance, food and tents in the aftermath of the largescale earthquake.

Afghan parliament approves 14 candidates for the Cabinet posts



Picture: The Guardian

The consultations in the Afghan parliament on Saturday, Jan 16, resulted in the approval of 7 other candidates for the ministries, raising the number to a total of 14 approved candidates, including President Karzai's longtime national security adviser Mr. Zalmay Rasool as the Foreign Minister. In addition to the approval of the Foreign Ministry's candidate, the Afghan parliament also approved the candidates for the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs/ The Martyred and The Disabled.

The initial set of nominees was presented to the parliament on Jan 2, where 7 out of total 25 cabinet candidates were approved. After the first round of confirmation by the Afghan parliament, President Karzai ordered the parliament to postpone its 45-day winter recess until a new Cabinet could be approved. It resulted in a second round of consultations on Jan 16 with the approval of additional 7 candidates.

Feature Story Of The Month:

Sudden Optimism in Afghan Hearts and Minds

Norway increases its aid to security sector in Afghanistan



The work for putting in place a strong political agreement on climate and the military and civilian efforts in Afghanistan were important topics during the meeting between Norwegian prime minister Jens Stoltenberg and US President Barack Obama.

During the meeting between the two heads of states, Norway announced its increase in aid to the Afghan Security Forces with an additional amount of USD 110 million from 2010 to 2014.

Prime minister Stoltenberg welcomed the new US strategy for development and stabilization in Afghanistan and specifically mentioned the greater focus from US towards the protection of civilians and capacitybuilding in Afghanistan.

-Norway will continue its military and civilian commitment to Afghanistan. If we want to reach our common goal, it is vital for us to support the Afghan security forces. -We have to make it possible for the Afghan security forces to take responsibility of their own security, said the prime minister.

Out of USD 110 million, USD 60 million will be spent on the training of the Afghan National Army and USD 50 million on the training of the Afghan National Police. The annual Norwegian aid to Afghanistan is already USD 120 million, and the number of Norwegian soldiers serving in Afghanistan is around 500.



Increase in Finnish assistance to Afghanistan



In a press release dated 22.01.2010 the Finnish Ministry of Defence stated that the President and the Cabinet Committee on Foreign and Security Policy discussed Finland's contribution to the stabilization and reconstruction process of Afghanistan. Finland will increase its support to Afghanistan.

The press release further stated that support to Afghanistan requires a comprehensive approach with an emphasis on strengthening Afghan capacity on all levels of administration, to assume responsibility over the country's development and security situation.

Finland aims to allocate a larger proportion of its development cooperation funding to the northern provinces of Afghanistan. Finland's participation in the EU police mission will be increased and the aim is to target these resources to northern Afghanistan.

Finnish military crisis management personnel will rise temporarily by over 50 soldiers, increasing the total forces to a maximum of 195 soldiers by the beginning of 2011.

The news of increasing support to Afghanistan by the Finnish officials was welcomed by H.E Manizha Bakhtari, Afghan Ambassador to the Nordic countries.

-Afghanistan has excellent diplomatic relations with Finland being one of the nations that has had a remarkable participation in crisis management tasks and development cooperation in Afghanistan.

The government of Afghanistan sincerely appreciates the efforts and assistance by the government of Finland to Afghanistan.

The government of Afghanistan sincerely appreciates the efforts and assistance by the government of Finland to Afghanistan.

NATO in Afghanistan- lessons learned



Norwegian Foreign Minister, Mr. Gahr Støre believes that the world should put more efforts into nationbuilding after a state collapses. The Norwegian government implies that Nato has to learn from mistakes that were made after the overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

In an interview with VG, Mr. Støre said the world has to concentrate more on nationbuilding next time a state collapses and becomes a threat to other countries security.

Lessons learned by Nato was one of the topics when prominent Nato members met during a Nato Conference in Oslo earlier this month

- The need for flexibility and changeability in a constantly unpredictable security situation becomes crucial, said the former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

The experience from Afghanistan has determined the Norwegian government to act differently if the same scene reoccurs for NATO at a different destination. When a country such as Afghanistan collapses there must be focus on systematic nationbuilding and institutionbuilding- and that the Afghan Constitution meets the Afghan reality.

