

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

Statement by Ms. Rice, Permanent Mission of United States of America to the United Nations.

At the outset, I should like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing. I welcome Special Representative Kubiš back to the Security Council and ask him to please share with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) staff and the United Nations country team our deep gratitude for their continued hard work and dedication. I should also like to thank Ambassador Tanin for his partnership and to congratulate Foreign Minister Carr and Ambassador Quinlan on Australia's assuming leadership of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) and Afghanistan-related resolutions in the Council.

Afghanistan and the international community are at an important juncture. As we have seen in recent weeks, challenges remain, but we continue to work together to achieve our shared goals. President Karzai visited Washington in January and discussed with President Obama strengthening Afghanistan's democratic institutions and supporting the country's long-term economic and social development. President Obama and President Karzai also reaffirmed the United States-Afghanistan enduring strategic partnership agreement that they signed in May 2012.

Security remains key. The Afghan National Security Forces now have the lead in overseeing security for nearly 90 per cent of the Afghan population, and with the recent announcement of the fourth tranche, 52 new districts in the north and centre of Afghanistan will soon be secured by Afghan forces.

As President Obama announced last month, more than 34,000 American troops will come home from Afghanistan by February of next year. We expect that the fifth and final tranche of the transition will be announced this spring, when Afghans will lead for security across their entire country.

While transitioning security responsibility to the Afghans is necessary for stability, it is not itself sufficient. In that regard, an inclusive and credible presidential election in 2014 is critical for the country's future and to sustaining international assistance to the people of Afghanistan. The results of the election must produce an outcome that is legitimately accepted by the Afghan people. The announcement of the election date by the Independent Election Commission is an important step, and its timely completion of a comprehensive operational plan will be another.

We note that Parliament is working on draft legislation to further establish a lasting electoral framework, including independent election institutions. It is important that respected and professional leaders be appointed to election institutions after a widely consultative process. We recognize the valuable contributions of Afghan civil society to those preparations and the essential work of the United Nations, notably the recent United Nations electoral needs assessment mission.

In addition, Afghan-led reconciliation is important for stability and the best way to end conflict and bring lasting peace to Afghanistan and the region. We continue to support the opening of an office in Doha, Qatar, to facilitate negotiations between the High Peace Council and the authorized representatives of the Taliban.

As a part of the outcome of any process, the Taliban and other armed opposition groups must end violence, break ties with Al-Qaida and accept Afghanistan's Constitution. The outcomes of peace and reconciliation must respect the historic achievements that a unified and sovereign Afghanistan has made over the past decade, including protecting the rights of all citizens of Afghanistan — women and men — as guaranteed under the Constitution.

Over the past decade, Afghan women have emerged from the total oppression imposed by Taliban rule. Women are essential partners in and contributors to the building of a strong civil society and a stable nation. Afghan women hold office at the national, provincial and local levels, and serve on the High Peace Council and in provincial peace councils. They start and run businesses of all kinds and organize to serve their communities and have their voices heard. As Afghanistan builds a better future, the contributions, intrinsic worth and fundamental dignity of Afghan women must continue to be embraced.

Afghanistan's progress is due primarily to the grit, determination and hard work of the Afghan people. It is they who have come this far. The international community has provided vital assistance along the way and will continue to do so.

Afghanistan's neighbours must play a constructive role in the creation of a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan. One vehicle is the Istanbul Process, which will have a ministerial meeting in Almaty next month and is expected to discuss the six confidence-building measures of counter-narcotics, counter-terrorism, trade, regional infrastructure, education and disaster management. Progress in those areas is vital for a secure, stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

Since 2002, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan has played an indispensable role in the country's progress. As Afghanistan continues its transition, UNAMA needs to remain a committed partner, and we as the Council need to sustain our support during this crucial time.

UNAMA has weathered significant budget reductions over the past two years, and we believe that those cuts have gone as far as they reasonably can. UNAMA's resources should be stabilized now and the Mission allowed to carry out its mandate with its core functions intact. UNAMA remains a priority and must be resourced as such. We appreciate the support of the United Nations in Afghanistan and are pleased to have extended UNAMA's mandate for another year.