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Ad Campaign Urges PM Harper to Call off Afghanistan Military Offensive

(Ottawa) Today the Rideau Institute initiated an ad campaign to stem the growing number of civilians killed in the Afghan war. It calls on Prime Minister Harper to urge U.S. and NATO leadership to call off the plan to launch a major offensive against insurgents inside the city of Kandahar, which risks many more civilian casualties.

The U.S., which has largely assumed control of Western military operations in Afghanistan, has planned for months to “root out” insurgents. But Kandahar residents are opposed to the offensive, fearing more casualties and hardship will be caused by the ensuing fighting. Many Western aid workers have vacated the city, and local hospitals are setting up beds to care for the anticipated wounded.

“Civilian deaths, a result of a conflict that has reached a stalemate, are unbearable,” said Steven Staples, President of the Rideau Institute. “Now is the time for Canada to speak up, and urge other leaders to call off the attack on Kandahar.”

Canadian military officials and war supporters had previously described the operation as “D-Day for NATO,” but since then the reality of an unsupportive local populace and ill-prepared Afghan allies has led U.S. General Petraeus to rethink his predecessor’s plan.

Several new reports have been issued this week documenting the terrible toll that the war is taking on Afghan civilians. The UN reports a 31 per cent increase in civilian dead and wounded over last year, including 1,271 deaths in the first six months of 2010. The report notes that women and children are bearing the brunt of attacks, mostly at the hands of anti-government insurgents. Another report by an Afghan agency puts the total killed even higher, at 1,325 during the first seven months of the year.

The ad appeared in today’s *Embassy* newspaper, an Ottawa-based publication read widely in the federal foreign, diplomatic and defence policy communities. Follow-up ads will continue to run in publications directed at Canada’s political circles. The ads were paid with funds raised through Ceasefire.ca, an online community of 20,000 Canadians, sponsored by the Rideau Institute.

Campaign ad as it appears in today's *Embassy* newspaper:



**PRIME MINISTER HARPER
CALL OFF THE ATTACK
ON KANDAHAR**

**Civilian casualties in Afghanistan are mounting.
This year 1,325 have been killed by both sides.**

**U.S. General David Petraeus' plan for an offensive
against the city of Kandahar puts many more at risk.**

**Mr. Harper, please urge the U.S. and NATO to
call off the planned offensive, and end Canada's
war in Afghanistan right away.**

This message made possible by the 20,000 supporters of Ceasefire.ca

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