

INFORMAL MEETING OF DEFENCE MINISTERS, BERLIN 11 MAY 2010
FINAL COMMUNIQUÉ

Today we, the Defence Ministers of the troop contributing nations for the ISAF Regional Command North (RC North), have discussed the situation in our area of responsibility. Our focus has been on further emphasizing the international community's continued engagement in Afghanistan – both in the short and long term.

We all agree that Afghanistan deserves a chance to prosper and that it should not allow itself to be used as a safe haven for international terrorism. Security in the region is inextricably linked to our own security. A stable Afghanistan is an important contribution to regional and global security, stability and peace. To achieve this, the support of the international community remains essential. Today we once again reaffirm our unwavering commitment to Afghanistan, and our support for making it possible for the Afghan government to achieve their own aspiration to assume full responsibility for Afghanistan's security within five years.

To implement the decisions taken at the London International Conference on Afghanistan, we are increasing our civilian and military efforts. As a result, we have significantly increased the number of troops deployed in the northern region since January 2010. Together, we will have around 12,000 servicemen and women deployed in that area by the end of the year. Their commitment, courage and bravery deserve our unqualified support and recognition. We bow to those fallen or wounded in the pursuit for peace, and express our deepest sympathy to their families.

We have agreed to further improve the command and control capability of the German-led Regional Command North, not the least in order to meet the increased need for coordination of civilian and military efforts. Together with the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police, we will improve the security situation for Afghans living and working throughout northern Afghanistan. Long-term focus of our efforts will strengthen the Afghan National Security Forces. To this end, we share a common understanding of how the training and mentoring of and partnering with the Afghan forces could be made even more effective. This will help to protect the Afghan population in the north in a sustainable way. The progress achieved shows an encouraging willingness and ability of the Afghan National Army to take responsibility for the security of their country and its people. Only the people in Afghanistan can master the upcoming challenges and, on that basis, independently develop their country.

In addition to establishing stability, it is of particular importance to strengthen the Afghans' confidence in their state institutions. Hence, we expect the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to fulfil the assurances it gave in January 2010 to fight corruption and drug trafficking, develop good governance and integrate moderate, former anti-government fighters in order to provide a credible symbol for a future of self responsibility. These are areas where we need to make progress ahead of the forthcoming Kabul Conference including feasible concepts as well as benchmarks. We will, for our part, provide the assistance and support that we have pledged.

We believe that with the resources now dedicated, and with the close cooperation of and with the Afghan government, a progressive handover of security responsibilities is attainable. It must be seen as an irreversible process but should not be taken as an incentive for immediate troop reductions.

Our comprehensive approach, as recently confirmed by nations in Tallinn, will require patience, and further discussions regarding the future role for ISAF and our cooperation with all relevant actors, as the transition process proceeds in the area. Hence, we intend to hold regular and close consultations on the situation and further developments in our area of responsibility.