

## Crucial Changes

By Kelsey Epler

Canada's role in the world's attempt to bring peace and equality to Afghanistan has grown and changed over the last five years. From the reaction of the Canadian people to that of the citizens of Afghanistan, we can see that we are heading towards a better future for both countries. I chose to do an art piece with pencil crayon, because I find that, in this case, it better expresses the situation in the originally terrorist-run country.

First of all, the World Trade Centre Towers in New York are what started NATO's and the UN's mission to conquer terrorism, and so it is only appropriate that they be in the picture. They are pointing inward to show that they are pushing the mission onward. Next to the towers is the Canadian Parliament with rallying signs, obviously symbolizing some people's displeasure with the government for sending our troops to Afghanistan. They are more towards the centre of the picture because protests were taking place in 2005, and still are today.

The child is shielding his eyes because he is horrified by the destruction of the twin towers, as well as the reports of suicide bombings and firefights in Afghanistan. He is also protecting his innocence and the innocence of Canada as a country. Canadians have historically been peacekeepers, and while the mission is in the interests of peace, our soldiers have been engaged in armed conflict, and many have sacrificed their lives.

Underneath the child is a Canadian soldier in grey, facing away from the American soldier in colour, who is holding an M16. The Canadian is grey because, originally, Canada was in the background when it came to fighting terrorism in Afghanistan. Americans were leading the way, and our soldiers seemed to be protecting their backs, not taking a huge part in any offensives. The fire above the soldiers shows that at the beginning, the war was focused more on fighting and the resulting destruction of parts of the country, rather than on rebuilding.

The eye is the focus of the art piece. On one side is the Taliban symbol; the Taliban were in control of Afghanistan, harbouring terrorists (including a training Afghanistan, specifically Kabul and Kandahar. That also means that Canada's role in Afghanistan is being focused on as well. On the other side of the iris is the Afghani flag, demonstrating that the citizens are taking back their country from the Taliban regime, with Canada's help.

The centre of the picture symbolizes the turning point of Canada's role in Afghanistan. Much of the left side of the piece shows Canada in the background; the war isn't being supported, and it is dark. The darkness symbolizes little or no progress in restabilising the country, as well as little hope for the Afghani people. The white on the right side is the opposite; progress, hope, and a belief that we can actually help bring peace to Afghanistan. Between the dark and light on the bottom is the badge for Operation Athena. This mission was very important, because Canadians were given a leading role. Its main directive was reconstruction and maintaining security in Afghanistan. To the right of the badge is a ballot with President Karzai's name on it, representing our efforts to bring true democracy back to the country, along with an incorrupt government.

Overtop of the eye, lined up with the badge and the pupil, is a tree, half dead and half alive. The left side of the tree represents that our mission, along with that of the

Americans, seemed potentially fruitless. The right side of the tree shows the growth and continuity of our role as well as of the country itself. We are now aiding Afghanistan on its way to being able to support itself; the green itself represents our monetary donations to the cause.

Next to the tree is The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Human rights abuses have been an enormous problem in Afghanistan, a problem that is one of Canada's main focuses in their mission of rebuilding Afghanistan. Along with general human rights, women's rights in Afghanistan were demolished under the Taliban rule. As our role has progressed, we have encouraged female participation in everyday life, as well as the improvement of women's rights. They are now able to vote in elections, and have been encouraged to run small businesses.

On top of the declaration is a needle with heroin powder. Afghanistan is one of Canada's main suppliers of heroin; our efforts in squashing that industry in Afghanistan will directly affect the illegal heroin trade here at home. That will hopefully help lessen heroin-related deaths in Canada and, perhaps, even around the world.

Canada's changing role also includes helping the Afghani people in their ability to maintain their safety and security once we have helped install such conditions in their country. This includes the de-mining of the countryside, as shown by the mine on the top right corner. As well, we are helping to solidify the Afghan National Army, whose badge is right under the mine. The Canadian army is helping to train the ANA, as well as the Afghan police.

It is important to show that the support for Canada's mission in Afghanistan has changed since the initial announcement that Canada was going to war against terrorism. The yellow ribbon has appeared more and more frequently, a symbol that Canadians support what we are doing to help stabilise Afghanistan.

Below the yellow ribbon are many things that the Canadian troops are doing, along with the citizens of Afghanistan to improve everyday life in their country. These improvements help maintain stability in some parts of the country, and show the people that we really are there to help, which increases their support. The pencil represents education; the red cross represents health care. The green apple represents food exports to Afghanistan. The road shows the effort that the troops are making to facilitate travel in the country, thus resulting in an easier access to markets. The Canadian flag is behind all of these things to show that Canada is behind these projects. However, there is a peace sign attached to the flag, much like a weight, pulling down on the flag. This shows that peace is a heavy weight for our country. While originally there weren't very many deaths, now, five years into the mission, there seem to be injuries and deaths every week. It demonstrates that peace can require a heavy price in order for it to succeed. As well, Canada is now bound to its mission in Afghanistan to stabilize their country and fight the terrorism of the Taliban. While we have pledged that the mission will go to 2009, our commitment may go beyond that, simply because we cannot pull out because of the weight of peace.

Finally, the handshake in front of the drop of water is very symbolic. The water itself simply represents the effort to bring drinkable water to as many villages as possible. The handshake, though, shows that Canadians and the Afghani people are working together to improve conditions in the country. Originally, Canada simply concentrated on helping to stabilize the country and give it what it needed to maintain that stability. Now,

however, one of Canada's primary goals is not to rebuild the country ourselves, but to allow the Afghani people to rebuild it with our support. This way, the citizens see that they have a part in their own future, and when foreign troops leave, they will be able to control their country themselves.

Canada's presence in Afghanistan has changed from being in the background to practically leading the way. Our role has changed from fighting the Taliban to rebuilding the country. Canada's role is changing every day, and it will continue to change as long as we remain there, doing our best to help bring peace to another part of the world.