

Afghanistan Update

A humanitarian initiatives and progress report

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Recent News

Midwives playing important role in healthcare

In Afghanistan, mortality rates among pregnant women are some of the highest in the world, [UNICEF](#) reported last December 8th. The war-torn infrastructure, coupled with lack of money and resources in the healthcare communities operating in the country have hampered the abilities of doctors and obstetricians to adequately care for expectant and new mothers. However, since 2002, the Ministry of Health "has chosen to focus on the rapid mobilization of midwives, especially in rural areas," UNICEF reported. "The objective is to create a cadre of professional midwives in keeping with the [international definition of a midwife](#) and skilled birth attendant, and recognized by the country's National Midwifery Education Accreditation Board, established in 2005." According to [USAID](#), those trained midwives are then able to be "deployed back to the communities that selected them and will work from health facilities, some of them in very remote areas." One graduated midwife told the American aid organization, "We are ready to start working to improve the health of Afghan women and babies. We have been trained in the skills we will need to work as midwives. I know I will be working alone but my community will support me."

A "Civilian Surge" in Afghanistan

Admiral Mike Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said recently that achieving political stability in Afghanistan will require the United States to focus its governmental civilian, and diplomatic resources to bolster the additional [17,000 troops the US will send](#) to combat the growing violence, [Wired](#) reported on February 11th. "This increase is necessary to stabilize a deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, which has not received the strategic attention, direction, and resources it urgently requires," said Mr. Obama. The admiral's words were echoed by other officials in the US military who have called for a greater "civilian surge" that "is needed to match the increase in military forces in order to field adequate numbers of provincial reconstruction teams and other civilian elements to support basic economic development, and to assist in the development of various important aspects of the rule of law, including initiatives to support the development of police and various judicial initiatives," Gen. David Petraeus, head US Central Command said during a speech at the [45th Munich Security Conference](#) in Germany.

Ambassador Holbrooke appointed as special representative to Afghanistan

US President Barack Obama's [newly appointed Special Representative for Afghanistan](#) and Pakistan and former US Ambassador to the UN (199-2001), Richard C. Holbrooke, [made his first visit to Kabul](#), the New York Times reported on February 12th. Holbrooke's mission in Afghanistan and tour of the region "was part of a ground-up review of American policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan ordered" by Mr. Obama. Mr. Holbrooke's first visit followed the day after a coordinated series of Taliban suicide attacks in Kabul. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton announced Holbrooke's appointment at the State Department on January 22nd and stated that Holbrooke "will coordinate across the entire government an effort to achieve United States' strategic goals in the region. This effort will be closely coordinated, not only within the State Department and, of course, with USAID, but also with the Defense Department and under the coordination of the National Security Council."

UN OCHA and partners coordinate appeal for \$600m in Afghan aid

A Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP) has been drawn up among the United Nation's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Afghan government and "dozens" of NGOs in an effort to raise more than \$600 million in humanitarian aid, the [United Nations](#) reported February 3. Inside the HAP, more than 112 project proposals from 39 NGOs and 8 UN organizations have been outlined in an effort to create new programs to alleviate hunger, malnourishment; to reduce the level of violence and bring security and services to rural and urban communities; and to combat sky-rocketing food prices. Wael Haj-Ibrahim, the head of the OCHA country office said, "The HAP identifies a set of urgent needs and requests donor funding to address those needs. All the needs are important and we want to urge donors to commit the funding to allow humanitarian actors to act quickly and meet the needs." According to IRIN, the plan refers to corruption and the weak rule of law as major problems and states that "Extreme poverty and lack of development have also left the population more susceptible during times of crisis and emergency, limiting their coping strategies and draining contingency reserves." IRIN continued, "increasingly insecurity has become the most pressing challenge for communities and aid organizations alike."

Bayat Foundation Announcements

News from the Kabul-based NGO

2009 Winter Aid delivered to families in over six provinces

In January and February 2009, the Bayat Foundation Winter Aid consisting of blankets, winter clothes and foodstuffs has been distributed to people in greatest need in the northern provinces, Maimana City, Baghlan Province, Wach Tangi Baysood District in Jalalabad Province, Badghes Province, Gardez Province, Herat Province, West Kabul (Dashti-barchi), Kapisa Province, Boldak and Qalat. The Winter Aid Program, since 2006, is an ongoing annual program of The Bayat Foundation serving families in need. In its inaugural year over 13,500 families received aid. This year over 2,500 families were served in spite of the challenges of the delivery route to the remote areas and unsecured territories with bumpy roads, the chilly winter climate and threat of avalanche.

Saleha Bayat Maternity Hospital served 2,931 patients in its first two months

The Saleha Bayat Maternity Hospital extension recently inaugurated in Mazar-e-Sharif has served 2,931 patients in January and February 2009, improving the quality of life, if not saving lives, for mothers and newborns in an area that previously lacked adequate maternity facilities.

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