

## **Security Council Open Debate on UNAMA, March 19<sup>th</sup> 2013, Security Council Chamber**

*Statement by Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary General of the United Nations.*

I am pleased to brief the Security Council today on the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

I am grateful to the Russian delegation for organizing this open debate on a crucially important subject.

This has been an intense period of activity as we look ahead to 2014. The United Nations is reflecting on its future role, and we are preparing for the challenges ahead. Our core priorities should guide us going forward. We should continue providing good offices, including support for elections, and maintain our work for reconciliation and regional cooperation. We must stand firm for human rights, and we must advance development. Humanitarian action is also crucial to our future role. It is especially important in order for us to address Afghanistan's chronic vulnerability and the impact of the transition. I would like to speak briefly on all of those issues today.

Afghanistan's political climate is dominated by the 2014 elections. Broad participation and a credible process are essential to reaching the goal of a widely accepted leadership transition. Let me stress that the elections are Afghan-led and Afghan-managed. Now is the time to take critical decisions. The Government has committed to making the elections an inclusive, consultative and transparent process. I welcome the active and responsible participation of all stakeholders in building a widely accepted electoral framework. I also welcome President Karzai's emphasis on adopting electoral legislation at the opening of the National Assembly. Agreement on an impartial, credible and independent mechanism for electoral dispute resolution will be critical. Another core element is the appointment of a respected, widely accepted chairperson to the Independent Electoral Commission. That Commission, along with the Ministry of Finance and donors, will have to engage seriously on the task of finding solutions to electoral funding that are realistic and satisfactory to all.

The Government favours an electronic national identity card project. That is an important initiative with wide-ranging potential applications. It should be used, to the extent possible, in the 2014 and 2015 elections. At the same time, it is important to understand that there may be few improvements in voter identification for elections during those years. That makes other checks and balances, including generally agreed-on rules of the game and anti-fraud measures, all the more essential. The principle of respect for the independence of the electoral management body in the conduct of its constitutional duties is vital.

Afghanistan's greatest need is for peace. I welcome January's joint United States-Afghan declaration supporting greater coherence in reconciliation efforts. Expectations must be realistic. Reconciliation efforts will not be quick or easy. The United Nations is pushing for a culture of peace, including support for a second phase of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace. Afghanistan's people must come together, not only to shun conflict but also to assume leadership and ownership of the transition process for the sake of a united Afghanistan. That is essential if we are to end the more than 30 years of conflict and establish true and lasting peace.

Our human rights efforts are built on constructive engagement. We have reported on the torture and ill-treatment of conflict-related detainees. A presidential fact-finding commission also heard widespread testimony of abuse and put forward 11 recommendations to address the problem. On civilian casualties, the Government and international forces have taken measures to reduce the adverse impact of their operations. Anti-Government groups must now live up to their public statements and international obligations and cease targeting civilians, using children in suicide

operations, attacking public places and using victim-activated pressure-plate explosives. Such actions are crimes under international law.

I am especially concerned about the 20 per cent increase in civilian casualties among women and girls in 2012. UNAMA's monitoring of civilian casualties prompted two statements from the Taliban that perhaps indicate a willingness to engage. I encourage a meaningful dialogue aimed at reducing the intolerable, continuing death toll and at protecting civilians. I welcome the speech President Karzai gave on International Women's Day, especially his focus on raising the awareness of gender issues among men. But I remain deeply disturbed that, despite some improvements in prosecuting cases of violence, there is still a pervasive climate of impunity in Afghanistan when it comes to the abuse of women and girls, who have the inviolable right to live free of fear or attacks. Women and girls are key to a better future for Afghanistan; protecting them is central to peace, prosperity and stability for everyone in the country. That calls for strict application of the Elimination of Violence against Women Law and ensuring that women and girls can participate more actively in public life.

We have to strengthen the way we provide development assistance in order to strengthen Afghan ownership. For its part, the Government must maintain momentum on putting in place the economic governance reforms needed to increase the sustainability of security and political transitions. Tackling the illicit economy is also critical to boosting economic confidence. The High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption, together with the United Nations, has documented the scope of the corruption that is tearing at Afghanistan's economic and social fabric. I am also concerned that the Opium Risk Assessment shows an increase in poppy cultivation. But there have been positive developments on the counter-narcotics front. Earlier this month, Afghan authorities made their largest seizure so far this year, taking some 23 tons of heroin, morphine and precursor chemicals.

In addition to counter-narcotics, we face the continuing challenge of responding to the needs of returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). I am committed to finding lasting solutions to post-conflict displacement. We have elements for success in the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries and in the national Afghan policy on IDPs.

We must prepare to look ahead beyond 2014. In a recent meeting with United Nations officials, Afghan representatives emphasized that they will need not less United Nations engagement, but engagement of a different kind. They consistently called for better coordination in the work of agencies, funds and programmes, so as to prevent gaps and overlaps, among themselves and with others. The Afghan representatives also broadly appreciated the need for a special political mission, with an evolving focus and scope. The United Nations must reinforce Afghan efforts. We aim to strengthen Afghan political processes and institutions. We want to boost the ability to deliver nationally and in different regions. We must bring to a close the time of parallel structures and efforts by the international community and fully integrate our support for Afghanistan.

To fulfill its mandate, the Mission must maintain its ability to reach out across the country and to meet the many demands it faces during this crucial period. As such, while the budget of UNAMA for 2013 reflected significant reductions, I do not envisage additional reductions for 2014. We can then more realistically assess the reorientation of the United Nations presence in Afghanistan after the transition.

The success we have achieved so far comes thanks in large measure to the dedication of my Special Representative Ján Kubiš and all of the women and men — national and international — who have worked with commitment and dedication. We are ultimately responsible for their security and their ability to support the Afghan people.

We are approaching a moment of transition in Afghanistan, a country that has survived decades of upheaval. Let us work as hard as possible to ensure that this transition leads to the stable, prosperous and safe future that the country's people deserve.