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Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan
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Mr. Chairman, when I briefed you in July my focus was on the outcome of the Paris Conference, which was a success in several respects. It provided 21 billion dollars in pledges for Afghanistan. It also established a roadmap for our common efforts. That roadmap was and remains the Afghan National Development Strategy and the Paris Declaration.

Since then we have, I believe, been distracted from the commitments undertaken in Paris. The main reason is the deteriorating security situation. In July and August, we witnessed the highest number of security incidents since 2002. It was an increase of up to 40 per cent compared to the same months last year. In the report you have received, three characteristics were highlighted. First of all, the influence of the insurgency had spread beyond the traditional areas in the south and the east and had extended to provinces around Kabul. Second, there was an increase in asymmetric attacks, some of them very sophisticated, which contributed to an increase in civilian casualties. Third, there were more attacks against aid related and humanitarian targets, including deadly attacks against NGOs and, recently, United Nations personnel.

During September – the month of Ramadan – we have seen a decrease in the number of incidents, as we had expected. On International Peace Day, on 21 September, hostilities were almost brought to a halt, including by the Taliban, following an appeal by the United Nations. This allowed us to vaccinate 1.6 million children against polio, a major achievement. However, we can now again see the number of incidents rising and we must expect that it will climb further over the next weeks, with at least four good weather weeks left after the end of Ramadan. We should be prepared for a situation where we do not experience the same level of winter lull as we have in previous winters. So the situation is increasingly challenging and indeed complex.

I would nevertheless caution against the kind of “gloom and doom” statements that we have seen too many of recently. Many of them really go too far, including from people who have scarcely set foot in Afghanistan. There are also some very promising trends that we must build on and utilize. Let me mention three in particular that affect critical aspects of the conflict.

The relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan has improved. Instead of acrimonious statements we now see a more constructive working relationship emerging. Following President Karzai’s attendance of President Zardari’s swearing-in ceremony, the political dialogue is expanding. It is based on an understanding that the threat from the insurgency is a shared threat. In addition to this political dialogue, I hope that the jirga process will again soon be underway. This is a useful instrument to help address challenges that the two countries have in common. The international community must help strengthen this improved relationship in a wise, meaningful and generous way.

The second development is the change made by President Karzai in his Government, last Saturday. I know from numerous conversations with the President that these changes reflect a desire to address better some of the key areas that have been identified as

common priorities by the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and the Paris Conference. I am first and foremost thinking of the strengthening of the Ministry of the Interior and of the Afghan national Police, which lags seriously behind the Army. This could affect the security in on the ground, the respect for the rule of law, the fight against corruption and our countries narcotics and border control efforts. So the implications could be very significant. I know that the new Minister, who has previously successfully built two key ministries, is determined to do his utmost to address the challenges of this new position.

The changes in the Ministry of Agriculture must also be used to inject new energy in boosting the agriculture production and help us avoid serious and frequent food shortages and to stimulate further growth. It is an area which we - the international community - have also neglected for too long, and the price is high.

The United Nations is already working with the Afghan Government and key partners on the ground to determine how we can use this opportunity to address areas that were identified as priority areas at the Paris Conference.

Third, the latest statistics for drug production show a mixed picture, but with some important positive trends. The overall production is reduced by 19 percent and the number of poppy free provinces has rose from 11 to 13 in 2007, and to 18 this year. Today poppy cultivation is not an Afghanistan-wide phenomenon, but is mainly limited to a smaller number of provinces primarily in the south, where Helmand withstands the vast majority. We must now do our utmost to consolidate this progress and make sure that next year more – and not less – provinces are poppy free. And this is achievable.

If we make good use of these positive trends in critical areas of our joint efforts, then the overall impact could be very significant. I am cautiously – I repeat cautiously – optimistic that we can start replacing the current negative atmosphere with atmosphere of greater confidence in what we are all doing.

That is important for the Afghan people and for the public in donor and troop contributing countries, and for the international community as such.

There is also another priority which has to be addressed urgently. The humanitarian challenges are serious and increasing, first and foremost the serious food shortage we may soon be facing. Again, I would urge donors to ensure that the requirements of the Joint Appeal launched by the Afghan Government and the United Nations in July are met and covered so that food and other assistance can be available to those who are the most undeliverable.

Let me also draw your attention to another important priority for the United Nations and for all of us. A week ago the election process started with the first phase of the voter registration. Despite delays in the opening of some voter registration centres, due to logistics, communication and security problems, approximately 90 percent of the registration centres were opened this week. Together with the Afghan authorities we monitor the situation closely to overcome operational challenges and to do our utmost to ensure a safe and credible registration process.

Mr. Chairman, a part of our mandate is to ensure better civil military cooperation. I believe that we do today have a better relationship between us and the International Security Assistance Force than we had half a year ago. It is a relationship based on respect for each others' distinct mandates. We work closely on the election process, which is now underway. We work better on humanitarian issues, where a set of guidelines have been agreed to ensure that humanitarian assistance is delivered in an impartial way respecting humanitarian principles. We work together on human rights issues, not least to avoid civilian casualties as a result of use of force. It is my hope that the current work in this area will have a positive impact on the ground. I am convinced that a clear and independent United Nations voice in this area is of benefit to all and that a good and constant dialogue with military forces is essential. My recent and very constructive

conversations with key military leaders confirm this impression. When we talk about civilian casualties, however, we must remember that the clear majority of such casualties are caused by the insurgency. The increased use of asymmetric attacks has also led to a significant increase in civilian victims, and such attacks must be firmly condemned.

As part of our civil military cooperation we have also elaborated an integrated approach under civilian lead. The challenge will be to translate this strategy into practical policies. In this respect, I would like to make one comment that I consider to be important. To use a comprehensive approach is not first and foremost how to organize our efforts in a post-operational landscape. It is about how we allocate our overall civilian and military resources to produce the optimal effect on the ground. Today, a growing amount of civilian resources is allocated to conflict provinces to support military operations. I understand that and the logic behind it – that countries need to demonstrate that where they fight they also build. But the result could easily be that more and more of us adopt a province-based perspective. We must avoid a donor-generated fragmentation of Afghanistan. There must be a balance. That is my appeal. Civilian resources will inevitably have a limited impact where and when the conflict is most intense.

At the same time, a number of provinces and districts are in balance. A number of provinces have seen progress that must be urgently consolidated. But they receive modest resources. These are provinces that could be stabilised or consolidated with limited means, so that we can make sure that military means will not be required in the future. This is a new strategy shared by the Executive Director of UNODC, Antonio Maria Costa. And let me add, without a balanced and equitable distribution of resources, then the Afghanistan National Development Strategy to which we have committed ourselves, is unimplementable.

Mr. Chairman. There is today much talk about reconciliation. I have always believed that a solution to the conflict in Afghanistan will depend on the continued and robust presence of military forces, but that the solution in itself ultimately will be a political solution. However, we must avoid speaking of reconciliation in a way that does not reflect the complexity of such a process and does not fully respect the lead of the Afghan Government. A policy of engagement will be required. It must be lead with strength and confidence by the Afghan Government, based on the Constitution and based on the achievements we have made. The United Nations stands ready to assist such a process in accordance with the mandate given to us in Security Council Resolution 1806; and let me add that it must be supported by a strong and confident international community.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, a few words about the work of the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan. It is still a small Mission in need of qualified staff to fulfil our mandate. We have asked for a significant increase in staff and budget – and I appeal to all of you for your support. However, I am more concerned with the quality of staff than with the number of staff. We need specialized people. I am grateful for the many offers made to us, but I also ask for your understanding for the fact that the regulations we have to respect in this building make it difficult to respond as positively and as quickly as I would have liked. There is a need for us all to find creative solutions, within existing regulations, that enable us to meet specific requirements quickly.

With regards to the substance of the work, after Paris, we have set up a new and more results-oriented consultation machinery, and it is starting to work. We have worked with the Afghan Government to establish the Afghanistan National Development Strategy implementation structure. We have worked with international donors to obtain the clarity we have sought in the important Afghanistan Social Outreach Programme of the Independent Directorate for Local Governance. We have worked with the Afghan Government to strengthen institution-building and move towards a more professional civil service. Over the last few days, as I mentioned Mr. President, our efforts have been concentrated on the need to build support around the new Ministers as they take up new responsibilities. We are addressing the critical issue of data collection, in order to monitor and improve aid-effectiveness.

Some have asked where I would like the United Nations Mission to be six months from now. Let me mention some achievables:

To agree with donors on specific criteria to measure aid effectiveness, such as amount of money spent through the core budget or appropriate mechanism which can support the Afghanistan National Development Strategy in an orchestrated way; or distribution of resources in an equitable way nation-wide; or percentage of resources spent in Afghanistan as opposed to resources spent in donor countries; or level of resources spent in a way that builds Afghan capacity. None of this is new; they are all commitments undertaken in Paris.

To establish a database to allow the Afghan Government and the United Nations to track resources, whether spent through the PRTs, development agencies or NGOs. This is critical for transparency and aid effectiveness. And today, Mr. President, the Afghan Government and the United Nations do not know how much money goes to Afghanistan and how it is spent. This must change.

To set up a mechanism for joint audits, enhancing the accountability on all sides.

To strengthen Government institutions to combat corruption.

To agree on a plan for what kind of police we want – because we are not even there, and how we should train them, and start implementing this plan.

To put discussions behind and implement the Afghanistan Social Outreach Programme.

To develop a design for agricultural reform, allowing us to all follow the same priorities and maximise the impact of resources we have available.

To solidify the Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship in a wider, confidence-building regional framework.

Mr. President, I have often talked about a “political surge”. With that I do not intend to minimize the importance of military forces. But it is important to focus on how to give the political dimension of our efforts greater prominence.

I hope we can all work in accordance with this agenda. We will do our best to coordinate, but coordination does not depend on mechanisms. It depends on commitments. It depends first and foremost on a willingness to do things differently. That is the challenge: to take commitments seriously.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.