

Security Council Open Debate on Afghanistan and UNAMA
20 March 2012, Security Council Chamber

Statement by H.E. Mr Rischbyski, Representative of Canada

I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Ján Kubiš for his briefing this morning. I also thank Afghan Ambassador Zahir Tanin for his statement.

Canada welcomes the diligent work of the Secretary-General in conducting a comprehensive review of the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) over the past year. The next four months will present Afghanistan and the international community with a series of critical decision points, which will define how we continue to progress together towards our common goal of a peaceful and sustainable Afghanistan through the transition period and into the transformation decade. Canada looks forward to working with its partners to further advance those shared objectives. We are confident that, at the Group of Eight and NATO summits, as well as at the Tokyo conference, we will continue to build on the strategic consensus reached in Bonn this past December — a consensus based on accountability and the assumption of leadership by the Afghan Government in its own security, good governance, and development.

In cooperation with our partners, Canada continues to endeavour to support Afghanistan in its efforts to undertake the remaining challenges of transition. In doing so, Canada continues to invest in the future of Afghan youth through programming in health and education; to advance security, the rule of law and human rights, including through a significant contribution to the NATO training mission; to promote regional diplomacy; and to support the delivery of humanitarian assistance as needed.

Canada believes that sustainable economic growth and constructive regional cooperation are essential to ensuring a secure and prosperous future for Afghanistan and the region. Economic growth will only be sustained by concrete efforts on the part of Afghanistan to establish a business-friendly environment and enact measures to strengthen effective and transparent economic governance. In that connection, Canada recognizes the commitments that the Government of Afghanistan has made with regard to that goal in its economic transition strategy.

Canada of course continues to support Afghanistan in pursuit of its development goals. The country must never again become a haven for terrorists and a breeding ground for terrorism. To that end, the real long-term measure of success will be determined by the extent to which Afghanistan can create wealth by attracting and retaining private-sector investment, both from within Afghanistan and abroad, and appropriately leverage it to benefit the Afghan population in a just and broad-based manner. Furthermore, in order to be sustainable, Afghanistan's economic growth must be accompanied by poverty reduction and increasing productive employment, as well as improved access to education and health care.

However, Afghanistan's economic potential reaches beyond its borders and its prosperity will, in large measure, be influenced by the extent to which it can harness its strategic position at the crossroads of markets in the heart of Asia. That will require the constructive support of its regional partners in promoting stability, security and prosperity in both Afghanistan and the region. In that regard, we commend the recent consensus in the context of the Istanbul Process to focus on a series of confidence building measures aimed at strengthening an agenda based on mutual benefit and trust. We also look forward to the fifth ministerial meeting of the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan. Canada strongly believes that regional leadership in the planning and execution of a common prosperity agenda must be at the centre of Afghanistan's continued transformation.

To that end, Canada will continue to promote regional cooperation as one of its four pillars of engagement over the next two years, in particular through the ongoing facilitation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan cooperation process — which we continue to believe can make tangible progress in strengthening the management and security of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region.

Among the most notable successes in Afghanistan of the past decade are the tremendous gains made by Afghan women and girls. Those gains must not be lost. Canada views the status and role of women as a key barometer by which the success of Afghanistan's progress will be measured. The recent Ulema Council statement, as well as cases of heinous abuse of Afghan women, represents a dramatic step backwards for Afghan women. Although we noted President Karzai's remarks on 11 March reiterating his full support of Afghan women's religious and constitutional rights, Canada will remain vigilant. We expect the Government of Afghanistan to uphold its Constitution and to distance itself from those outrageous remarks.

The protection and advancement of women's rights has been and continues to be a key pillar of Canada's foreign policy. That is especially true in Afghanistan, where promoting and protecting fundamental freedoms, including women's rights, is a central theme of Canada's post-2011 engagement. Respect for the freedoms and rights of all Afghan citizens is fundamental to Afghanistan's security and its future prosperity.

All Afghans must, in our view, also have the right to practice personal religious beliefs in safety and security. Canada would like to underline the importance of tolerance and pluralism in establishing a peaceful and cohesive Afghan society, based on the principles established by the Afghan Constitution.

Afghanistan has accomplished impressive progress towards developing a representative and sustainable democracy. Canada recognizes that Afghanistan's democratic development faces many challenges, and we encourage the Government of Afghanistan to renew its commitment to transparency and impartiality in all electoral and appointment processes.

An important element in ensuring sustainable Afghan peace still resides in the achievement of an Afghan-led reconciliation process, the outcome of which must be in accordance with the principles confirmed at the Bonn Conference. In this respect, Canada supports an inclusive national peace dialogue that encourages the participation of Afghan civil society, victims' groups and, especially, Afghan religious and ethnic minorities and women in determining the shape of what we all hope will be a peaceful and stable Afghanistan.

Permit me to conclude by noting that Canada remains committed to our common goal of a peaceful, sustainable Afghanistan led by Afghans with vision, confidence and hope in their future. In order to achieve this vision, Canada stands ready to continue working with the Government of Afghanistan, as well as all our international partners in meeting this goal.