

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

Statement by Ms. Murmokaite, Permanent Mission of Lithuania to the United Nations.

Allow me at the start to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this important debate.

Lithuania aligns itself with the statement delivered by Mr. Vygaudas Ušackas, European Union Special Representative for Afghanistan. In addition, allow me to make the following points.

My first point is on the electoral processes. We welcome the active engagement of the political parties and civil society in election-related developments. It is essential that those elections be inclusive, transparent, free and fair. Critical preparations for the elections must be accelerated, including tangible progress in voter identification and registration.

The adoption of a robust electoral framework with credible mechanisms for electoral fraud prevention and dispute resolution is required. The formation of electoral management bodies must be duly completed and qualified officials appointed to the Independent Election Commission. International observation of the elections should be guaranteed.

We encourage the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to continue to provide all necessary assistance in preparing for the Afghan-led elections.

I would like to recall that in the past the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) deployed elections support teams to Afghanistan, one of the OSCE's Asian Partners for Cooperation. A solid set of recommendations on improving the electoral framework was presented by the OSCE in Kabul in 2012. We encourage Afghan officials to make use of the experience and recommendations offered by the OSCE.

My second point is on the situation of women and girls. We appreciate the commitment of the Afghan Government to empowering women and ensuring gender equality. Post-Taliban Afghanistan has seen the appointment of the first female district governor, Saira Shakeeb Sadat. Women are asserting themselves as ministers and members of Parliament and of the High Peace Council. We welcome these developments and reiterate that women's full participation in the reconciliation and transformation processes is essential for the construction of a peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

Much more needs to be done, however. Every two hours, a woman dies from pregnancy-related causes. Domestic violence against women and the imprisonment of women for alleged moral crimes are a cause of concern, as is the number of women and girls killed or injured during the past year, which increased considerably.

We urge the United Nations to continue its support for systematic monitoring and reporting on the gender commitments contained in the Tokyo Declaration and Mutual Accountability Framework.

Thirdly, my delegation remains concerned about the level of casualties among civilians and the increased targeting of civilian locations by anti-Government forces and illegal armed groups. In particular, the continuing deaths and injuries of children is a cause of concern. We hope that the action plan for the prevention of underage recruitment and its annexes on killing and maiming as well as sexual violence against children will be fully implemented and that all necessary measures will be taken to prevent violations of the rights of the child.

Over 1 million Afghans live within 500 metres of mine-contaminated areas. As a Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan donor, Lithuania has itself engaged in demining and supports the Afghan mine-clearing efforts. We welcome the progress achieved and encourage the Afghan Government to work on mine-action legislation with all relevant stakeholders and to clear all anti-personnel landmines by 2013 as part of its obligations under the Ottawa Convention.

Finally, turning to regional cooperation, the success of Afghanistan's transition process requires the active involvement of all regional stakeholders. For the United Nations and regional organizations to achieve greater synergies, it is important to better coordinate their efforts in Afghanistan and the region, including with countries of Central Asia.

We are heartened by the determination of the States in the region, through the Istanbul Process, the bilateral Afghan-Pakistan dialogue and other initiatives, to address the manifold challenges facing the Afghan nation. The opening of an office in Doha for the purpose of negotiations could be a step forward towards a peaceful, Afghan-led solution to the Taliban insurgency. Reconciliation has to be an inclusive and Afghan-owned process. We welcome the Security Council's readiness to adjust the Taliban sanctions regime in support of those efforts.

To conclude, we welcome the adoption by the Council of resolution 2096 (2013), which extends the mandate of UNAMA for 12 months. UNAMA, with a strong political role, will be an essential partner to the Afghan Government during the transformation period. Let me note that further cuts in the budget of UNAMA may have a negative impact on its ability to fulfil its core mandate. Given the magnitude of the challenges facing Afghanistan and the wider region, a properly staffed and resourced UNAMA remains key to ensuring the success of the transition period.