

Security Council Open Debate on UNAMA, March 19th 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Carr, Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations.

I am pleased that my first address to the Security Council is about the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I acknowledge the Russian presidency for the month of March. I acknowledge, as well, the presence of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Afghanistan's Permanent Representative, Zahir Tanin. I also recognize Special Representative Ján Kubiš for his leadership of the United Nations Mission in Kabul.

This year's UNAMA mandate will cover a crucial period for Afghanistan. The Government will work to address the economic and fiscal impact of transition, intensify its preparations for the presidential election in 2014, lead progress in the reconciliation process and take lead responsibility for security.

As the transition moves forward, UNAMA's support to Afghanistan will become more, not less, important. As Afghanistan moves through transition to its transformation decade, it is important to note the progress that has been made over the past 10 years. Through the leadership of its Government, the determination of its fine people and the support of the international community, Afghanistan has come a long way. Large parts of the country have been made significantly safer. Afghan people now live much longer. Nearly 8 million people are enrolled in schools today, including more than 2.7 million girls. Approximately 85 per cent of the population have access to health care. The Afghan economy is growing at 8 per cent per annum. Security gains have ensured that Afghanistan will never again be a safe haven for international terrorism. Development and governance gains have helped to ensure that the international community will have a stable partner. I am confident that the years ahead will see the Afghan Government protect those gains.

But to achieve that, the international community must remain in Afghanistan. We must send a clear message that Afghanistan will not stand alone. International support has been instrumental to Afghanistan's progress. At the Chicago Summit and the Tokyo Conference last year, we committed to standing with Afghanistan well beyond transition.

The Council's mandate for UNAMA will provide the Mission with the certainty and capacity it needs to support Afghanistan. As the Secretary-General noted in his report (S/2013/133), it is essential that UNAMA be resourced to fulfil its mandate, this year and beyond, and to maintain a meaningful presence in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan will face some significant challenges. The next 12 months will set the stage for the completion of Afghanistan's political and security transitions in 2014. By the end of 2013, Afghanistan will have lead responsibility for security across the country — a major milestone. The Afghan National Security Forces have proved capable as transition has progressed. Australia is confident that, with consistent international support, their capacities will continue to improve, as will their ability to provide security for Afghanistan.

The Afghan Government must also implement economic and governance reforms to promote growth and fiscal responsibility. With international support, that Afghan-led reform process is under way.

UNAMA works with the Afghan Government and international partners to implement the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, under which the international community recognizes and meets Afghanistan's legitimate needs for assistance and Afghanistan remains committed to strengthening governance and promoting respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Advancing the opportunities for women and girls in Afghanistan will remain a major priority for Australia. We very much welcome the references in resolution 2096 (2013), on UNAMA, to the need for measurable objectives to secure the rights of women and girls, as well as the need to counter discrimination. We condemn absolutely all forms of violence against women and girls.

Afghanistan must also continue its progress in fighting corruption and bank fraud, strengthening human rights and building the capacity of State institutions. Support for UNAMA is an important element in those endeavours, and UNAMA's role in coordinating and delivering international assistance remains essential well beyond 2014.

In order to entrench good governance and conditions for growth, it is essential that Afghan society be underpinned by solid political foundations. The 2014 elections are fundamental. We encourage the Afghan Government to drive preparations for the presidential election.

As those elections near, it is critical that the Afghan Government set up an appropriate electoral framework. The Government must lead the way to inclusive elections which are accepted by the Afghan people. We encourage them to utilize international assistance and work with UNAMA to strengthen the integrity of the election process, consistent with the Mission's mandate.

A political settlement will be necessary in order to achieve a secure Afghanistan. Military force alone will not bring stability. Recent momentum in the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process is heartening. Our expectations must remain realistic. We support the High Peace Council's efforts to build the conditions for reconciliation, including by ensuring that the Security Council's Taliban sanctions regime is flexible enough to support an Afghan-led process.

As the Secretary-General notes, UNAMA's unique comparative advantage is its broad presence and political outreach. Adequate resources and an effective mandate will allow UNAMA to support Afghanistan through transition and beyond. UNAMA will therefore be able to meet its long-term commitment to the Government and the people of Afghanistan.

That mandate provides a sound basis for UNAMA to continue to support Afghanistan on behalf of the United Nations and the international community. Council members, and the wider UN membership, have a stake in Afghanistan's future security and stability. The adoption of resolution 2096 (2013) renewing UNAMA's mandate highlights the unity of purpose between the international community and the Afghan Government in promoting Afghanistan's future security and stability.

Australia has welcomed the responsibility of coordinating Security Council discussions on Afghanistan during our Council term. In that role, we will continue to work with Afghanistan and international partners to support the country through transition and beyond.