

**Briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for  
Afghanistan, Ján Kubiš, to the UN Security Council, 17 December 2013**

---

Good morning Mr. President, Esteemed Members of the Security Council,

When last here three months ago, in September, I highlighted a positive trajectory as Afghanistan undergoes ambitious security, political and economic transitions. Today I can reiterate that progress continues and efforts are, by and large, on track - although not without challenges and temporary setbacks, and at heavy costs of lives and limbs of Afghans. I would like to express my condolences for the six NATO soldiers who died in a plane crash in southern Afghanistan today.

Yes, there is volatility. There is uncertainty. However the fundamental elements required to enhance stability in Afghanistan and the wider region are being consolidated as the drawdown of international forces continues.

Over a decade of efforts by Afghanistan, supported by the international community, have transformed the country we see today. The Afghan people clearly recognise that in order to sustain their state, their security agencies, and their economy, international support will be required through at least the decade of transformation. In turn, member states have pledged extraordinary continued levels of long-term assistance at Tokyo and Chicago. This has been further underscored by an increasing number of Strategic Partnership Agreements across the region and spanning the world.

The Consultative Loya Jirga's recent endorsement of the Bilateral Security Agreement between Afghanistan and the United States reinforced widespread

expectations of finalisation of this important framework for ongoing partnership, and, by extension, continuity in broader international engagement.

Predictability is critical to building confidence in the future. We must resolutely continue working together to ensure a sovereign and sustainable state that will never again become a haven for international terrorism and organised crime, notably including narco-businesses. This is in everyone's interest.

Mr. President,

Political transition is at the very core of these efforts with next year's Presidential elections to mark a historic democratic transfer of power.

The critical importance of holding credible polls on time and in full accordance with the Constitution is widely appreciated. Technical preparations and political momentum for the agreed 5 April election day remain on track and is further advanced than in previous polls.

This reporting period has seen the establishment of the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission and the Media Commission. Together with the Independent Election Commission, this means that all three electoral management bodies are now in place and, for the first time, created under an agreed legal framework.

The number of candidates – 11 for presidential polls and 2,713 for Provincial Councils, including 308 women – clearly shows the widespread interest in these elections within Afghanistan. The ongoing voter registration top-up exercise has seen over 3.2 million new voter cards issued to date – one-third of these to women.

In securing the electoral process and participants - including voters, candidates, election workers, and domestic and international observers - the Ministry of Interior is in the lead with good interaction seen between stakeholders. The security challenges are real and should be proactively and realistically addressed to promote maximum inclusion and avoid any pretext for disenfranchisement or delay. This requires planning based on sound and credible assessments and public outreach to communicate the measures taken and thus generate increased voter confidence. This includes transparency on the location and status of polling centres, with important decisions to be made in the coming period.

Politically, I welcome efforts amongst candidates to agree “rules of the games”, or principles, including acceptance of the eventual winner. Before we next meet the official campaign period begins and I urge each candidate to commit themselves, and their supporters, to a fair, clean, issues-based race. These polls, and the surrounding political environment, should contribute to national unity and not enflame or exacerbate tensions, including ethnic or sectarian divisions. A legitimate process is ultimately in everyone's interest and should include equal access to state resources and balanced media coverage.

Observation efforts – not just on Election Day but of the environment leading up to polling and the compilation of results – can aid confidence. I urge member states, together with regional and multilateral organisations, to contribute to efforts in this regard.

Mr. President,

Afghanistan's regional relationships and establishing its rightful place in a cooperative neighbourhood will be the best guarantor of future stability and sustainability of both Afghanistan and its neighbours.

Regional engagement by President Hamid Karzai in this period has included visits to Dushanbe, Tehran, Beijing and New Delhi with Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif received in Kabul. The President also participated in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Bishkek, at which he met with the Presidents of Kyrgyzstan and Russia, and in trilateral engagement with Pakistan and the United Kingdom in London. Such regular high-level contacts are important to generating increased momentum for mutually acceptable bilateral and multilateral approaches.

I particularly welcome positive momentum in relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The recent high-level visits are an important demonstration of mutual willingness to build trust and cooperation in all spheres of mutual interest. A new tone is emerging amidst recognition that strengthened relationships and mutual solutions are necessary in the face of internal and regional challenges.

I was encouraged by the reception of Afghanistan's High Peace Council at the highest levels in Islamabad recently. There is now broad recognition across the region that political solutions will be the key to sustainable peace, security and prosperity.

