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DEAR MR ADAMS:

AS AN ANALYST AND PARTICIPANT IN AFGHAN AFFAIRS FOR THE PAST 30 YEARS I WANT YOU TO CONSIDER AN ISSUE OF IMPORTANCE TO ME, TO YOU AND TO OUR GOVERNMENT RELATING TO OPIUM POPPY PRODUCTION IN AFGHANISTAN.

THE TALIBAN HAVE BANNED THE CULTIVATION OF OPIUM POPPY IN THE PARTS OF AFGHANISTAN UNDER THEIR CONTROL. THE FARMERS HAVE NOT PLANTED POPPY THIS CROP SEASON - AT LEAST IN THE CENTRAL HELMAND REGION OF SOUTHERN AFGHANISTAN, THE CENTER OF OPIUM PRODUCTION. THIS IS A MAJOR EVENT IN THE REGION AND FOR THE WORLD AND IT IS BEING IGNORED. AS THE WORLD LEADER AND A LONG TERM FRIEND OF AFGHANISTAN, WE, THE U.S.A., MUST TAKE SOME ACTION IN SUPPORT OF THIS VERY BRAVE ACTION ON THE PART OF THE TALIBAN.

IN THIS PAPER, I WILL PROPOSE AN ACTION THAT COULD BE TAKEN AND WHY. I OFFER MY SERVICES TO DISCUSS THIS ISSUE WITH YOU OR ANYONE ON YOUR STAFF, AND TO ORGANIZE AND FIELD THE PROPOSED PROJECT. I HAVE A LONG TERM AND STRONG ATTACHMENT TO THIS SOUTHERN REGION OF AFGHANISTAN WHERE I WORKED FOR SOME 8 YEARS. I HAVE BEEN VISITING THE REGION PERIODICALLY FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS. WE SHOULD TAKE SOME QUICK AND PRODUCTIVE ACTION IN RECOGNITION OF THE POPPY BAN. AND I AM READY AND WILLING TO ORGANIZE AND FIELD THE NECESSARY ACTION.

SINCE MY RETURN FROM THE REGION IN LATE FALL 2000, I HAVE BEEN IN CONTINUOUS CONTACT WITH AFGHANS WHO GO TO HELMAND ON A REGULAR BASIS WITH VARIOUS NGO'S. THESE MEN ARE OBSERVERS AND INFORMANTS THAT I HAVE WORKED WITH FOR THE PAST 2 TO 5 YEARS. MY INFORMATION IS CURRENT.

IN LATE SUMMER 2000, BEFORE OPIUM POPPY PLANTING SEASON IN THE FALL, MULLAH OMER, EMIR OF THE TALIBAN, BANNED THE PLANTING OF POPPY IN THE AREAS UNDER HIS CONTROL. THERE WERE MANY DOUBTING THOMASES THAT SAID "IMPOSSIBLE". THIS WAS A MAJOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC MOVE ON THE PART OF MULLAH OMER. HE BANNED THE PRIMARY CASH CROP, THE BASIS OF THE LOCAL AG ECONOMY, FOR THE SAME REGION WHERE HE ENJOYS A MAJOR PART OF HIS POLITICAL SUPPORT, THE HELMAND REGION.

THERE HAS BEEN SOME WISHFUL THINKING THAT THE DROUGHT WOULD CUT POPPY PRODUCTION. THIS MAY BE TRUE FOR SOME AREAS DEPENDENT ON RAIN FALL OR FOR KOREZ SYSTEMS BUT IT DOES NOT AFFECT THE PRIMARY PRODUCTION AREA OF CENTRAL HELMAND. THE CENTRAL HELMAND REGION IS IRRIGATED BY THE BOGHRA CANAL, WHICH WE (U.S.A.) BUILT. THE WATER IS FROM THE HELMAND RIVER WHICH ENCOMPASSES 40 PERCENT OF THE SURFACE WATER OF AFGHANISTAN. SINCE THE HELMAND RIVER SOURCE IS FROM SNOW PACK IN CENTRAL AFGHANISTAN, THE DROUGHT DID NOT AND WILL NOT ON THE SHORT TERM REDUCE OPIUM PRODUCTION IN CENTRAL HELMAND. THERE IS ALWAYS SOME WATER IN THE HELMAND RIVER AND THE BOGHRA CANAL. THE POPPY CROP IS IRRIGATED FROM THE RIVER AND DOES NOT DEPEND ON REGIONAL RAIN FALL.

