



## Remarks on Public-Private Partnership for Justice Reform in Afghanistan

### Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you. Good afternoon. Welcome to the Department of State.

I'd like to extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest from Afghanistan, Attorney General Abdul Jabar Sabit. A very special welcome also to the Ambassador of Afghanistan and to our private sector co-chairman, Robert O'Brien.

I'd like to recognize the work of our team: Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs David Johnson; Legal Adviser John Bellinger; and of course, to Tom Schweich, the U.S. coordinator for counternarcotics and justice reform in Afghanistan. My thanks to them for the hard in putting together this partnership.

I am pleased to join you to talk about justice reform in Afghanistan, which is critical to the country's future success. Over the past six years, the United States and our partner nations have supported the Afghan people as they work to build and reform democratic and independent institutions in their country. Together, we have made progress. And the ongoing transformation of Afghanistan from tyranny to democracy is a credit, first and foremost, to the Afghan people, and to the leadership of President Hamid Karzai.

We all remember the Afghanistan of the past – a country ravaged by war and by the Taliban's cruelty, isolated from the world, and a haven for al-Qaida. The progress that has been made over the past six years is remarkable. In 2004, Afghans freely elected the head of state in the first presidential elections in that country's 5,000 year history. That was followed by the first ever democratic parliamentary elections.

In the last six years, the lives of ordinary Afghans have begun to improve. Six years ago, eight percent of Afghans had access to some form of healthcare; now, more than 80 percent of the population does. The mortality rate for infants and children under 5 has declined 24 percent, saving more than 85,000 young lives last year. Over the past three years, the average per capita income has nearly doubled for the citizens of Afghanistan. And whereas girls were prohibited from getting an education in 2001, today more than 1.5 million girls are enrolled in school throughout the country.

The justice sector, which we are highlighting today, has also had its successes, including a real focus on tackling corruption. Under the leadership of Dr. Sabit, the Attorney General's office has launched a nationwide campaign that has prosecuted hundreds of cases of embezzlement, bribery, and abuse of authority by public officials.

Dr. Sabit has also been a strong promoter of women in government service. Today, there are 368 women employed by the Attorney General's office. One hundred and nine of them are prosecutors. And in fact, the Attorney General's office is one of the Afghan Government's biggest employers of women. So I commend you, sir, for your courage and for your commitment to building a free and democratic Afghanistan, in which all citizens, men and women, are equal before the law.

Establishing a fair, democratic, and transparent justice system in Afghanistan is essential to the country's success, and we know that there is much work remaining to be done. One concern for the justice system is the deficiency of basic equipment – such as just office supplies, vehicles – and the limited availability of defense attorneys and private practitioners. Another challenge is to expand public awareness of legal rights, which is especially lacking in rural areas.

Increasing the number of women judges is also a key priority. Afghanistan currently has over 1,500 judges nationwide, yet only 60 are women. It is imperative that Afghanistan develop a well-trained, educated, and demographically representative cadre of judges to serve in courts across the country.

These challenges explain why we are launching this Public-Private Partnership for Justice Reform in Afghanistan. We are asking American law firms and law schools to help the Afghan judicial system in a variety of ways. By providing lawyer-to-lawyer support through this Public-Private Partnership, we hope to bring Afghan practitioners into the larger international community of legal professionals. American firms and law schools have already begun to embrace this partnership. We hope that more will choose to play an active role—in parallel with the government of the United States — in supporting the development of the Afghan judicial system.

Afghanistan is engaged in a reform process that will take a great deal of time, a great deal of resources, and a great deal of commitment from the United States, from the Afghan people, from the international community, and from concerned private citizens like you.

Through our combined public and private sector efforts in Afghanistan we can ensure that our assistance builds upon the foundations of democracy and justice that Afghanistan is working so diligently to achieve. Together with the Afghan people, I am confident that we can succeed.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

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