Continuing work in promoting a conducive environment for peace, mitigating the impact of the conflict on civilians - including fostering understanding of the civilian nature of elections, and building the necessary environment and architecture to support direct talks between Afghan authorities and Anti-

Government elements remain essential. The United Nations stands ready to assist in line with its mandate.

More broadly, I see an increased focus on shared economic interests, including interconnectivity and infrastructure, as an opportunity to enhance regional relationships while delivering tangible improvements in people's lives.

The Istanbul Process continues to demonstrate potential in enhancing multi-lateral relationships and regional approaches on Afghanistan. India hosting the next Senior Officials Meeting in early January, to be followed later in the year by the Ministerial in China, demonstrates regional buy-in. Increasing political commitment now needs to be matched by concrete deliverables emerging from agreed confidence-building measures.

I am also personally investing increased time and attention to regional engagement and outreach, notably in this reporting period travelling to the Central Asian republics, and my Political Deputy to Tehran and Beijing. Recent progress in talks on the Iranian nuclear programme in Geneva is being closely followed in Kabul as potentially contributing to a more conducive environment, also, for peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region.

Mr. President,

In my meetings with the leaderships of Afghanistan's neighbours and regional partners, I heard concerns centred around current uncertainties. This included the potential for volatility post-2014 if there is a vacuum which could encourage the spread of Al-Qaeda-linked international terrorism and criminality with implications across the region.

Most immediately another record-setting year of poppy cultivation and production in Afghanistan - resulting in some 5,500 tonnes of opium - is of grave concern. This menace threatens the health, security and economic well-being not just of Afghanistan but also the region and wider international community. Increasing conflict in the previously relatively stable western and northern provinces of Afghanistan, including the short-lived insurgent capture of a district centre in Badakhshan, is also creating some alarm and highlights the complex, evolving nature of the conflict.

In the face of such challenges, I have been impressed by the calm and measured responses of Afghanistan's regional partners. There is increasing appreciation of the need to move beyond pointing fingers to generating regional solutions, both bilateral and multilateral. An excellent example of this is the recent meeting of ministers and counter-narcotic agencies hosted by Tajikistan, where the importance of regional cooperation based on shared responsibilities and joint responses was emphasised.

Mr. President,

Security transition is proceeding as planned. There has not been the catastrophic collapse in security some doomsayers had predicted. The Afghan army and the Afghan police are stepping up to the challenge. There are of course setbacks and casualty rates are of concern. I was pleased to hear from the Minister of Interior recently that the high rate of deaths amongst police personnel is now decreasing.

It is civilians that continue to bear the brunt of the conflict. To the end of November, UNAMA recorded 2,730 deaths and 5,169 injuries, a ten per cent increase on the same period in 2012. The Mission's data continues to show that armed opposition groups are responsible for the vast majority of such casualties. I

welcome steps taken by Afghan and international forces to reduce the impact of the conflict on civilians. However, I repeat a specific appeal to NATO member states to meet obligations in ensuring that vacated premises are fully cleared of potential explosive remnants of war and thus reduce the potential for accidental harm to civilians.

As Afghan forces assume security lead this brings with it increased responsibilities in ensuring the protection of civilians. Working to build understandings of human rights obligations together with promoting the transparency and accountability of Afghan security institutions should be an important element of international training and assistance going forward.

Indeed, there is increasing recognition that it is not simply the number of personnel that is important but their professionalism and sustainability which are ultimately central to institutional effectiveness. I welcome the Minister of Interior's renewed emphasis on the civilian nature of policing and an increased focus on law enforcement functions, including commitment to increasing - and supporting - female personnel in the ranks.

I repeatedly hear from Afghans that impunity and a lack of accountability are major drivers of violence. A focus on increasing public confidence in security services is therefore not a luxury to be addressed later but rather a priority now. In recognition of this, and in line with its mandate, the United Nations in Afghanistan will also increase its focus on promoting coherence of support across the rule of law and judicial sectors.

Corruption remains an extreme problem. Afghanistan is currently ranked 175th of 177 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. On 9 December - International Anti-Corruption Day - the United Nations-backed

Afghanistan Integrity Initiative was launched. This seeks to support Government commitment and capacity to enhance financial accountability at a time when more international assistance is provided 'on budget'.

Mr. President,

Also, humanitarian needs will likely increase. Afghanistan remains a country of chronic poverty exacerbating vulnerability to natural disasters and conflict. Winter is an additional stress. While temperatures this year are likely to be above the seasonal average and less snowfall is predicted, Provincial Disaster Management Committees have developed contingency plans.