UNDCP CUT THEIR OPIUM POPPY PROJECT IN THE KANDAHAR AND JALALABAD REGIONS AT THE END OF 2000. I UNDERSTAND THERE IS ONE MAN REMAINING IN THE KANDAHAR OFFICE ONLY TO MAINTAIN A PRESENCE. AS I NOTED TO MR. GEDDES OF UNDCP IN 1996, THIS PROJECT WAS MIS-FOCUSED FROM THE START. IT DID NOT FOCUS ON THE AREAS OF PRIMARY PRODUCTION, WHERE PEOPLE HAD A HISTORY OF PRIMARY CASH CROPS BEFORE POPPY (TO WHICH THEY COULD RETURN) OR LIKE HELMAND, WHERE THE FARMERS HAD LIVING MEMORY OF AGREEMENTS NOT TO GROW NARCOTICS. I UNDERSTAND THAT IN THE KANDAHAR AREA THE PROJECT PRIMARILY FOCUSED ON AREAS IRRIGATED BY KOREZ SYSTEMS (RELATIVELY SMALL SCALE AGRICULTURE) AND HAD ABOUT 10 PERCENT OF THEIR LAND IN POPPY, AT THE START. APPARENTLY POPPY PRODUCTION INCREASED THROUGH TIME. ON THE SIDE, I WAS TOLD THAT THE AREAS WERE SELECTED BECAUSE OF SOME POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS RATHER THAN FOR POTENTIAL IMPACT. IN SHORT, FOR WHATEVER REASONS, THAT PROJECT FAILED AND IS GONE.

F.A.O. HAS A VERY SMALL SEED GRAIN PROJECT IN THE CENTRAL HELMAND REGION BUT NOTHING FOCUSED ON THE NARCOTICS PROBLEM OR A CASH CROP ALTERNATIVE FOR THE BANNED OPIUM POPPY.

WHEN I LEFT PESHAWAR IN NOVEMBER 2000, I WAS TOLD THAT THE POPPY BAN WAS HOLDING IN HELMAND, AND THAT THE FARMERS DID NOT PLANT POPPY THIS YEAR. EVERY COMMUNICATION WITH MY CONTACTS, INCLUDING E-MAIL TODAY, HAS REINFORCED THIS OBSERVATION. THE HELMAND FARMERS DID NOT PLANT POPPY THIS YEAR. THIS IS A POINT THAT THE MEDIA AND A VARIETY OF SPOKESPERSONS OF SEVERAL GOVERNMENTS, INCLUDING OUR OWN, HAVE IGNORED. I HAVE POINTED THIS FACT OUT TO BOTH MR. SHEEHAN AND MR. INDERFURTH IN E-MAILS AS A RESPONSE TO SOME OF THEIR STATEMENTS TO THE MEDIA ON AFGHANISTAN AND NARCOTICS. I DID NOT EXPECT NOR RECEIVE RESPONSE TO THOSE COMMUNICATIONS.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT AND MUST NOT BE IGNORED: THE HELMAND FARMERS, IN THE CENTER OF OPIUM POPPY PRODUCTION FOR AFGHANISTAN, DID NOT PLANT POPPY THIS YEAR. HELMAND IS A REGION WHERE WE HAVE HAD A LONG ASSOCIATION, BEGINNING IN 1946 WHEN MORRISON-KNUTSEN CONSTRUCTION COMPANY OF BOISE, IDAHO STARTED BUILDING THE BOGHRA CANAL. WE MAINTAINED A PRESENCE IN THE REGION UNTIL 1979 AND THE RUSSIAN INVASION. WE SUPPORTED THE AFGHANS THROUGH 10 YEARS OF WAR AGAINST THE USSR. THEY FOUGHT THE LAST BATTLE OF THE COLD WAR FOR US AND LOST MORE THAN A MILLION PEOPLE IN THE PROCESS. WE HAVE A LOT OF LONG TERM FRIENDS IN THE REGION THAT TRUST US.

