

# COUNTRY PROFILE: AFGHANISTAN

June 2008



## BASIC FACTS (UNDP and WHO Atlas)

- Population (2008 est.): 32,7 million, annual growth (2008 est.): 2.62 %
- Infant mortality rate – 154.6 per 1,000 live births (2008 est)
- Malnutrition rate: 12% (as high as 20% in some of the districts)
- Human Development Index rank : 172/177
- Literacy rate: 28.7 % over the age of 15
- Average life expectancy: 44 years (2008)
- 20 % children die before the age of five
- 61 % of all children not enrolled in school, 80 % of girls

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT:

Ahmad Shah Durrani unified the Pashtun tribes and founded Afghanistan in 1747. The country served as a buffer between the British and Russian empires until it won independence from notional British control in 1919. A brief experiment in democracy ended in a 1973 coup and a 1978 Communist counter-coup. The Soviet Union invaded in 1979 to support the tottering Afghan Communist regime, touching off a long and destructive war. The USSR withdrew in 1989 under relentless pressure by internationally supported anti-Communist mujahedin rebels. Subsequently, a series of civil wars saw Kabul finally fall in 1996 to the Taliban, a hardline movement that emerged in 1994 to end the country's civil war and anarchy. Following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City, a US, Allied, and anti-Taliban Northern Alliance military action toppled the Taliban. The UN-sponsored Bonn Conference in 2001 established a process for political reconstruction that included the adoption of a new constitution and a presidential election in 2004, and National Assembly elections in 2005. On 7 December 2004, Hamid Karzai became the first democratically elected president of Afghanistan. The National Assembly was inaugurated on 19 December 2005.

While the focus in Afghanistan is on the reconstruction phase, almost five years after the end of the conflict, the security situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate at an alarming rate. Despite widespread international military and financial support, the country is on the brink of reversal fuelled by insurgency in the South, insecurity spreading to the whole of Afghanistan, warlordism and opium trafficking, lack of economical investment, serving to undo some of the development gains of the last few years. Provinces associated with high security risks in many cases report some of the country's worst development indicators and have not seen the peace dividend. This itself fuels potential for increasing public dissatisfaction in volatile communities, and creates an environment in which militant or extremist groups become even more active.



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

\*Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.

## AT A GLANCE:

- Full name: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
- Population: 32,7 million
- Capital: Kabul
- Largest city: Kabul
- Area: 647,500 sq km
- Major languages: Dari (official), Pashto (official), Turkic languages (primarily Uzbek and Turkmen), and 30 other minor languages
- Major religion: Islam
- Life expectancy: 44 years (men), 44 years (women)
- Monetary unit: 1 Afghani = 100 puls
- Main exports: Fruits and nuts, handwoven carpets, wool, cotton, hides and pelts, precious and semi-precious gems
- GDP per capita: US \$1,000 (PPP, 2007 est)
- Internet domain: .af
- International dialling code: +93

## POLITICS:

Politics in Afghanistan has historically consisted of power struggles, bloody coups and unstable transfers of power. With the exception of a military junta, the country has been governed by nearly every system of government over the past century, including a monarchy, republic, theocracy and communist state. The constitution ratified by the 2003 Loya jirga restructured the government as an Islamic Republic consisting of three branches, (executive, legislature and judiciary).

Afghanistan is currently led by President Hamid Karzai, who was elected in October 2004. The current parliament was elected in 2005. Among the elected members were former mujahadeen, Taliban members, communists, reformists, and Islamic fundamentalists. 28% of the delegates elected were women, 3 points more than the 25% minimum guaranteed under the constitution. This made Afghanistan, long known under the Taliban for its oppression of women, one of the leading countries in terms of female representation.

Afghanistan currently has more than 70,000 national police officers, with plans to recruit more so that the total number can reach 80,000. They are being trained by and through the Afghanistan Police Program. Although the police officially are responsible for maintaining civil order, sometimes local and regional military commanders continue to exercise control in the hinterland. Police have been accused of improper treatment and detention of prisoners. In 2003 the mandate of the International Security Assistance Force, now under command of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was extended and expanded beyond the Kabul area. However, in some areas unoccupied by those forces, local militias maintain control. In many areas, crimes have gone uninvestigated because of insufficient police and/or communications.

## ECONOMY:

Afghanistan's economy is recovering from decades of conflict. The economy has improved significantly since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 largely because of the infusion of international assistance, the recovery of the agricultural sector, and service sector growth. Real GDP growth exceeded 7% in 2007. Despite the progress of the past few years, Afghanistan is extremely poor, landlocked, and highly dependent on foreign aid, agriculture, and trade with neighbouring countries. Much of the population continues to suffer from shortages of housing, clean water, electricity, medical care, and jobs. Criminality, insecurity, and the Afghan Government's inability to extend rule of law to all parts of the country pose challenges to future economic growth. It will probably take the remainder of the decade and continuing donor aid and attention to significantly raise Afghanistan's living standards from its current level, among the lowest in the world. International pledges made by more than 60 countries and international financial institutions at the Berlin Donors Conference for Afghan reconstruction in March 2004 reached US\$ 8.9 billion for 2004-09. While the international community remains committed to Afghanistan's development, pledging over US\$ 24 billion at three donors' conferences since 2002, Kabul will need to overcome a number of challenges. Expanding poppy cultivation and a growing opium trade generate roughly US\$ 4 billion in illicit economic activity and looms as one of Kabul's most serious policy concerns. Other long-term challenges include: budget sustainability, job creation, corruption, government capacity, and rebuilding war torn infrastructure.

### Sources:

CIA World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos>

BBC News - [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/country\\_profiles/1162668.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/country_profiles/1162668.stm)

Wikipedia - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghanistan>