

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

Statement by Mr. Arias, Permanent Mission of Spain to the United Nations.

This year, we commemorate the twelfth anniversary of the international community's commitment to Afghanistan. I believe that this is an excellent moment to thank the Secretary-General for introducing his report (S/2013/133) to the Council today, and to say that I greatly value the contribution made to this debate by Ambassador Tanin.

Spain, which has been part of this process from the beginning, has been making a military and civilian contribution to the stabilization and reconstruction of the country. The human toll of Spain's military effort in Afghanistan has been high; 100 Spaniards have died since the arrival of our troops. Spain is currently the eighth largest contributor to the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, under the Security Council's mandate. We are now engaged in the withdrawal of the 1,300 Spanish soldiers who are still in Afghanistan, distributed throughout the provinces of Herat, whose airport is managed by Spain; Badghis, which is one of the most inaccessible and disadvantaged provinces of the country and where the Spanish provincial reconstruction team is located in Qala-i-Naw; and Kabul. Spain has supported in the past and continues today to strongly support the efforts of the Afghan Government in the complex transition process, both in their security and civilian aspects. We are currently entering a difficult stage in the process. We are in the final stretch, as we all know. We all have to do our utmost to ensure that the transition is irreversible and sustainable. We must therefore redouble our efforts in the coming months, particularly in the areas of governance, institution-building and economic development.

The transfer of responsibilities in the security sector to Afghan authorities has already been completed in the six districts of Badghis province. We are satisfied with the way in which the transition is progressing. Spain will continue cooperating and will remain firmly committed to the activities of consulting, training and supporting the Afghan security forces during the completion of the transition process.

With regard to the civil aspects of the transition, we are now in a position to complete the transfer of the cooperation projects that we have developed in our area of responsibility. We are considering doing that in parallel with the transfer of responsibility in the crucial area of security. Currently, most of the projects are already being managed by Afghan personnel. The transfer will be formalized with the signing of the appropriate agreements with the representatives of the Afghan ministries that will take over those projects.

In 2013, Cooperación Española en Afganistán will conclude after seven years of positive collaboration. It should be emphasized, however, that Cooperación Española will continue to participate in multilateral projects through its contributions to international organizations.

Despite the difficulties inherent in the complex peace process, recent progress permits us to hope for a possible relaunch of dialogue towards sustainable and inclusive reconciliation. For that to be successful, it should involve the armed groups and all sectors of Afghan society in a context of respect for the Afghan Constitution, especially when it comes to human rights, in particular those of women and girls.

The year 2012 was a year of major international events related to Afghanistan. Now it is time to note the year's many achievements.

Afghanistan will continue to need international assistance after 2014. That is why the bases for the new allied mission for the post-2014 period are being outlined, focusing exclusively on educational

and training tasks. In that way it will seek to assist the Afghan National Security Forces in the best possible way so that they can successfully deal with the important work that they have to do and that is expected of them.

On the regional level, we welcome the fact that the Istanbul Process, whose principal goal is to promote regional cooperation and security in order to achieve peace and stability in Afghanistan, is decisively moving forward. Spain is currently examining its contributions to the confidence-building measures that are associated with the Process.

In addition to everything I have just set out, we are also working to secure the political and financial sustainability essential for the consolidation of the Afghan political system. We trust that the Government of Afghanistan will continue to fulfil its basic commitments in the fields of governance, development, the rule of law, human rights and the fight against corruption.

In that context, the presidential elections announced for 5 April 2014 will be a significant challenge from a logistical perspective. The international community will continue to support Afghanistan, which in turn will have to ensure an inclusive, transparent and democratic election, with results that the Afghan people can fully identify with.

The work and the support of the United Nations will be of great importance in those elections. That is why Spain supports the decision to extend the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan by one year, and greatly appreciates the central and impartial role that the United Nations is playing in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Finally, allow me also to emphasize the enormous importance that Spain attaches to the role that the European Union can play in assisting the Afghan authorities on issues related to capacity-building, including governance, transparency and the rule of law, as well as in the training of civil servants and members of the police and judicial sectors, and in the socioeconomic development of the country in general.

In the light of what I have said here, Spain firmly supports the ongoing negotiations for an ambitious cooperation agreement for partnership and development between the European Union and Afghanistan, which will certainly set the tone for and guide the relations between both partners in the coming years. The coming months will be decisive for the consolidation of the international community's legacy in Afghanistan. It is essential that the progress and successes of the past decade not be reversed.

The Special Representative of the European Union for Afghanistan has already made a statement, which we of course share. Nevertheless, I am also grateful, Mr. President, for the fact that you have given me the opportunity to make an additional set of comments in my national capacity.