

INTERNATIONAL

Continued Commitment Is Key To Success In Afghanistan: Ambassador

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The key to achieving victory is getting Afghanistan on its feet, an ambassador representing Afghanistan told students and Island residents last week.

David Sproule, the Canadian Ambassador to Afghanistan, spoke to a group at the University of Prince Edward Island about the progress made in Afghanistan, and work that still needs to be done.

The country, which is ranked sixth poorest in the world, has been in a state of war for most of the last 30 years, and the country's infrastructure has been destroyed as a result.

Sproule said achievements have been made since Canadian forces entered Afghanistan in 2001, such as getting the first democratically elected government in the country's history. In October 2004, President Hamid Karzai was elected with a 55 per cent majority, and national assembly and provincial elections were held less than a year later.



Submitted Photo

Ambassador David Sproule standing on the road in Afghanistan. A Canadian armoured vehicle is behind him

Canada, along with other nations, has set out to develop a stable infrastructure by improving roads, and developing educational facilities and other key institutions.

Sproule said every step Canada takes is part of a larger vision.

"The international community has a plan, it has a comprehensive plan, and Canada is part of working on that plan."

Liberating women is a major part of the mission, and since entering Afghanistan five years ago, 25 per cent of MPs are women, and five million children are now enrolled in school, with one-third of them being girls, Sproule said

"We don't ever want to again see images of girls being denied access to school, and women being beaten off the streets for potentially violating regulations"

Despite the success, audience members had some tough questions for the ambassador following his speech.

Chris Carson, a student at UPEI, asked how soldiers felt about signing up for a peacekeeping mission when the focus seems to be shifting to that of a combat mission.

In response, Sproule defended Canada's position in Afghanistan and maintained it is still a peacekeeping mission, although not in the traditional sense as international conflicts have grown increasingly complex.

Leo Broderick, who also attended the speech, said there is a consensus among many Canadians that the situation in Afghanistan is similar to that of Iraq, and that Canada has aligned itself with the United States.

While Sproule said he wasn't an expert on Iraq, he said Canada was in Afghanistan with the blessing of the Afghan government. He also said the discussion wasn't about the United States' role in the country, but Canada's role.

Broderick also talked about the dire situation for women living in the country, and cited cases from the government of injustice to women.

Afghan MP Malalai Joya painted a different picture than that of Sproule when speaking to students at the University of Ottawa in September. She said women still face many problems in society and freedom of speech is non-existent in the country.

Joya was elected into the government, and since then she has survived four assassination attempts. She is best known for accusing her government of corruption and called some members warlords in a speech she gave.

After the speech, she was threatened by some of her peers.

"One of them shouted 'prostitute, take her and rape her,'" she told students at the University of Ottawa last month.

Sproule said there is still a long way to go, but Canada is in for the long run to promote stability and peace in Afghanistan, as well as protecting the international community.

"We are here because we never want a reprise of what happened on Sept. 11."

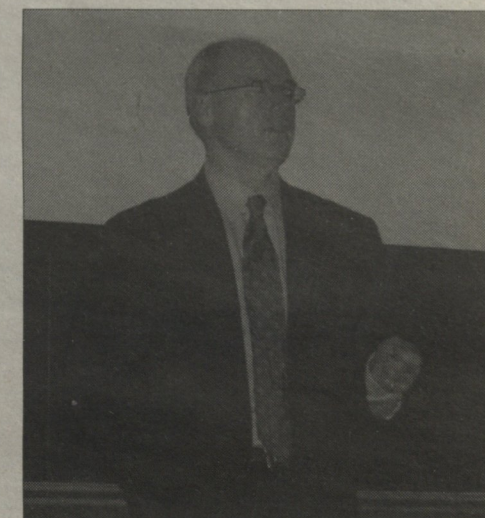


Photo: Murray

Ambassador David Sproule Speaks to an Audience at UPEI

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