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Canadian Voices in Afghanistan

Q&A with Mike Capstick, Peace Dividend Trust Country Director

Mike Capstick is country director of [Peace Dividend Trust Afghanistan](#), a non-profit organization whose projects are funded by the Government of Canada and UK Department for International Development.

What is the main focus of your organization?

Peace Dividend Trust works to make peace and humanitarian operations more efficient, effective and equitable by encouraging international actors to spend their money on local goods and services. This helps to develop the local marketplace, create jobs, and generate tax revenues – all of which support economic recovery and the restoration of stability. Since PDT started working in Afghanistan in 2006, we have facilitated the flow of more than US\$400 million into the Afghan economy, created and/or sustained at least 2,000 local jobs, and developed the only online business directory in Afghanistan, which now profiles over 5,000 [Afghan businesses](#). PDT now has field offices in the provinces of Kandahar, Nangarhar, Balkh and Helmand. Business development services offered free of charge in addition to the business directory include tender distribution, business matchmaking, training, marketplace information and advocacy. PDT also works with an array of actors to promote “Afghan First” procurement initiatives, providing technical assistance to agencies wishing to develop Afghan First policies and increase their local procurement levels. We also assist these agencies in communicating their policies internally and externally.



Mike Capstick, Peace Dividend
Trust Country Director

Why did you decide to come to Afghanistan?

I first came to Afghanistan in 2005 as a Canadian Forces officer to lead the first Strategic Advisory Team that provided strategic planning assistance to a wide variety of Afghan government ministries and agencies. During that one-year deployment, I came to understand the human suffering that Afghanistan has endured over three decades of conflict and, at the same time, was tremendously impressed with the resilience of the people of Afghanistan and their will to rebuild Afghanistan. After retiring from the Canadian Forces in 2006, I advocated for Canadian support of the Afghan people, delivered training to a variety of groups and worked in Kabul in the governance sector. In January 2009 I returned to Kabul to work on a temporary basis with PDT. After working with its tremendous Afghan staff for a few months, I decided to accept PDT's offer to take up the post of country director in May 2009.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

The people. PDT has a dedicated staff, both international and Afghan, who work well together as a team. The project is worthwhile, is making a real difference and it is very rewarding to

see the successes of the Afghan businesses that we work with.

What changes have you seen since you started working in Afghanistan?

In spite of the security situation, Afghanistan continues to make good progress in any number of areas. For example, in 2005 there were no privately owned Afghan banks, today there are 15. The range of goods and services available in the Afghan marketplace continues to expand and the quality keeps improving. Kabul now has a decent supply of electricity and Afghans are investing in the re-construction of their own country as evidenced by the amazing construction boom in Kabul. Of course there's much more to be done and very serious problems exist that will take resources, patience and a well coordinated partnership between the Afghan people and the international community.

What do you think Canadians should know about Afghanistan that they are not learning from the mainstream media?

Canadians are not seeing the resilience of the Afghan people and their determination to make their kids' lives better than theirs. Our domestic view is totally shaped by the coverage of combat operations in Kandahar, casualties and violence. As important as these are, they don't tell the whole story - the story of people recovering from a national trauma that we, as Canadians, can not even begin to understand. The vast majority of Afghans are not insurgents, fighters, drug lords or corrupt officials on the take. Instead, they're hard working people with families, friends and hopes for a better future. Most simply want what Canadians got on Confederation in 1867 - "Peace, Order and Good Government." They just need support to attain that aspiration.

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