

Translation

Policy statement
by Guido Westerwelle, Member of the German Bundestag,
Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs
“Afghanistan and the Kabul Conference:
paving the way for a responsible handover”
9 July 2010

The International Conference on Afghanistan is taking place in Kabul on 20 July. No doubt there would have been simpler places in the world in which to hold the conference. The fact that this foreign ministers' meeting is taking place in Kabul is a signal. The conference venue is an expression of our firm determination to transfer complete responsibility for security into Afghan hands. The venue is also an expression of the Afghans' strong desire to take their country's fate into their own hands once again.

The Kabul Conference is the first international conference on Afghanistan to be held in Afghanistan. This is more than symbolic. It shows that we have embarked on a new phase in the process which is the responsible handover of responsibility to the Afghan people.

Germany and over 40 other nations are engaged in Afghanistan under a United Nations mandate in order to prevent the country from once again becoming a haven for international terrorism. Our fellow Germans are serving in Afghanistan so that we can live in safety here. Germany's engagement in Afghanistan is not popular, but it remains necessary and in our own interest.

At the London Conference at the beginning of this year, the Afghan Government on the one hand and the international community on the other entered into a mutual obligation: the Afghan Government committed itself to aim for better governance, to seek to establish the rule of law, to fight corruption and to reduce drug cultivation. In turn, the international community undertook to step up its endeavours to help the Afghans achieve these goals.

The international community has kept its promise. The Federal Government presented its Afghanistan Policy Paper in January and set in motion its implementation.

I would like to thank the Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Dirk Niebel, for the fact that we have succeeded in almost doubling Germany's civilian assistance for the people of Afghanistan.

Since the beginning of the year we have also almost doubled the number of German police instructors on the ground. I expressly thank the Federal Minister of the Interior, Thomas de Maizière, and the federal states for this important contribution.

I thank the Federal Minister of Defence, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, for his helpful cooperation on the new version of the German ISAF mandate to take account of our international agreements. Together we further strengthened the focus of German participation, namely training for Afghan security forces. Alongside some restructuring of the mandate, we can today send 500 additional soldiers to Afghanistan to improve and speed up training for local security forces.

This week the Federal Cabinet passed the most ambitious austerity budget in the history of the Federal Republic. But no savings will be made on our commitment in Afghanistan. Germany keeps its promises.

Some things have been achieved since London:

We have built new training centres for the police and provided basic and further training for almost 2000 Afghan police officers this year.

We have started to rebuild the provincial hospitals in Kunduz and Takhar. We are supporting mobile health teams in the north of the country which will bring healthcare to the people there. We hope to reach about 2.6 million people in this way.

In Balkh province we have created new school places for 3000 boys and girls. And at our new teacher training centre in Mazar-e-Sharif in northern Afghanistan, more than 6000 people are undergoing teacher training.

All this in the past six months.

However, making an honest appraisal also means not ignoring setbacks and recognizing the limits of our possibilities. We know about the drug cultivation still going on in Afghanistan. We know about the corruption in the country and are concerned at reports of aid money being shunted out of the country. And we know about the heightened security situation.

Not everything is good in Afghanistan. Anyone who believes we can create European conditions in the Hindu Kush is mistaken. Our goal must be to help create a situation in Afghanistan which is good enough.

Good enough means that the Afghans themselves are in a position to ensure adequate stability in their country. Good enough means that the progress on human rights we have achieved since the fall of the Taliban is secured. Without human rights, without the right of women and girls to education, freedom of movement, participation in life, there can be no lasting stabilization in the country.

There is light and shade in Afghanistan. Many of you have held talks there and gained your own personal impression of the situation.

You know how dangerous the engagement in Afghanistan is for our soldiers.

In June alone, over 100 ISAF soldiers were killed. We mourn the seven German soldiers who have lost their lives in attacks by the Taliban in the past six months. We think of those who have suffered injuries – visible and invisible – in the course of their service. And our thoughts are with the families mourning a loved one or worrying about a relative because they know how dangerous this engagement is on a day-to-day basis.

I extend my most sincere respect and my deepest thanks to all those serving in Afghanistan, whether in uniform or as civilians, to all those risking their health, indeed their lives, in the PRTs, the Embassy or one of the many development projects. We value their work. We need their commitment and we hope for its success.

