

# PENNIES FOR PEACE FACT SHEETS

## AFGHANISTAN FACT SHEET

- Afghanistan is a land-locked country about the size of Texas, located in Central Asia. It borders Iran on the west, Pakistan to the east and south, and Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to the north.
- Afghanistan is an arid country with the Hindu Kush mountain range reaching roughly east to west centrally with peak elevations up to 24,000 feet. Winters are cold and summers are hot and dry.
- Modern day Afghanistan was founded in 1747 under Ahmad Shah Durrani, the first king of the country.
- In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Russian and British empires battled for control in Afghanistan, a time called the Great Game. In 1893-96 during the Durrani Empire, Afghanistan and British India were formally divided by the Durand Line.
- In 1919 the British Empire gave up its interests in Afghanistan, making it a fully independent state.
- From 1934 to 1973 Afghanistan enjoyed a long period of stable rule under King Mohammad Zahir Shah.
- In 1973, Mohammed Daoud overthrew the king in a coup. The Soviets came forward with arms and support, when they saw no US involvement forthcoming.
- A pro-Soviet coup in 1978 by Hafizullah Amin was followed by Soviet invasion reaching from 1979 to 1989.
- During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan a mujahedeen resistance movement was established. The mujahedeen were then supported with arms and money the US, as well as China, Iran, Pakistan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.
- The Soviets planted land mines in extraordinary numbers throughout farmlands, leaving them unsuitable for production and a threat to the population to this day.
- By 1990, a record 6.2 million Afghan's were driven out of Afghanistan to refugee camps in both Pakistan and Iran.
- The Soviets withdrew in 1989. The Soviets left Najibullah, a pro-Marxist, in charge, but he yielded power to the mujahideen after 3 years, who renamed the country the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. A series of civil wars ensued.
- By 1994, a movement of young, Muslim students arose. Initially they were welcomed, as they brought order to the chaos that the civil wars of the mujahedeen. The Taliban ruled with strict Islamic beliefs.
- By 1996 Kabul had fallen to the Taliban, and they ruled Afghanistan with an iron hand until 2001. Under Taliban rule women were banned from outside work and outside activities, such as shopping, were banned. Women were forced to be fully covered with traditional Islamic clothing or endure severe punishment. State schools were shut down: girls were no longer given an education, and boys were sent for only Islamic studies in madrassas.
- Under the Taliban, another Islamic-extremist group - al-Qaeda – found safe haven. The Taliban repeatedly refused to divulge al-Qaeda's whereabouts, giving them refuge based on shared Islamic beliefs, and money. On September 11, 2001, the United States was attacked, by al-Qaeda.
- In October 2001, the US and Britain began an assault targeting the Taliban and al-Qaeda.
- In 2004, Hamid Karzai was elected president of Afghanistan, and a National Assembly was elected. While efforts are being made to ensure a stable, central government, a Taliban insurgency continues to be a big problem for the government.
- The people of Afghanistan are a mix of ethnic groups consisting primarily of Pashtun, as well as Tajiks, Hazaras, Farsiwan, Uzbek, Kirghis, Turkmen, Sikhs, Hindus and Jews.

- Pashto and Dari are the principal languages spoken, with Dari being the main means of communication among different dialects.
- Afghanistan is 99% Muslim, approximately 80% Sunni and 19% Shiite Muslim ([www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov)).
- Archaeological findings show evidence of human habitation as early as the fourth century BC. The first conqueror was the Persian, Darius the Great, in 500 BC. Alexander the Great conquered areas of Afghanistan to the north and east in 329 BC.