SOME EFFORT MUST BE MADE TO SUPPORT THE PRESENT OPIUM POPPY BAN. THERE IS THE POSSIBILITY THAT POPPY AS A CASH CROP WILL BE ALLOWED TO RETURN. OPIUM POPPY WAS THE ESTABLISHED MAJOR CASH CROP FOR THE REGION; THE BASIS OF THE REGIONAL AG ECONOMY WITH A WELL ESTABLISHED CREDIT AND MARKETING SYSTEM. MULLAH OMER, I UNDERSTAND, HAS ASKED FOR HELP WITH ALTERNATIVE CROPS AND/OR SOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL FARMER INCOMES VIS-À-VIS THE POPPY BAN. SINCE 1996, IN MY ON-GOING DISCUSSIONS WITH TALIBAN OFFICIALS AND FARMERS OF THE REGION THE SAME REQUEST IS REPEATED AND IS PARAPHRASED HERE: "HELP US WITH THE REHABILITATION OF THE IRRIGATION SYSTEM THAT WOULD ALLOW US TO RETURN TO THE DOUBLE CROPPING PATTERNS OF BEFORE THE WAR AND WE WILL END OPIUM PRODUCTION. IT IS AN EVIL CROP." AS I HAVE NOTED BEFORE, HELP IS NEEDED WITH CREDIT, FERTILIZER AND MARKETING THE ALTERNATIVES.

ACCORDING TO MY SOURCES AS OUTLINED ABOVE, NO ONE, NO ORGANIZATION, NO GOVERNMENT IS DOING ANYTHING TO SUPPORT THE OPIUM POPPY BAN. THIS IS A MAJOR MISTAKE UNLESS THIS INACTION RELATES TO A POLICY OF SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY. WE, AS WELL AS THE REST OF THE OF THE ILLEGAL DRUG CONSUMING

WORLD SHOULD BE WORKING TO HELP END OPIUM POPPY PRODUCTION IN AFGHANISTAN. OPIUM PRODUCTION WILL NOT END BY ITSELF. AS NOTED, MULLAH OMER ALREADY HAS TAKEN THE FIRST STEP IN THIS DIRECTION.

SOME COUNTRY NEEDS TO HELP TO INSURE THAT OPIUM POPPY DOES NOT RETURN TO HELMAND, AND THAT COUNTRY SHOULD BE US, THE U.S.A. THE HELMAND FARMERS RESPECT AND TRUST US. IN MY EXPERIENCE, THE HELMAND FARMERS AND THE TALIBAN HAVE LITTLE RESPECT FOR OR TRUST IN THE U.N. THE BRITISH SHOULD ALSO BE ASKED TO HELP SINCE THEY BUILT THE COTTON GINS AND SUPPORTED THE GROWTH OF COTTON PRODUCTION IN THE REGION BEGINNING IN THE 1960'S. COTTON IS THE MOST OBVIOUS AND UNDERSTOOD CASH CROP ALTERNATIVE FOR HELMAND.

COTTON WAS THE MAIN CASH CROP BEFORE THE RUSSIAN INVASION. THE FARMERS KNOW AND CONTINUE TO GROW COTTON. ONE OF TWO COTTON GINS STILL FUNCTIONS. WHILE THERE IS A GOOD INTERNATIONAL MARKET FOR THE COTTON, THE HELMAND COTTON INDUSTRY NEEDS ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT TO COMPETE.

