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ACBAR (Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief) supports a joint letter signed by 54 nongovernmental organizations urging NATO to implement its mandate and expand the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) as envisaged in the Bonn Agreement.

The Secretary-General of NATO, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, warned NATO representatives last month that they are “flirting with failure” in Afghanistan.

“Security is markedly deteriorating, affecting ordinary Afghans as well as the assistance community. Humanitarian space continues to be diminished. The Istanbul conference may prove to be the last chance for the international community to face its obligations by devoting sufficient forces to guarantee security throughout Afghanistan” said Barbara Stapleton, ACBAR’s Advocacy and Policy Coordinator. “At the same time, the crisis in public confidence in the Bonn process is deepening as the country approaches elections, which many Afghans fear will not be free or fair due to the lack of neutral security and little progress in a genuine disarmament process.”

Fatal attacks on NGO staff and other civilians engaged in reconstruction are now occurring in areas of the country previously judged comparatively safe. “Since 1 January there have been 19 people in the humanitarian community killed and 11 wounded. This situation is leading to the withdrawal of international humanitarian staff from project sites in more and more parts of the country. Afghan staff of international and national NGOs face a stark choice between continuing their work or staying at home. Deteriorating security has resulted in an ongoing decline in the implementing capacity of all actors in the delivery of assistance and development” said Dave Mather, Vice-Chair of ACBAR.

“Many NGOs have supported repeated calls to the UN Security Council for the expansion of ISAF since the middle of 2002” said Barbara Stapleton, “but the eventual adjustment of ISAF’s mandate in October 2003 has only resulted in one provincial reconstruction team (PRT) in Kunduz. Afghanistan continues to be sidelined as international attention and resources remain focused on Iraq.”

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