

February 7, 2012

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Secretary of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

I write to urge you to support the Afghan government in replacing poppy with sustainable crops by replicating the Helmand Food Zone in additional poppy-growing provinces in Afghanistan. It is essential to have as many alternative development projects on the ground as possible in Afghanistan before the U.S. withdrawal in 2014.

I recently met with Afghan Minister of Counternarcotics Zarar Ahmad Moqbel Osmani. He shared with me the impressive results of the Helmand Food Zone which has helped to reduce poppy cultivation in the province. He also shared his interest in expanding the Food Zone to five other provinces: Kandahar, Farah, Oruzgan, Nangarhar and Badakhshan. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), poppy cultivation in Helmand province has gone from 102,770 hectares in 2007 to 63,307 hectares in 2011. The Helmand Food Zone program is an integrated approach to eliminating poppy cultivation. It has four core elements:

- (1) A robust public information campaign by the provincial government;
- (2) Provision of alternative development inputs – such as seeds and fertilizer – to farmers to help diversify licit sources of income and achieve greater food security;
- (3) Increased law enforcement, including poppy eradication in areas that receive alternative development support and public information from the government; and
- (4) Support for local drug demand reduction efforts.

I understand that between 2008 and 2011, the Helmand Food Zone cost \$56 million and was funded by the U.S., British and Danish governments. I received a proposal from Minister Osmani which states that replicating the Helmand Food Zone in Kandahar would cost an estimated \$31,386,229 over three years, with 73 percent of these costs going toward alternative development programs. While I recognize that resources are limited, I urge the State Department and USAID to work with the Afghan Counternarcotics and Agriculture Ministries to target our assistance towards the replication of the Helmand Food Zone in other provinces. In particular, I ask that you review the feasibility of doing this in the suggested provinces of Kandahar, Farah, Oruzgan, Nangarhar and Badakhshan, which account for an estimated 35 percent of Afghan poppy.

A July 2010 report on Afghanistan issued by the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control explained, “The drug problem in Afghanistan cannot be ignored, because it is now a major source of funding for the Taliban.” Programs like the Helmand Food Zone are essential, because their success can ultimately help to cut off financing to the Taliban. Poppy cultivation and opium production provide the Taliban with a massive source of revenue. UNODC estimates that in 2009, the Afghan Taliban earned about \$155 million from the drug trade – a combination of taxing farmers, bazaar shopkeepers and drug traffickers moving heroin or raw opium out of the country in return for security protection along the route. This financing must be cut off. Eliminating the Afghan drug trade at its source by supporting small farmers is the best way to do this.

Finally, as the State Department considers support for the replication of the Helmand Food Zone, I urge you to work with the Afghan government to identify markets and safe transportation routes for alternative crops. Without securing domestic and international markets for products, alternative development will not succeed. For example, a January 1, 2012 *New York Times* article stated that finding markets for Afghan wheat can be difficult. Afghan cotton – another key alternate crop – cannot compete with cheaper Pakistani cotton.

Success in Afghanistan will depend in part on success in combating the country’s drug trade. Replication of the Helmand Food Zone in additional high poppy cultivation provinces will help to achieve the dual goal of strengthening Afghanistan’s economy while weakening the Taliban. I look forward to working with you to support the expansion of food zones in Afghanistan.

Sincerely,  
Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator