



Dear Reader,

I write this message by way of saying farewell. My two-year long assignment as Afghanistan's ambassador to the five Nordic countries has come to an end.

The past two years will go down in the history of Afghanistan's diplomatic relations with the Nordic countries as a crucial shaping period in which our bilateral ties developed on an unprecedented scale, thanks to the vision, leadership and efforts of certain political leaders on both sides. In Afghanistan, both President Hamid Karzai and Foreign Minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta have been personally behind the impetus to broaden and deepen Afghanistan's relations with Norway and its Nordic neighbours. The recent official visit by Speaker of Afghan Parliament Mohammad Yonus Qanuni took the relations a step further to include inter-parliamentary relations.

From the Norwegian side, a great deal is owed to the vision and leadership of Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre and Defence Minister Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen, who have not just shown vision and leadership in shaping the valuable Norwegian engagement, both civilian and military, in Afghanistan, but have also invested considerable personal effort to ensure the sustainable continuation of this engagement.

As I say farewell to Oslo, I am full of admiration for the beauty and tranquillity of Norway and gratitude for the generosity of the Norwegian people who have supported Afghanistan so wholeheartedly over the past years.

My colleagues at the Embassy of Afghanistan in Oslo remain committed to play an active and positive role in expanding mutual relations which can, undoubtedly, be further developed in much greater dimensions.

Jawed Ludin,
Ambassador



Afghan journalists visit Norway

As part of a program aiming to create better understanding between Afghanistan and Norway, the Embassy of Afghanistan and the Norwegian Atlantic Committee recently invited a group of journalists from Kabul to Oslo.

– To help the Norwegian public understand the situation in Afghanistan better, and see how their support is making a difference for the Afghan people, it is good that they hear it not just from the Afghan government, but also from the civil society, says Ambassador Jawed Ludin.

During their week-long visit, the five journalists from independent media in Afghanistan visited some of the major media organizations, met fellow journalists and learned about the media situation in Norway. In return, they shared their stories about the history of journalism in Afghanistan, the leap in freedom of speech and the proliferation of media organizations after the

collapse of the Taliban regime – as well as the challenges that persist for Afghan journalists.

They also met with Norwegian authorities, scholars and development organizations engaged in their home country, and got the opportunity to establish long term relations to the different organizations and media involved in Afghanistan.

– It is important that the journalists also learn about Norwegian society, and reflect this knowledge in their reporting back home. This way the relationship between Afghanistan and Norway could be expanded beyond governments to the two societies, the Ambassador says.



Pictures: Ellen Anna Gaup

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Stories from Afghanistan

France pledges 9 million Euro to Afghanistan



Picture: French Foreign Ministry

The French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Bernard Kouchner, recently visited Kabul to meet with his Afghan counterpart and reaffirm France's commitment to the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

During his visit he announced that France is pledging 9 million Euro to improve Afghanistan's health services. He stated that "the money will be spent to provide more facilities to the French Medical Institute for Children in Kabul."

The French hospital in Kabul is one of the best equipped hospitals in Afghanistan, and it provides free treatment. The hospital is to expand its services, making it into a 400-bed health centre, and the NGO Aga Khan Foundation will also contribute 9 million Euros to the project.

Nangarhar Province is poppy-free

Over the past one and a half month a larger poppy eradication programme has been going on in the province of Nangarhar. The eradication has been led by Afghan security forces, and more than 3800 acres of poppy fields have been destroyed.



Picture: NATO

All of the poppy fields in Nangarhar have now been eradicated, including districts known to be major drug producing areas like Shirzad, Lalpoor, Khogyani, and Kama.

The Police Chief in the province states that the cooperation in the anti-drug campaign is very good, and that as many as 100 civilian labourers helped the police in the eradication efforts.

First ever home for disabled in Afghanistan



Picture: UAE Foreign Ministry

Three decades of conflict has left many Afghans disabled. This month, the first housing development for disabled Afghans was handed over to its future residents in Kabul.

A committee has been established to decide who is eligible for receiving a place to live in the housing facility. The housing project comprises 200 homes, all consisting of three rooms for sleeping and living, as well as a kitchen and two restrooms.

The whole project cost around 4 million USD, and includes on-site health facilities, a school and a mosque.

The housing development was funded by the United Arab Emirates, that have also said they will fund more projects of this kind in the future.

South Korea announces new aid plan for Afghanistan

On Wednesday, May 6, South Korea announced that it would contribute further to improving

Afghanistan's health sector, and that it will actively take part in the international efforts to reconstruct Afghanistan.



Picture: Wikipedia Commons

South Korea ended a five-year deployment of army medics and engineers to Afghanistan in 2007, and has now decided to send 60 more medical staff and vocational professionals to Afghanistan in January 2010.

Further, South Korea's efforts will consist of building a hospital and other health facilities in the country, as well as sending 300 motorcycles and 100 ambulances to the country.

The United States delivers 5 million USD in emergency funding

The United States State Department recently announced that it will deliver 5 million USD for mine clearing activities in Afghanistan. This emergency funding will support the important work of removing landmines and explosive remnants in Afghanistan.

The US will support 6 demining groups, which will enable 34 more teams to provide demining services to potentially hazardous areas in 19 different communities. When these teams have completed their efforts, an area measuring three square kilometers will have been demined.

