

Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia)



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Senator John Faulkner
Minister for Defence
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT 2600

Dear Minister

Re: Australian troops in Afghanistan

I write on behalf of the Medical Association for Prevention of War, an organisation of doctors and other health professionals working to prevent war by addressing its causes and consequences.

I wish to commend your Government's recent rejection of additional troop deployments to Afghanistan.

The conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrate the need to resolve conflicts without warfare. Building real human security means reducing extreme poverty, preventable disease and premature death, whilst ensuring the massive investments urgently needed to address climate change and secure a sustainable energy future. This is readily achievable by re-directing some of the enormous wealth currently spent on warfare and its preparation. Such actions would enhance security and stability not only for people in developing countries but also for countries such as Australia.

It is estimated that 7% of current global military spending invested annually for a decade could allow the fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. This would enable 500 million fewer people to live in extreme poverty, 300 million to no longer be hungry, prevent 30 million under-five deaths and prevent 2 million deaths of mothers in childbirth.

The costs of wars in dollar terms are monumental and this war is no exception: Australia will spend \$1.4 billion dollars on the Afghanistan war this financial year. That's \$ \$3.8 million a day. Building a new school in Kabul has been estimated to cost around US\$128,000.

The *human* costs of the war in Afghanistan are deeply disturbing. In terms of deaths, eleven Australian military personnel have been killed since 2002, including four this year and over 80 have been wounded. Our allies have also lost over 1200 military personnel. We have serious concerns about the high rate in particular of mental and neurological injuries affecting military personnel.

Meanwhile, over 20,000 Afghan citizens are believed to have died. Australia's military strategy should prioritise the avoidance of civilian deaths. Shockingly, 235,000 have been forced to leave their homes for refuge in other parts of Afghanistan, with 3.5 million Afghans finding refuge in the neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Iran over the last two decades.



We believe that there are three essential ingredients for long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan: foreign military forces withdraw, neighbouring nations engage in a regional peace process and Afghans regain control of their society. To facilitate this, the UN should convene an international conference for the purpose of reaching a regional consensus on Afghanistan. Negotiations must include all groups involved in the conflict, including the Afghan government, other groups within Afghanistan, and all of Afghanistan's neighbours. Given the failure to date of military intervention, consideration must be given to re-engaging the Taliban in negotiations.

In concrete terms, our approach to resolving the crisis in Afghanistan entails:

1. setting and implementing a timetable for withdrawal of Australian troops;
2. advocating that our allies set a timetable for withdrawal of their troops;
3. redirection of resources to build local capacity for reconstruction; and
4. building and resourcing diplomatic bridges, incorporating both secular and religious politicians and other leaders.

Thank you for your attention to setting a new course for Australia in dealing with the terrible aftermath of decades of instability and failed military policies in Afghanistan.

Yours sincerely



Dr Bill Williams
President

CC

The Hon. Kevin Rudd, MP; Prime Minister of Australia,
The Hon. Stephen Smith, MP; Minister for Foreign Affairs,
Leader of the Opposition
Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs
Shadow Minister for Defence