Amongst communities identified as particularly vulnerable are 35,000 conflict-related internally displaced persons in Wardak, Nuristan, Ghor, Ghazni, Paktya and Faryab Provinces. I welcome the recent Council of Ministers' endorsement of the national strategy on Internally Displaced Persons and look forward to its formal launch and, even more importantly, its implementation in ensuring comprehensive and durable solutions.

Even as such needs increase, so do the dangers to those seeking to assist. So far in 2013, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has recorded 237 incidents against humanitarian personnel, facilities and assets including 36 deaths, 24 detentions, 46 injuries and 72 abductions. The Security Council has already expressed its strong condemnation of two particularly tragic incidents in this period, with three Afghan development workers killed by a remote-controlled explosive device in Uruzgan on 26 November and, the next day, six Afghans working with the French organisation ACTED dying in an ambush in Faryab. I am grateful on behalf of the humanitarian community in Afghanistan for this.

I pay tribute to the brave men and women working to mitigate and prevent civilian suffering and call upon all actors to respect and uphold the neutrality, impartiality and independence of the humanitarian community and to abide by international law and the norms of war.

Mr. President,

Economic sustainability and equitable social development underpin sovereignty and stability. A decrease in revenue collection at the same time as Afghanistan moves to meet more of its national budget, including security costs, is of concern. Increased revenue generation, together with a robust regulatory framework, is essential to donor and investor confidence.

I welcome Government assurances that laws on anti-money laundering, combating the financing of terrorism, and value-added tax will soon be passed. I further recognise the work being done by donors and the Government to clarify funding flows – including aid alignment with national priorities – to meet mutual commitments.

Continued momentum in the development agenda is required to ensure continuity and progress throughout the upcoming political transition. In taking stock of progress on the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework and building a forward-looking agenda, arrangements are currently being finalised for a special Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board meeting on 29 January next year.

Some areas, such as elections, have seen encouraging results but greater efforts are needed in others such as implementation of the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. UNAMA's latest reporting found that Afghan authorities registered more reports of violence against women under the law over

the past year, but that prosecutions and convictions remained low. Increased levels of reporting are a positive development, but must be met by real will to enforce legal prohibitions on harmful practices against women, including the prosecution of perpetrators.

Another central commitment in protecting and strengthening the gains of the last decade is ensuring the autonomy, credibility and sustainability of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. The Commission recently underwent its international accreditation review and a formal decision is pending. I urge the Government and Commission to work together in ensuring that the review's recommendations are implemented.

Mr. President,

The role of UNAMA, and more broadly of the United Nations in Afghanistan, appears widely appreciated.

A need for greater internal United Nations coherence and efficiencies is recognized. Assistance must be delivered in ways that reinforces and strengthens the capacity of Afghan institutions to deliver services to their people in line with agreed national priorities. This includes increasingly integrated efforts across the United Nations family in support of comprehensive approaches to tackling the illicit economy and improved coherence in the delivery of justice and enhancing the rule of law.

The future role of the United Nations in Afghanistan will likely be considered more comprehensively when there is greater clarity on the impact of the political and security transitions. By its very definition, transition is a time of managed

change. There will necessarily be a reorientation of UNAMA's mandate in recognition of enhanced sovereignty and Afghan lead.

While not seeking to in any way pre-empt Council discussions on a future mandate, I would, at this juncture, foresee the continued need for an integrated mission, streamlined around core areas, namely: good offices in support of Afghan led processes, leading development coherence amongst international stakeholders, and human rights monitoring and advocacy including a particular focus on the rights of women and children, as well as humanitarian assistance.

I thank Council members for clear statements in previous debates supporting stability in UNAMA's resourcing in the coming biennium. The budget must necessarily be informed by the mandate which remains extensive and complex.

In particular, I would highlight the value of the Mission's national footprint, a unique network. Our field offices are essential to mandated elections work and human rights monitoring in particular. Reductions in funding would most likely, and most unfortunately, require additional closures.

Mr. President,

The United Nations in Afghanistan remains committed to long-term partnership in support of Afghan institutions and Afghan priorities with the goal of a stable, inclusive and sustainable state. Once again I reconfirm that despite all the challenges raised today, progress is being made toward these aims.

Essential elements of Afghanistan's transition are coalescing and efforts remain generally on track. The key at this delicate time is enhancing predictability. We must remain patient and not waver in our determination, ensuring that mutual

efforts remain firmly focused on strategic interests and ultimate goals shared by both Afghans and the international community.

Thank you for your attention.

\*\*\*\*\*