**Afghan and Pakistani Mullahs and Businesses Team with U.S. Businesses in Coordinated Effort to Calm Tensions following Holy Qur’an burning**

**Local Distribution of U.S. donated Holy Qur’ans**

**ISLAMABAD/KABUL**

In a coordinated effort to reduce inflamed tensions, build bridges, and increase mutual understanding and respect, Pakistan’s Global Disaster Relief Organization and the U.S. companies Soft-Power Solutions and Halcyon Group International coordinated with Islamic religious leaders and tribal elders throughout Pakistan and Afghanistan to distribute 5,000 Holy Qur’ans to cities and villages in twelve Afghan and four Pakistani provinces. This follows the improper disposal of Holy Qur’ans at Bagram Airbase, which met with violent protests and resulted in injury and loss of life to Afghan citizens and ISAF forces.

On February 27, 2012, internet monitoring revealed several thousand Facebook comments and twitter entries (Tweets) calling for revenge and death to America. They primarily originated in Bahrain and advocated violence and revenge over the burning of Holy Qur’ans, further inflaming tensions.

In a privately funded effort aimed at reconciliation, Soft Power Solutions, a Virginia based company, contacted Brigadier General Azam Effendi, a retired Pakistani Army officer and Chairman of the Global Disaster Relief Organization to determine how the organizations could work together in grass roots reconciliation efforts. Following consultations and relying on the expert cultural advice of Halcyon Group International, another Virginia based company, $25,000 in private funding was coordinated and the following actions taken:

- A mitigation plan was jointly developed which included the distribution of 5,000 Holy Qur’ans to the population in the most heavily impacted areas on both sides of the border; direct coordination with religious leaders and tribal elders; and the subsequent issuance of Fatwa’s calling for peace and forgiveness.

- On 29 Feb, over 5,000 Holy Qur’ans were procured at Peshawar, Quetta and Kandahar for distribution. With a support team of approximately 200 local Pakistani and Afghan individuals, distribution began in several rural areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The distribution included Jirga’s in each village, in which they – despite potential Taliban retribution – accepted the Holy Qur’ans in a spirit of grateful reconciliation and offered prayers of forgiveness and condolence.

- Included with the Holy Qur’ans were letters that expressed condolences in both English and Pashto from Skip Vincent, Chairman of Soft Power Solutions and Catherine Dunlap, President of Halcyon Group International.

- The gesture of peace, reconciliation, and good-will was well received on both sides of the border.

- Although the effort was non-governmental and focused at local level reconciliation, the Pakistan Army expedited border crossings at the Khyber Pass, the Afghan Ministry of Hajj and Islamic Affairs participated in the Kabul Jirga, and in other areas Effendi arranged for an Afghan Army General, provincial governor, and religious leaders to distribute the Holy Qur’ans provided on behalf of the Americans who contributed toward the effort.

- On March 2, in Jalalabad in the north, Kandahar in the South, and Attock in Pakistan, distribution continued with participation and support by Muslim leaders from different backgrounds, along with TV and radio messaging and the issuing of a Fatwa of forgiveness by Islamic clerics. Special prayers were held at the Grand Mosque for peace, forgiveness, tolerance and mercy, with support extended to the families of the victims of the violence with an appeal for restraint on all sides. The transparent gesture of good-will from Soft-Power Solutions and Halcyon Group International was accepted with gratitude.

- By 7 March, all 5000 Holy Qur’ans had been distributed. Internet monitoring indicates a positive reaction to these gifts from the American people.

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