In the fiscal year of 2009 the United States have contributed over 20 million USD to efforts on conventional weapons destruction and mine action.

NATO Parliamentary Assembly held in Oslo

The NATO Parliamentary Assembly's Spring Session was held in Oslo, Norway from May 22 to 26. As expected, Afghanistan was a much discussed topic during the Assembly, and all of the speakers during the plenary sessions brought up the situation in the region in their comments.



Picture: NATO

In his speech the President of the Parliamentary Assembly, John Tanner, said he was pleased to see so many NATO members contributing to a mission that in many ways would have seemed unthinkable ten years ago, and reassured Afghanistan of NATO's continued commitment.

President Tanner also stated that the members of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly can proudly inform their constituents that the Alliance as a whole made the decision to support Afghanistan, in order to protect the values which the NATO countries share: tolerance, individual freedom and mutual respect. These are the underpinnings of democracy, and what NATO is fighting in Afghanistan is a force that rejects those principles.

President Tanner also took the opportunity to quote a statement Professor Musa Maroofi, Afghanistan's ambassador to Italy, made at the Italian Parliament's 60th anniversary. "The average men and women in the NATO nations need to know that if the war is not won in Afghanistan, then they should be prepared to fight

it in their own cities and streets." President Tanner saw these words as beneficial for all to consider.



Picture: Henriette Bjørge

UN Special Representative, Kai Eide, was also present in Oslo. In his speech he said there are challenges coming up in Afghanistan, but also positive trends that need to be reinforced.

Afghanistan is entering an intensive fighting season, as well as a period of campaigning and elections. This combination will be challenging – yet in no way impossible, Mr. Eide said. The additional international troops that are being deployed to bolster security ahead of the elections are most definitely needed. Mr. Eide emphasized the importance of not letting this increase in troop numbers lead to an increase in civilian casualties, as this would alienate the Afghan public.

2009 can prove to be a very crucial year in Afghanistan's development. Progress has been made on many areas in government, emphasizing especially the Ministries of Interior, Agriculture, Commerce and Finance.

It has been decided to increase the Afghan National Police by 15000, an increase which will be followed by a larger increase later this year. Measures have also been made to fight corruption within the police force. The Afghan National Army continues to improve, and the new ceiling of troops is at 134000, and can be reached early in 2011 – two years ahead of plans.

Also, Mr. Eide added, the prognosis on poppy cultivation for 2009 indicates a very significant decrease.

The Danish people support Afghanistan mission



Picture: Danish Foreign Ministry

Despite the loss of Danish lives in Afghanistan, the majority of Danes still support military presence in the region. This is the conclusion from a poll conducted by Gallup and Berlingske Tidende.

The new poll also showed that more than half of the participants support negotiations with the Taliban as part of the peace and reconciliation process.

Denmark sends additional troops to Afghanistan

The Danish Parliament's Foreign Policy Committee has decided to deploy additional troops to Afghanistan.

According to the Copenhagen Post, the troops will be sent to Afghanistan temporarily to bolster security for the upcoming elections on August 20. Denmark will be sending 65 members of the Hunter and Frogmen Corps, which are Special Forces units of the Army and the Navy.

Several other ISAF member countries are also temporarily increasing their troop levels for the election period.



Picture: NATO

Ambassador Jawed Ludin leaving for new posting in Canada



After spending two years in Oslo, Ambassador Jawed Ludin was awarded a new posting. On June 2, he officially left his position as Afghanistan's ambassador to the Nordic countries, to represent his country in Canada.

During his time in Oslo, Ambassador Ludin was an active participant in the public debate, an engaged Ambassador and a dear friend to those with whom he crossed paths. As a relatively new embassy, the Embassy of Afghanistan in Oslo grew both in size and capacity under Ambassador Ludin's leadership.

The government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has yet to announce the new ambassador to the Nordic countries, and Minister Counsellor Mr. Poya Faryabi will serve as Charge d'Affaires until this happens.

On June 5, an official farewell reception was held in Ambassador Ludin's honour. The reception was held at Oslo Militære Samfund, and was opened with a speech from the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, Ambassador of the Republic of Chile, Mr. Roberto Eduardo Alonso Budge. Ambassador Budge praised Mr. Ludin's efforts in Oslo, and wished him the best of luck in his new posting in Ottawa, Canada.



As a gift from the Diplomatic Corps, Mr. Ludin received a beautiful painting of the area Jotunheimen, a gift he much appreciated. The art was made by painter Dag Hol, famous for his depictions of Norwegian nature.



In his speech, Ambassador Ludin reflected upon his time in Norway. His posting to the Nordic countries was the first time he was appointed ambassador, and he stated he had learned a lot, while at the same time having the joy of serving his country. He said that the experience of being posted in the Nordic countries was one he would carry with him in his future endeavours.



Ambassador Ludin also emphasized the joy of making many close friends during his time in Norway. Many of them were present at the farewell reception, and he thanked them all for their friendship and support. One of the Ambassador's good friends, UN Special Representative, Kai Eide, also attended the reception, which was deeply appreciated by the Ambassador.



The staff of the Embassy of Afghanistan in Oslo wishes to thank Ambassador Ludin for the work he has done, and for being a great role-model to us all. We wish him the best of luck in Canada.

All pictures on this page: Henriette Bjørge

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