

TO: President-Elect Barack Obama

FROM: Global Social Concerns Group, SCUSA Conference, 2008

SUBJECT: A Brief on Health in Afghanistan and its Global Repercussions

Dear President-Elect Obama,

Approximately half of the developing world is currently suffering from health problems caused by unclean water and poor sanitation. Most of those who are suffering are not able to attend school or work, thus preventing them from being productive members of society.¹ Working with other nations, donors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other community actors, the United States must implement policies that make basic healthcare needs an essential component of societies across the globe. The reduction of disease and the provision of basic healthcare through the implementation of a sustainable and self-sufficient healthcare system will contribute to the national interests of the United States and the security and economic prosperity of the international community.

In the development of our policy recommendations we have made a few important assumptions. We assume that there will be stability in a region if citizens are provided with their basic needs (such as food, clean water, proper housing etc.), if the citizens are protected and secure, and if the citizens have confidence in their government, thereby giving the government credibility. Addressing health issues will contribute to the stability of a state. It will do so through the establishment of a sustainable and self-sufficient healthcare system which will combat infectious diseases, promote long and productive lives, and develop healthy and effective communities. Finally, in order to implement and establish such a healthcare system we assume that we will have adequate resources and that the target nation will accept our resources and guidance.

To articulate our proposal for the establishment of a sustainable and self-sufficient healthcare system, we will outline our plan by using the situation in Afghanistan as a case study. A comprehensive healthcare approach is necessary for the stability and security of Afghanistan as a state. More importantly, the stability of Afghanistan is vital to the national interests, including physical and economic security, of the United States.

Afghanistan is the fourth poorest country in the world and its health indicators suggest that without significant support and relief, the country will be on "life support" from the United States and other developed nations for years to come.² Its infant and maternal mortality rates are among the worst in the world, with approximately 157 children dying per 1,000 live births and one-in-four mothers dying as a result of child birth. The average life expectancy for an Afghan man or woman is 44 years, the seventh lowest in the world. Even with such terrible health realities, the Afghan government only spends one percent of their gross domestic product on health, which is approximately \$20 per person per year.

With these statistics in mind, it is essential to address the basic health needs of the Afghani people. By improving the overall health of the citizens of Afghanistan, stability can be established through the reduction of national security threats. It is estimated that over two million

¹ Dr. Jim Kim, Partners in Health, 2005

² Lieutenant-General Douglas Lute, 5-Nov, 2008

Afghan citizens have fled to Pakistan; Afghan refugees in Pakistan may serve as a support base and recruiting ground for both Al Qaeda and the Taliban in the region. By increasing the overall health and well-being of the people of Afghanistan, citizens will be reluctant to migrate to other states, thereby reducing support for terrorist initiatives. Furthermore, healthy and productive citizens are essential to the economic development and prosperity of the people. By increasing the wellbeing and health of the population, Afghanistan will become more productive. The education system will expand at all levels, the economy will grow due to a healthier, larger, and more productive workforce, and both men and women will be able to employ practices of gender equality.

Three important steps must be taken to establish a successful, sustainable and self-sufficient healthcare system in Afghanistan. First, there must be cooperation and collaboration among all actors. An open channel of communication must be established between state and non-state actors, including the governments of Afghanistan and the U.S., NGO's, international donors, and local communities and civilians. Second, a basic health services package must be created. This package must include the creation of community health centers, basic health education services, vaccinations, sanitation (including clean water, waste management, hygiene, and nutrition), and the use of data-sharing information communication technologies (i.e. cell phones) to track health updates. With respect to personnel, an increase in the number of skilled and unskilled health professionals, through scholarships and programs designed to keep people working locally, will increase health. Third, we must work to create resilient communities through open and inclusive dialogue at the community level aimed at empowerment of the local populous to take health matters into their own hands. This dialogue must again involve all internal actors ranging from the government to local tribes as well as external actors. All implemented systems must focus on training and hiring personnel locally, thus ensuring the sustainability of these programs.

We must now address the point at which the United States can say that we have succeeded. Life expectancy and infant mortality are two of the primary indicators of health conditions around the world. Once we see a measurable increase in life expectancy and a decrease in infant mortality from our baseline data, we will know that we are proceeding in a positive direction. A coalition of medical and public health professionals will be best-suited to determine the appropriate levels of change in those variables from the status quo, but this data must be consistently reevaluated.

The healthcare system that we have described has been designed to be globally-deployable, nation- and culture-specific, and supportive of U.S. security interests. Through these mechanisms, we will be able to enhance regional and global security. This system can be readily applied to other areas of global social concern beyond health, such as disaster relief, human trafficking, and mass human migration. The central principle of government and third-party collaboration is critical to success in all areas, and we view this to be a cornerstone of our plan. The process of collective brainstorming with all involved actors to determine actual, as opposed to perceived needs, will increase stability within any state. Increased stability in a state leads to increased security. The security of one state enhances the security of all others. If we can succeed here in Afghanistan with one of the most challenging problems we face today, we can succeed anywhere while re-assuming our role as a moral leader across the globe.

Most respectfully,

Global Social Concerns Group