A SERIOUS GESTURE SHOULD BE MADE TO SHOW OUR SUPPORT OF THE POPPY BAN BEFORE THE SPRING 2001 PLANTING SEASON. ONE SUCH ACTION COULD BE DONE WITHIN THE SHORT TIME PERIOD REMAINING WITH SEVERAL THOUSAND DOLLARS WORTH OF VEGETABLE SEED. STANDARD VEGETABLES OF THE REGION ARE ONION, TOMATO, CUCUMBER AND OKRA. ONION WOULD BE A PARTICULARLY GOOD VEGETABLE CROP BECAUSE IT STORES AND SHIPS WELL, AND USUALLY HAS A GOOD MARKET IN THE SUB-CONTINENT. QUALITY PEANUT SEED, A GROWING REGIONAL CASH CROP WITH A GOOD MARKET IN HERAT AND IRAN, WOULD ALSO BE WELCOMED. AND, AS NOTED, PRIMARY SUPPORT IS NEEDED TO ENABLE THE COTTON CROP TO BE PLANTED IN SPRING 2001. ALL SEED WOULD BE SOLD AT REASONABLE PRICES.

IN APRIL 2000, I RECORDED INSECT/DISEASE PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY SOME HELMAND FARMERS WITH THE COTTON CROP. JERRY RANN, A RETIRED USAID ENTOMOLOGIST WHO HAD WORKED FOR SOME 8 YEARS IN HELMAND BEFORE THE WAR, IDENTIFIED THE OFFENDING INSECT FROM THE DESCRIPTION AND SENT PAGES FROM A USAID PUBLICATION HE HAD WRITTEN YEARS AGO ON THE PROBLEM AND WHAT INSECTICIDES TO USE. I FORWARDED THIS INFORMATION TO THE REGION THROUGH NGO CONTACTS. HOPEFULLY THE INSECTICIDES WILL BE AVAILABLE IN THE LOCAL BAZAARS. THEY CERTAINLY WOULD BE AVAILABLE IN PAKISTAN. THE APPEARANCE OF A KNOWN EX-USAID

INSECT CONTROL EXPERT IN THE REGION TO HELP ORGANIZE AGAINST A REPEAT OF THE PROBLEM WOULD GIVE US ADDITIONAL CREDIBILITY.

ON A SHORT-TERM BASIS AND USING EXISTING NGO'S, IT WOULD BE SOMEWHAT SIMPLE TO ORGANIZE AND FIELD A STRONG U.S. GESTURE OF SUPPORT FOR THE OPIUM POPPY BAN. THIS EFFORT WOULD GO FAR TO INSURE A NON-RETURN OF OPIUM POPPY PRODUCTION. THE PROPOSED ACTION SHOULD BE COMBINED WITH CONTINUING DIALOGUE WITH THE TALIBAN AND THE FARMERS ABOUT WHAT IS EXPECTED FROM THEM.

ASSUMING THAT WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE AN END TO OPIUM POPPY PRODUCTION IN AFGHANISTAN, WE NEED TO TAKE ACTION NOW TO AT LEAST RECOGNIZE THE POSITIVE ACTION TAKEN BY THE TALIBAN. GIVEN THE TIME RESTRAINT, THE ABOVE SUGGESTIONS WOULD BE A FIRST STEP ON OUR PART. MULLAH OMER HAS ALREADY TAKEN THE FIRST MAJOR STEP IN THIS DIRECTION. WHETHER WE LIKE HIM OR NOT OR RECOGNIZE HIS GOVERNMENT OR NOT, THE GOAL SHOULD BE TO SUPPORT THE BAN TO END OPIUM POPPY PRODUCTION IN AFGHANISTAN.

I WOULD BE HAPPY TO ORGANIZE AND FIELD SUCH AN ACTION THROUGH ONE OR MORE NGO'S. IT IS A MATTER OF DRAWING TOGETHER AND ORGANIZING INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS WITH EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE HELMAND VALLEY OF AFGHANISTAN. IT COULD BE DONE QUICKLY AND RELATIVELY INEXPENSIVELY. IN THE PROCESS OF FIELDING THIS ACTION, OTHER SIMILAR, SUPPORTIVE ACTIONS COULD BE IDENTIFIED AND OTHER DONORS RECRUITED.

