



## HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE DUNCAN HUNTER – CHAIRMAN

### *PRESS RELEASE*

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For Immediate Release:  
June 28, 2006

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### **CHAIRMAN HUNTER OPENING STATEMENT**

#### *Hearing on the Status of Safety and Security in Afghanistan*

**Washington, D.C.** – Our forces in Afghanistan typify the quiet dedication and professionalism that we as Americans have grown used to seeing from our military personnel. Numbering over 21,000, these brave men and women often labor off the front page of our nation’s newspapers. Progress is deliberate and perhaps – in the day-to-day view – unexciting, but I think if you look back at how far that small but very important country has come, you begin to grasp the depth of the commitment of our military and civilian officials to see this job through until the end.

We would do well to remember what Afghanistan looked like under the Taliban regime less than five years ago. Girls over the age of eight could not go to school. Women were treated as personal property. People could not believe as they saw fit. Taliban rulers co-existed happily with – and indeed supported – the people who murdered thousands of Americans in a single day.

Today schools are open. People can vote for their own leaders, a number of which are women. Far from being ruled by a regime that supports terrorism, Afghanistan is a fledgling democracy whose friendship and partnership are invaluable to the United States.

Our last hearing on Afghanistan was over a year ago, and we need to get an update on the progress that’s being made there. Since last summer, Afghanistan has held its first parliamentary and provincial elections in almost thirty years. December saw the first session of that inaugural parliament. Good men and women continue to step forward in Afghanistan and are taking active roles in their nation’s stability and reconstruction.

As expected, U.S. men and women continue to serve in the security sector, both within NATO and through the Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan. Military and civilians together are also building a better Afghanistan through Provincial Reconstruction Teams and U.S. Agency for International Development projects.

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Coalition partners are also maintaining or even increasing their commitment to Afghanistan's stability and reconstruction. This summer, the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force will take over primary security responsibility for three quarters of the country and will lead reconstruction efforts in northern, western, and southern Afghanistan.

The Afghan National Army continues to come online. One year ago, no ANA units were capable of taking the lead in security operations. This year six units serve on the frontlines of their own country's defense. A full forty combat units fight alongside coalition forces in the day-to-day effort to keep peace and build security in Afghanistan.

A lot of work remains to be done. Afghanistan and its partners must cut off any resurgence of Taliban influence and violence now while also clamping down on a serious poppy cultivation issue. No one denies that these are difficult problems and that the end is still far off, but I think the Afghans, Americans, and international partners prove every day that if we will give the people of Afghanistan the tools, they will fight for their nation's long-term stability and development. During today's hearing, I hope we hear how we can help you, as U.S. officials deeply involved in these efforts, to do your jobs better.

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