Prime Minister Gillard today announced an increase in Australian aid to Afghanistan, to support the country’s development and stability.

Australia’s aid program will rise from $165 million to $250 million per year by 2015-16.

The Prime Minister advised President Karzai of the increase during their bilateral meeting at the Chicago NATO-ISAF Summit.

Despite recent gains in development, Afghanistan remains one of the world’s poorest countries.

Over one third of the population still lives in extreme poverty and the average life expectancy is just 48 years.

Australia’s aid will help Afghanistan expand basic service delivery in health and education, including for women and girls.

Our assistance will also help improve livelihoods in agriculture, promote rural development and help improve governance and public financial management.

The Prime Minister said it was important for the international community to provide sustained, reliable support to help Afghanistan meet its development challenges and to protect recent gains in areas like health and education.

International development assistance, together with support for security, will help underpin Afghanistan’s stability.

Foreign Minister Carr said Australia would work with Afghanistan to make further progress on areas like tackling corruption, conditions for women and girls, and electoral and economic reforms.

These are important not only for Afghanistan’s future but to sustain high levels of international community support through the transformation decade.

Australia has contributed to some important development gains in Afghanistan in recent years, including:
• an increase in school enrolments from around one million in 2001 to nearly eight million today, including more than 2.5 million girls;

• an increase in access to basic health services from 10 percent of the population in 2001, to 85 percent today; and

• rehabilitation of more than 10,000 kilometres of rural roads, providing thousands of local jobs.

In Uruzgan Province alone there are now 29 girls schools and more than 200 schools in total (a sixfold increase since 2006).

Eighty percent of pregnant women now receive at least one antenatal health care visit.

From 2012 Australia will directly support reform in the mining sector to encourage long term economic growth.

This will include support for good sector regulation; advancing geoscience knowledge; and mining education focused on technical and vocational training.

Our increased assistance will contribute to Afghan-led multi-donor efforts to:

• increase school enrolments to approximately 10 million students;

• 60% increase in coverage for Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus vaccinations;

• constructing approximately 3000kms of rural roads which will also help to provide jobs in the immediate post transition period.

We will also support election institution strengthening and civic awareness through a package of assistance worth around $30 million over four years.

CHICAGO
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