Mistakes were made. But the trust is still there, continued Mr. Støre, also mentioning that NATO became a handy tool for the US during the initial stabilization of Afghanistan.

Staffan di Mistura takes over as Special Representative after Kai Eide



Picture: United Nations

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has announced veteran UN-diplomat Staffan de Mistura as the top UN envoy to Afghanistan. Mr. de Mistura has been serving as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Iraq and headed the UN mission there.

Mr. de Mistura, a Swedish national will be tasked to lead the entire UN-body's efforts in Afghanistan. The take over from the current Special Representative and Head of the United Nation Assistance Mission (UNAMA), Norwegian diplomat Kai Eide, will take place on March 1st.

The announcement from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon comes at a time when world leaders prepare to meet at the London Conference on Afghanistan.

Current British Ambassador as the new NATO Senior Civilian Representative



Picture: NATO

At a press conference hosted by Nato-Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen announced Ambassador Mark Sedwill as the new Nato Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan.

Sedwill, current British Ambassador to Afghanistan will succeed Mr. Fernando Gentilini and be in charge of all civilian efforts by NATO in Afghanistan.

"I look forward to playing my part in trying to help build a more coherent international effort, civilians alongside the military," said Ambassador Sedwill.

Nordic Countries to coordinate mentoring efforts in Afghanistan



Norway, Sweden and Finland have signed a Memorandum of Understanding enabling them to a strengthened coordination in the mentoring of Afghan officers. The three countries signed the MoU which aims to strengthen trilateral efforts in mentoring an Afghan Brigade in Regional Command North. Presently the three nations are conducting pre-deployment training individually, but the agreement will enable the forces from the three countries to conduct joint training in Norway and Sweden. Before their deployment the Nordic officers will be able to attend courses in Germany alongside the Afghan counterparts they will be mentoring after deployment.

- One effect we hope to get out of this collaboration is that the Nordic mentors would have a common methodology and approach for how the mentoring of the Afghan officers should be implemented," said senior adviser Ragnhild Hustad in Forsvarsstaben.

She points out that the joint courses between the Afghan and Nordic officers will prove beneficial for the mission and training on ground.

- The cooperation makes the operation more efficient," states Hustad.

The three countries agree that they want the new brigade headquarters in Maymana. The Norwegian PRT is also located in Maymana.

- By delivering a better product to the Afghan officers, and playing a larger role in the mentoring of the brigade, we show that small nations can count," says Hustad. Rear Admiral Jörgen Ericsson in the Swedish Armed Forces said that he thinks it is a pleasure to work with the other Nordic countries to support development in Afghanistan. It means a lot to us that we are together when we train the Afghan army.

This means that support is more effective and better when it comes to stabilizing our area," said Ericsson. There are no immediate plans of increasing the number of mentors, but Norway and Sweden want to look at how they can fill the mentor positions in 2011.

A tribute to Claes Joakim



Photo: Forsvaret

On Monday 25th we all heard the terrible news about the loss of a Norwegian soldier in Afghanistan. 22 year old Claes Joakim Olsson was on a mission with his unit on their way to meet fellow Afghan soldiers when their vehicle was hit by a roadside explosion. He didn't reach his fellow soldiers, he didn't reach home, but we can at least hope that he is at rest and in peace now. The loss of Joakim Olsson is sorrowful, not only for his family and friends, but also for the mission itself. It is with great humbleness I share my sincere appreciation for the contribution by Claes Joakim- and the mission he was a part of. I would also like to express my deepest condolence to his loved ones and assure them that the Afghan government appreciates - and is in dire need of the Norwegian military presence in Afghanistan.

May you rest in peace, Joakim

Manizha Bakhtari
Ambassador

NYHETSBRÆV - January 2009
Monthly Newsletter of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in Oslo, accredited to Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland

Public Relations Department
Embassy of Afghanistan, Oslo
Kronprinsens gate 17
0244 OSLO