IN OCTOBER 2000, WHILE IN PAKISTAN, I WROTE A CONCEPT PAPER RELATING TO HELMAND. IT CONCERNED A RESPONSE TO DROUGHT RELIEF AND REHABILITATION OF THE BOGHRA IRRIGATION SYSTEM USING FOOD-FOR-WORK HAND LABOR DRAWN FROM DROUGHT HIT AREAS TO THE NORTH. THIS WORK WOULD ALSO PROVIDE ALTERNATIVE INCOMES FOR PAST OPIUM POPPY FARMERS. I HAD THE DOCUMENT DISTRIBUTED TO NGO'S AND OTHER AGENCIES IN THE AREA. YOUR OFFICE IN ISLAMABAD HAS A COPY, AS DOES THE DISASTER RELIEF OFFICE IN THE EMBASSY. BUT THERE WAS VERY LITTLE FEEDBACK. MY INTERPRETATION OF THE NON-RESPONSE WAS THAT ORGANIZATIONS USED TO RESPONDING TO DISASTER RELIEF WOULD FIND IT EASIER TO ORGANIZE FREE FOOD DISTRIBUTION THAN TO ORGANIZE A WORK FORCE FOCUSED ON IRRIGATION REHABILITATION. I WILL FAX A COPY OF THIS CONCEPT PAPER TO YOU SEPERATELY.

I HAVE OUTLINED THE SITUATION WITH THE POPPY BAN IN THE HELMAND REGION OF AFGHANISTAN. THIS HAS BEEN THE REGION PRODUCING A VERY HIGH PERCENTAGE OF THE AFGHAN OPIUM. THE BAN MUST RECEIVE SOME RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT FROM OUTSIDE. PRESENTLY THERE IS NO SUPPORT OF THE OPIUM POPPY BAN FROM OUTSIDE, ALTHOUGH HELP HAS BEEN REQUESTED FOR ALTERNATIVE CROPS, SUPPLIMENTARY INCOMES FOR THE FARMERS AND IRRIGATION REHABILITATION. WITHOUT SOME HELP, IT IS POSSIBLE AND LIKELY THAT THE FARMERS WILL BE ALLOWED TO RETURN TO POPPY PRODUCTION.

I FEEL VERY STRONGLY THAT WE, THE U.S.A., SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD IN RESPONDING TO AND SUPPORTING THE OPIUM POPPY BAN. CLEARLY NO ONE ELSE WILL TAKE THE NECESSARY ACTION IN THE CONTEXT OF A WORLD GROANING ABOUT AFGHAN OPIUM PRODUCTION. WE CANNOT DEPEND ON THE UNDCP TO TAKE ANY TIMELY ACTION.

I WOULD BE HAPPY TO DISCUSS THIS PROPOSAL WITH YOU, YOUR STAFF OR ANYONE ELSE THAT MIGHT HAVE AN INTEREST IN TAKING AN IMPORTANT AND MAJOR STEP TO INSURE THE END OF OPIUM PRODUCTION IN AFGHANISTAN. I OFFER MY SERVICES TO ORGANIZE THIS PROPOSED ACTION, PUT IT IN THE FIELD, SUPERVISE AND MANAGE IT. I WOULD ORGANIZE THE WORK THROUGH NGO'S THAT I KNOW, THAT HAVE THE NECESSARY CONTACTS AND WORK EXPERIENCE IN THAT REGION. I HAVE THE NECESSARY EXPERIENCE, CONTACTS AND DESIRE TO DO IT. I HAVE A STRONG ATTACHMENT TO AND EMPHY FOR THE PEOPLE THAT LIVE THERE. WE MUST NOT LET THIS UNILATERAL POPPY BAN GO UNNOTICED AND WITHOUT SUPPORT. THE WESTERN WORLD IS THE PRIMARY CONSUMER OF THIS ILLEGAL DRUG FROM WHICH THE FARMERS EARNED A MARGINAL LIVING BY WESTERN STANDARDS. WE SHOULD HELP TO INSURE THAT OPIUM POPPY DOES NOT RETURN TO THE HELMAND REGION THROUGH WHAT WOULD BE A RELATIVELY MINOR INVESTMENT AND BY HELPING THE FARMERS TO MAKE THE CHANGE.

SINCERELY,

RICHARD B SCOTT