

“What is important in building up Afghanistan as a state and what help you seek and who you seek it from are decisions that can only be made by the Afghan government – international contributors are here for you as supportive partners,” said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves during a meeting with his Afghan counterpart Hamid Karzai.

The first Estonian head of state to officially visit Afghanistan, President Ilves said it is too early to start putting time limits on the NATO-led security operations in the country.

“It is of key importance that the central government of Afghanistan is capable of controlling more and more of its provinces itself, which means taking greater responsibility in guaranteeing security and in organising the life of the country,” President Ilves said.

“Involvement in the building up of Afghanistan as a nation means diligence in terms of the security not only of the country itself, but also the region as a whole and that of the Member States of NATO, as well as an understanding of how this is all interconnected,” said the Estonian head of state.

President Karzai thanked Estonia for its contribution to NATO’s security forces, in which more than 160 Estonian soldiers are currently serving – the majority in Helmand province, which remains unstable and prone to violence.

“Afghanistan is a significant transit country in the region, and a political bridge between the Middle East, Central Asia and Southern Asia,” said President Ilves. “A stable Afghanistan will boost security not only in its own region, but in a much broader context, when you think about the problems of terrorism, the drug trade and the flood of refugees.”

President Ilves commended the Afghan government on the measures it has taken to reinforce its army and police forces so as to eventually assume control from the NATO-led forces in the country.

“A reliable government in Kabul and its provinces, transparent governance, a strong army, a dependable police force, general economic development, restricting the power of local warlords and drug barons and the reintegration of more moderate elements of the Taliban and anti-government protestors into Afghan society are the keys to success,” explained President Ilves, adding: “This would all show the ordinary people of this country, who live in the crossfire and who are tired of the violence and fear, that the Afghan government is neither abstract nor weak, that the Taliban will not be restored to power, and that peace and security in Afghanistan are possible.”

The two presidents agreed that the dedication of the Afghan government and improvements in cooperation between its international partners would hopefully change life for the country’s population for the better and make their lives safer and more secure in the near future.

Talking of relations between Estonia and Afghanistan, President Ilves noted that December will mark the 80th anniversary of the signing in Tallinn of the friendship agreement between the two countries, in accordance with which “an unbroken peace and an unbreakable friendship shall reign” between the countries and their citizens.

“Today we have the chance to truly give that agreement meaning,” said President Ilves, “since in a few years’ time, if we succeed, there is nothing to say that trade relations between Estonia and Afghanistan will still be a dream.”

The Estonian head of state said that his country is looking to be an ally to Afghanistan in more than just military terms. “One of Estonia’s key objectives in contributing to the advancement of Afghanistan is to extend the influence of both the central government and local governments,” he said.

Estonia is coordinating the development of a health care system in Helmand province; has arranged training for Afghan diplomats in Tallinn; is working with the Afghan parliament to develop electronic voting, attendance and speaking systems; is supporting the construction of a new building for the Afghanistan Centre of the University of Kabul; and is assisting in the preservation of material for the Afghan National Archive and in publishing new books.

Accompanying President Ilves on his visit to Afghanistan are Estonian Defence Forces director

Lieutenant-General Ants Laaneots, chairman of the National Defence Committee of the parliament Mati Raidma and Ministry of Defence Secretary-General Riho Terras.

Office of the President
Public Relations Department
Phone +372 631 6229