



BACKGROUND: Afghan Civilian Assistance Program

U.S. combat operations in Afghanistan sometimes result in loss of civilian life, limb and property, causing tremendous pain and suffering among the population. If not properly addressed, these losses can also breed anger and resentment toward international forces. In creating the Afghan Civilian Assistance Program (ACAP), Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (D-VT) demonstrated his belief that the United States has a moral responsibility to help these families and communities, and that, further, it is in the nation's interest to do so.

ACAP helps Afghan civilian war victims recover by developing sustainable assistance packages based on their specific needs: by establishing or expanding a business, restoring livelihoods by replacing livestock, crops, infrastructure or equipment, rebuilding or constructing shelter, providing literacy and vocational training, education support for school-aged children, medical treatment, and other in-kind assistance. ACAP also offers community assistance, particularly when a military incident has affected a large area or when security concerns prevent individual assistance. ACAP projects are designed to sustain families and rebuild lives for the long term.

ACAP is a USAID project currently administered by IOM (International Organization for Migration) in Afghanistan.

History

In 1989, Senator Leahy created The Leahy War Victims Fund to help conflict victims in developing countries. In October 2001, when the U.S. invaded Afghanistan, Senator Leahy again recognized the need to help the war's civilian victims. The 2002 Supplemental Appropriations Act (Public Law 107-206) and the 2003 Consolidated Appropriations Resolution (Public Law 108-7) helped establish the Afghanistan Transition Initiative (also known as the Leahy Initiative). Both included language providing funds to assist Afghan families and communities suffering losses as a result of military operations. In 2005, the consolidated effort became the Afghan Civilian Assistance Program (ACAP).

Funding

To date, Congress has appropriated \$81 million for the Afghan Civilian Assistance Program with another \$20 million pending in the 2011 budget.

Impact

As of June 2010 ACAP has:

- * Provided customized assistance to more than 5,000 people
- * Delivered 4,183 small business start-ups
- * Rebuilt 1,767 homes
- * Completed four small community projects totaling \$844,568
- * Documented 1,260 incidents involving civilians harmed¹

¹ USAID Fact Sheet: Afghan Civilian Assistance Program (ACAP) June 2010. <http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/documents/document/document/1021> June 21010 <http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/documents/document/document/1021>

"Nowadays, if you get a piece of bread from someone, you are happy. So this [ACAP] aid is very important. It will help to expand my supplies and to expand business. It will bring positive effects to my family. With this business, we can pay off the loans that we owe to people. Thank you."

-CIVIC Afghan report, Mirweiss, Interview #41, July 21, 2008, Kandahar city, Kandahar province.

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Since ACAP provides sustainable livelihood assistance rather than cash, beneficiaries who received aid frequently told CIVIC that their quality of life and economic situations were significantly improved. Some now had better livelihood opportunities than existed prior to the incident. In addition to providing a source of income, ACAP has helped reintegrate the disabled into their communities when social stigma would otherwise have prevented them from finding employment or receiving an education. This tailored aid meets a variety of needs for families and, in many cases, has been extremely effective in helping victims rebuild their lives.²

CIVIC spoke with one young man whose arm was incapacitated when a suicide blast exploded near him in the central market of Gardez city. ACAP helped pay for an apprenticeship as a mechanic and purchased the equipment he needed to start his business. He pointed to his partner, who was his teacher during the apprenticeship, “I was a student of this man [senior mechanic] but now I am better than he is!”

CIVIC visited the tailoring shop of Khaled whose leg was amputated when he was 14 years old due to a cluster munition explosion. ACAP helped Khaled receive training as a tailor and to set up a shop for himself. Seven years after losing his leg, Khaled’s tailoring business was thriving and he could barely keep up with the work.³

CIVIC is working to ensure that ACAP continues to most effectively provide help to the thousands of civilians suffering losses as a result of military operations in Afghanistan.

For success stories and additional information:

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² CIVIC, *Losing the People: the Costs and Consequences of Civilian Suffering in Afghanistan*, February 2009.

³ *Ibid.*

Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict works on behalf of war victims by advocating that warring parties recognize and help the civilians they harm. CIVIC supports the principle that it is never acceptable for a warring party to ignore civilian suffering. In 2005, CIVIC’s founder Marla Ruzicka was killed in Iraq by a suicide bomb while advocating for families of victims. CIVIC honors her legacy and strives to sustain her vision.

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