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Richard Adams
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Dear Mr. Adams,

After I sent you the Final Report on the work in Helmand, Afghanistan last winter, I realized that you have little information about me or my background. I have enclosed a copy of my CV for your information. Other than Mr. Parker and Mr. McHugh, the only other person that I have known from your organization, over a longer term, was Stan Samuelson.

As noted in our telephone conversation, I would be interested in other consultations and short-term work assignments in the Helmand Valley, an area that I know well. Major changes in opium poppy production can be made in Helmand with a combination of actions outlined in my final report. One agency is not likely to have the funding or skills for such a program but the combination of the UNDCP, U.S. and other interested national agencies in a coordinated effort could make a major impact.

As noted, the Taliban have asked for help with the agricultural economy of Helmand as a prerequisite to eliminate the primary cash crop of the region: opium poppy. I have been having periodic discussions with them over the past three years on this subject, as have others. Under present conditions, politically the Taliban are in no position to eliminate the region's primary cash crop. They receive perhaps most of their political, if not economic support from this southeast corner of Afghanistan, Kandahar and Helmand provinces. With help, the Taliban and the farmers would return to the pre-war cash crop of cotton. The farmers understand the crop and many still grow it. The Taliban have the infrastructure to process the crop with their two cotton gins (one in operation) but not being trained technicians, marketers or managers they need help to profit from the crop that could replace poppy.

We got their attention, confidence and trust this past winter with the work outlined in my final report. In the past, one of the problems for the area was not having adequate water during the hot season when cotton and corn are grown as the second primary crops of the year. The de-silting work was continued down the Boghra canal and, I understand was completed in September. Some drainage work was initiated, all with residual funds from INL. Most of the area irrigated from the Boghra canal now should have more than adequate water...too much in fact. With the drainage system in the area still badly silted, the problems should now be getting the drain water out of the area and waterlogging. These problems were already apparent last winter. As with most crops, poppy and cotton do not do well in over-damp soils. The priority now must be on cleaning the drainage system in the area. Much of this work can be done with hand labor which would bring greater benefit to the local population. But this work needs to be done during the warmer seasons of the year since it means men working standing in water...not a winter action. Discussions with the Taliban and the farmers beginning in the spring on opium poppy reduction in response to a major drain cleaning effort could have a major impact but, I emphasize, the discussions must be directly with the Taliban administrators in the region. Without complete and direct Taliban involvement, the results should be expected to be limited. The Taliban and the farmers must believe and trust the persons that are making the proposals. Many people and organizations have discussed the situation but few have taken any action. And the proposed work should be underway well prior to the poppy planting season in October, i.e., spring, summer and fall work period. Opium poppy can be eliminated in Helmand through development actions and continuous discussion with the Taliban and the farmers. It is unfortunate that this program got sidetracked by bad/delayed timing for the agreement with the farmers and the lack of direct Taliban involvement last year, and the suspension of funding this year.

I would be happy to discuss these issues with you at your convenience. I hope to go back into the region this spring on business, perhaps in March, and I would be available at that time for additional work in Helmand.

Sincerely yours,

Richard B. Scott