

Welcoming address of the President of the Senate of the States
General,

Mrs Y.E.M.A. Timmerman-Buck, on the occasion of the visit of
His Excellency the President of Afghanistan, Karzai
on Tuesday, 10 June 2008

Your Excellency,
Dear President Karzai,

It is with very great pleasure that I warmly welcome you today in the assembly hall of the Senate. Of course I also extend my welcome on behalf of Mrs. Verbeet, President of the House of Representatives. We are truly honoured that you have found the opportunity to meet with members of both Houses of the Dutch Parliament. It underlines not only the good relations between your beautiful country and the Netherlands, but at the same time stresses our common stance on the importance of prosperity and stability in Afghanistan.

The history of your country should not be looked upon lightly. Over the last decades your country being an international battlefield has suffered tremendously. Your personal commitment over these years to build an Afghanistan for the Afghan people has been truly impressive.

The relationship between our two countries has been strengthened since 2001, and even further since the first of August 2006, when our military men and women were stationed in your province of Uruzgan. Our Constitution underlines that the Dutch armed forces can serve the purpose of maintaining and advancing the international legal order. Our involvement in the UN-mission in your country relates to this purpose. The deployment of our Dutch troops is subject to debate in the House of Representatives and the Senate. Many of our members present here today have been intensely involved in those debates.

As President of the Dutch Senate, in the midst of today's setting, I give my thoughts to the many soldiers and civilians who were injured or lost their lives in Afghanistan. When a tragic message about one of our soldiers reaches us, not only the Dutch armed forces are touched to the very core, our entire nation feels deep sympathy. We are however very proud to have such professional armed forces, who are capable of dealing with extremely difficult situations. We are aware that their task in Afghanistan is of crucial importance for the Afghan citizen, your country, Asia and international stability and peace. Mr. Karzai, we do realise that the losses amongst your people in number are so much greater than our losses. We sincerely

sympathise with the enormous and enduring grief of the Afghan people.

Afghanistan is in the process of building a new nation based on the rule of law and civil society. Within that context your country is laying its own foundations for a prosperous and stable democratic future. The international presence in Afghanistan is based on the desire to aid Afghanistan – to aid your government – to further develop the freedoms that come with the rule of law.

The future Afghan society should and can be a society with respect for human rights in which all the Afghan people feel at home; in which they believe to raise their children and grand-children. Even though I am very much aware of the difficulties you face, I sincerely hope that the future free Afghan society under the rule of law will reflect the rich variety of cultures, religions and populations.

Our common objective is for your government to govern Afghanistan so that our international presence ultimately can come to an end. We agree that we will not succeed on that joint path, if we only focus on fighting the Taliban. For good reason the Dutch military mission is a reconstruction-mission, that's to say it is not just about military security. It is above all aimed at human security: helping to create the conditions for the Afghan people to shape their democracy and economy. Human security provided by a strengthened rule of law, enforced from bottom-up by police-men until the national judiciary. Human security provided by health care, education and social services, by job-prospects and equal opportunities for everyone. The Dutch contribution is aimed at concerted help in these wider areas.

Your government indeed has made progress in improving many conditions in your country. You do have a vision on where you want to lead your country to, as was so clearly demonstrated in the National Development Strategy that you recently launched.

Dear President, there indeed are many difficult issues to tackle. In a recent interview you have referred to diabolical dilemma's you are sometimes confronted with. The Dutch want to be friends and partners on the road to a truly free and stable society in Afghanistan. In the near future we will go on sharing some of the challenges you face. Hopefully our efforts contribute to further achieving positive results.

May I finish my welcoming words by wishing you a very successful ministerial conference in Paris later this week.