Germany is doing a lot in Afghanistan. In debates some reduce our commitment to the military components, others to the civilian elements.

We will not stabilize Afghanistan if we only take the military path. We will not stabilize Afghanistan by simply building schools, tarring roads and training police officers. Both are

necessary and part of our networked security concept. But even the two together are not enough. We also need a third element:

A lasting self-sustaining stabilization of Afghanistan can only work through a political process that balances out the interests of the different ethnic and social groups in Afghanistan.

Here, too, we have already taken the first step with our Allies in London by introducing a reintegration programme for moderate Taliban who are seeking a way out.

A second step was the Peace Jirga which was held in Kabul in early June bringing together 1600 delegates, more than 20% of whom were women.

The discussions were very open, in part emotional. Participants reported from the meeting that conservative mullahs and women's representatives sat opposite one another but initially refused to look one another in the eye.

Tajik and Pashtun representatives apparently argued for a whole day about whether they should speak Pashto or Dari with one another.

On the third day however the Peace Jirga published a final document – with no votes against.

The 1600 delegates voted unanimously for the engagement of the international community in their country. They called upon their President to launch peace negotiations. They also made clear that reconciliation is only possible with those

- who renounce violence,
- who cut their ties to international terrorism,
- and who respect the Afghan Constitution and the resulting obligations to comply with international human rights standards.

This all shows that Afghanistan needs an Afghan solution. I am also saying that with a view to the parliamentary elections on 18 September. The political process must be an Afghan-led process if it is to be successful. Only the Afghan Government can make peace with their adversaries.

On the one hand, our task is to support this process. On the other, the international community has the job of drawing Afghanistan's neighbouring countries into this process. The aim is to bring Afghanistan's neighbouring countries to support the inter-Afghan peace process. Underpinning inter-Afghan results in the region will help secure what has been achieved.

The Kabul Conference will also play a role here.

The Kabul Conference will not be another donor conference at which the international community makes new pledges. In Kabul, the Afghan Government will for its part report on how it is progressing with fulfilling its obligations and on what concrete steps it is planning in the coming weeks and months. That is first and foremost the wish of the Afghans themselves as they have given this Conference the leitmotif of re-establishing the full sovereignty of their country.

Reintegration and reconciliation will be a central topic.

In London we agreed on the principles for a programme to reintegrate Taliban fighters into society. We will discuss this programme in detail in Kabul and then take a decision on releasing the funds that Germany has pledged.

We are expecting yet more answers from the Afghans at the Conference:

The Afghan Government will present concrete plans on how to improve its ability to govern and reduce corruption. A particular focus will be on governance in the provinces, districts and villages. This is where the Afghan citizens encounter their state. This is where they form an opinion on their Government and its legitimacy. Currently the deficits are greater here than in the capital Kabul. More needs to be done at this level so more responsibility can be transferred to Afghan institutions.

Together with NATO and the Afghan Government we will also adopt a plan in Kabul in which we lay down concrete conditions for deciding in which provinces responsibility for security can be passed to the Afghan security forces in the next year.

In 2011, next year, we want to transfer responsibility for three or four provinces. At least one of these will be in our sphere of responsibility in the north of the country.

As early as November, a fundamental decision is to be taken at the NATO Summit in Lisbon.

That doesn't mean that the Bundeswehr presence immediately loses its importance and that we no longer need soldiers there. Similarly, our civilian reconstruction aid also has a long-term perspective. But it is nevertheless a decisive step towards re-establishing Afghan sovereignty. And it is of course a central condition for starting to withdraw troops.

In the course of this legislative period we want to create the prerequisites so that we can begin to gradually wind down our military presence in Afghanistan.

This is a goal we are pursuing with determination and persistence and in close coordination with our Allies. Germany assumed responsibility in Afghanistan together with its Allies. Germany will not shirk this responsibility unilaterally.

The decisions on the German engagement in Afghanistan are amongst the most difficult decisions this Parliament has to take. The Federal Government will thus ensure not just that you are constantly and transparently informed across party lines about our engagement in Afghanistan but also that you are involved in shaping this engagement.

This is why it was today a matter of course for me as a Parliamentarian but also a priority for me personally to update you in the run-up to the International Conference on Afghanistan in Kabul on 20 July.

Thank you very much.