

## **Joint Media Statement issued by the Foreign Ministers of New Zealand and Afghanistan**

**Wellington, 18 March 2013**

Afghan Foreign Minister Dr Zalmay Rassoul and New Zealand Minister of Foreign Affairs Murray McCully met today in Wellington to discuss the bilateral relationship between Afghanistan and New Zealand. Minister Rassoul is on a two-day official visit to New Zealand.

The Ministers solemnly acknowledged the shared losses of both nations in the pursuit of a peaceful, prosperous and democratic Afghanistan. Dr. Rassoul expressed the profound gratitude of the Afghan people and government to Minister McCully for New Zealand's support and friendship with Afghanistan over the past decade.

In their discussions, the Ministers agreed that a new chapter will soon start in the two countries' relationship, with New Zealand withdrawing its Provincial Reconstruction Team in Bamyán province in April, in line with the transition process in Afghanistan.

Both Ministers noted that New Zealand has led the PRT in Bamyán since 2003 and has achieved much during the 10-year deployment. The PRT has contributed to international counter-terrorism efforts and improved security, development and governance in the province.

Minister McCully confirmed that New Zealand would remain committed to Afghanistan and would continue to play its part in international efforts to support the country. He briefed Minister Rassoul on New Zealand's ongoing military commitments to Afghanistan, including 8 NZDF trainers to the Afghan National Army Officer Academy, 12 NZDF personnel working at the ISAF Special Operations Forces mainly in intelligence and planning roles, and a small number of officers based at the headquarters of the International Security Assistance Force, the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan and in New Zealand's national support element.

The Ministers discussed New Zealand's development programme in Bamyán, which would continue beyond the withdrawal of the PRT, and in line with the development priorities of the Afghan government. This includes the Renewable Energy Project (US\$20 million) and the Agriculture Support Project (US\$3.7 million).

Minister McCully also noted New Zealand's in principle commitment of US\$2 million a year from 2015 to the Afghan National Security Forces for rule of law projects in Bamyán.

The Ministers agreed on the importance of working together to promote sustainable economic development for a stable, secure and prosperous future in Afghanistan.

Both Ministers agreed that New Zealand and Afghanistan have forged a bond from shared sacrifice and a commitment to peace and security.

The Ministers agreed to look for opportunities in the future for exchanges on both the bilateral relationship and international issues of mutual interest.