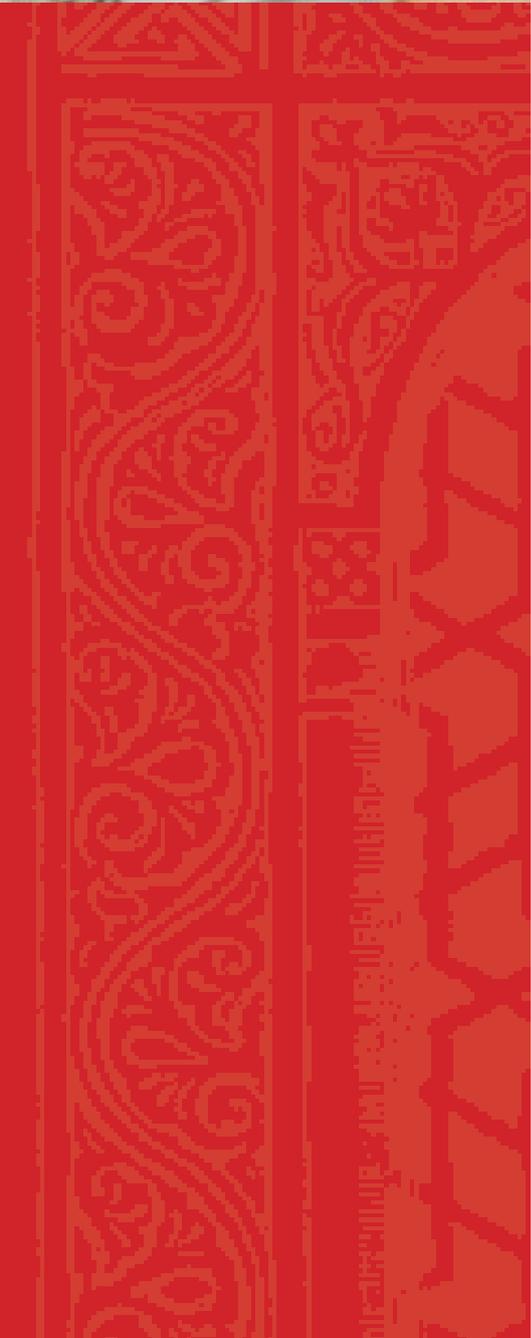




United Arab Emirates

## UAE Policy for the provision of Direct Support to Afghanistan





## Executive Summary

This policy statement outlines the approach of the UAE Government towards the provision of direct support to the people of Afghanistan. It explains the rationale behind the direct involvement of UAE humanitarian and military personnel, and identifies the key activities these representatives are engaged in to support the development of healthcare, education and basic community infrastructure for the people of Afghanistan, in an environment of safety and stability.

It analyses the key areas of humanitarian need in Afghanistan and underlines the responsibility of the international community to respond to the significant healthcare, education and community infrastructure challenges that the people of Afghanistan continue to face. Importantly, this policy articulates the opinion of the UAE Government that safety and stability are essential prerequisites for the successful provision of comprehensive humanitarian aid and the development of sustainable community infrastructure.

## The Situation in Afghanistan

According to leading international organizations, and other members of the international community, large parts of Afghanistan are in a situation of extreme humanitarian need and continue to live under the threat of instability and the violent activities of criminal and insurgent forces. Despite the significant efforts made by the international community, including the UAE, over the last five years, the provision of quality healthcare, education and basic community infrastructure continue to be three of the greatest areas of need in Afghanistan.

According to UNICEF, an estimated 22 million Afghans, representing 70 percent of the population, live in poverty and substandard conditions.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that 54 percent of Afghan children are suffering from severe or moderate stunting and 39 percent are severely or moderately underweight.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, 7 percent of Afghan children suffer from acute malnutrition and 54 percent are chronically malnourished.<sup>3</sup>

Infant mortality is also an ongoing concern, as it is estimated that twenty five percent of children in Afghanistan will die before their fifth birthday.<sup>4</sup> It is also estimated that more than 50 women die every day from complications in pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>5</sup>

The lack of basic hygiene and sanitation facilities is a major contributor to the current health situation. For example, it was estimated in January 2008 that only 23 percent of the entire population of Afghanistan has access to safe drinking water, while access to sanitation facilities is as low as 12 percent.<sup>6</sup>

For social and demographic reasons, education is also an immediate priority. According to UNICEF, Afghanistan has a relatively young population, with more than half of the local population less than 18 years of age.<sup>7</sup> Presently, it is estimated that two million primary school-aged children (sixty percent) are not in school, with more than half of this group being girls.<sup>8</sup> Ensuring the country's children and young adults are educated is an ongoing challenge for organizations on the ground.

This is a critical area of need, as the literacy rate for young women (15-24 years of age) in Afghanistan is only 18 percent, and among males of the same age group it is only 51 percent.<sup>9</sup> The implications of this trend being allowed to continue into the future are dramatic.

However, addressing this need is particularly challenging, as according to UNICEF, schools are often attacked by warring factions in Afghanistan. In the first half of 2007 for example, there were thirty one separate attacks on schools recorded, dominated by the torching of school facilities and explosions.<sup>10</sup> There were also attacks and threats made against students and teachers across Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup> In certain parts of Afghanistan, children are studying in tents as organizations such as UNICEF and its international partners work to create a permanent school structure for the local community.

One of the major challenges is encouraging and making it possible for school-aged children to enroll in education, despite the many additional responsibilities they are faced with at such an early age. In the current social and economic environment in Afghanistan, many school-aged children are working to support their families, meaning education is not always considered an immediate priority. This underscores the need for broader community development in Afghanistan, alongside the development of schools and educational services.

It is also important to recognize that in a Muslim country such as Afghanistan, broader community development generally involves the provision of mosques, prayer facilities and other materials associated with the practicing of Islamic faith.

From the perspective of the UAE, the international community has a responsibility to address these pressing humanitarian needs, in healthcare, education and the provision of basic infrastructure. As a responsible member of the international community, with natural insights into the broader cultural needs of the people of Afghanistan, the UAE is compelled to contribute to this international response.

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, Afghanistan Humanitarian Action Update, 17 January 2008, [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_31224.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_31224.html)

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, Afghanistan Statistics, [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_statistics.html)

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF, Afghanistan Humanitarian Action Update, 17 January 2008, [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_31224.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_31224.html)

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF, Afghanistan Background, [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_background.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_background.html)

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF, Afghanistan Humanitarian Action Update, 17 January 2008, [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_31224.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_31224.html)

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF, Afghanistan Background, [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_background.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_background.html)

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF, Humanitarian Action Update – Afghanistan, 17 January 2008, [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_31224.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_31224.html)

<sup>9</sup> UNICEF, Afghanistan Statistics, [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_statistics.html)

<sup>10</sup> UNICEF, Afghanistan Donor Update, 25 July 2007, [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_31224.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_31224.html)

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

## UAE Contributions

The UAE continues to make a significant humanitarian contribution in Afghanistan, and has done so since 2003. Through organizations such as the Red Crescent, the generous donations made by UAE citizens and volunteers have contributed to the construction of:

- 11 schools educating 300 students per day;
- 6 medical clinics which have treated 35,000 Afghani patients;
- Zayed University, Afghanistan, serving over 6,400 students per year;
- a major hospital with an annual capacity of 7,000 patients;
- 38 mosques each providing a prayer service for over 300 people;
- a general public library serving more than 400 students and visitors per day;
- accommodation in Zayed City for 200 displaced families;
- 160 wells providing healthy drinking water.

Privately, the UAE people have contributed US\$22 million for food, medicine and basic relief projects providing housing and shelter in Afghanistan. In addition, the UAE Red Crescent has invested US\$19 million in local projects, and the UAE Government has dedicated US\$30 million to international reconstruction efforts in the country.

## Evidence of Progress

So far, international organizations such as UNICEF and its partners have:

- Immunized over five million children against polio and delivered millions of vitamin A supplements;
- Provided access to safe water and sanitary facilities for over 500,000 Afghans;
- Provided five new salt iodization plants to reduce iodine deficiency;
- Established therapeutic feeding programs in 20 hospitals to address malnutrition;
- Trained 30,000 teachers and supplied educational materials for 4.87 million students.<sup>12</sup>

School enrolments are also increasing. Assisted by the work of international organizations and members of the international community, over 6 million students attended the first day of the school year in Afghanistan in March 2008.<sup>13</sup> This included approximately 800,000 children who have been enrolled in school for the first time.<sup>14</sup> It is also estimated that over 90,000 women across Afghanistan will be encouraged to learn how to read and write for the first time through 3,500 literacy centres that have been established by UNICEF and its partner organizations.<sup>15</sup>

UAE organizations have also established community-based schools in a number of provinces that are making an invaluable contribution to the future of Afghanistan's children, and the development of literacy and basic skills.

<sup>12</sup> UNICEF, Afghanistan Background, [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_background.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_background.html)

<sup>13</sup> UNICEF, "Communities 'stand up to violence' as the new school year begins", Media Release, 24 March 2008, [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_43350.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_43350.html)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

### The Need for a Military Support Presence

Humanitarian projects in healthcare, education and the provision of basic infrastructure are regularly threatened by violence and instability in Afghanistan. Criminal and insurgent forces continue to threaten the safety and stability of local communities, and regularly seek to undermine the success of humanitarian and community development initiatives being delivered by international organizations.

As a result, it has been necessary for the UAE to maintain a military support presence in effected provinces to protect the personnel of humanitarian organizations and to provide the stability necessary for humanitarian projects to succeed. It is the opinion of the UAE that humanitarian projects in healthcare, education and the provision of basic infrastructure cannot succeed, as they should, in an environment of ongoing instability.

From the perspective of the UAE, the presence of its military personnel in Afghanistan is therefore necessary to contribute to the establishment of an environment of safety and stability, in order to allow the many humanitarian projects underway in that country to succeed.

### The Responsibilities of the UAE Armed Forces in Afghanistan

In accordance with the UAE Constitution, the UAE's Armed Forces can, and will, only be used for defensive purposes. The work of the UAE Armed Forces in Afghanistan is guided by this principle, and personnel are focused on the protection of humanitarian initiatives and the provision of safety and stability for local communities. Through its work in Afghanistan, the UAE seeks to extend the protections it offers its own citizens at home, in the area of national security, to the citizens of Afghanistan during its current period of need.

The UAE Armed Forces are also directly involved in culturally-sensitive community development activities, alongside representatives of key humanitarian organizations such as the Red Crescent. The language skills and cultural awareness of UAE Armed Forces personnel represent a significant advantage in the delivery of effective community development initiatives in a Muslim country such as Afghanistan. The construction of mosques and provision of observance materials by UAE Armed Forces personnel, for example, meets a specific cultural need of the local community and is considered to be an essential element of successful community development in many parts of Afghanistan.

The Government of the UAE is proud of the important work its humanitarian and Armed Forces personnel have been conducting in Afghanistan since 2003. Despite the ongoing need, recent achievements in healthcare, education and the provision of basic infrastructure can in part be directly and indirectly attributed to the work of the UAE Armed Forces in the provision of safety, stability and culturally-sensitive community development.