



Briefing to the United Nations Security Council by the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Nicholas Haysom

[as delivered]

New York, 16 March 2015

Mr. President, members of the Council,

Recent avalanches and floods across Afghanistan which caused over 200 fatalities have reminded us that the country is not only subject to the cost of human conflict but also vulnerable to the regular toll exacted by natural disasters. The United Nations offers its condolences to the affected families and commends the response of the government and humanitarian rescue workers who have worked in the harshest of conditions to assist survivors and re-establish basic services. As requested by the Government, the UN humanitarian system has provided emergency relief and stands ready to deliver further assistance towards longer-term reconstruction.

Mr. President,

Since my last briefing to this Council a number of significant developments have brought renewed hope for an active peace process in Afghanistan. In addition, the National Unity Government has started to take shape with the nomination and approval of a number of ministers. And, Afghanistan and Pakistan have conducted an increasingly constructive dialogue focused on peace, trade and security.

These positive developments are a testament to the efforts of President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah. Their collaborative leadership remains essential for any peace talks to progress, for comprehensive electoral reforms to take hold, and for the implementation of the changes required to reinvigorate the economy.

To this effect, UNAMA once again urges political leaders to conclude the appointment process of senior Government officials. In particular, the Mission highlights the need to appoint senior judicial officials to strengthen recent efforts to reinforce the rule of law and to fight against corruption. UNAMA continues to stress that a diverse and professional administration with strong female representation will be necessary to tackle the many challenges that lie ahead.

Mr. President,

In past weeks, reports on possible peace talks between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban have been prevalent. It is UNAMA's assessment that there is currently an alignment of circumstances that could be conducive to fostering peace talks. Parties, however, need to be given sufficient space to build a level of trust that will allow them to establish common ground, to come to the realization that peace is the only viable option for Afghanistan, and that a military victory is neither likely, nor optimal for a lasting national social compact.

Peace processes are fragile and vulnerable to external destabilization. They require patient nurturing. International support should be coherent and coordinated. A sustainable peace will require that the process be inclusive and build upon the significant gains made by Afghanistan in the past decade. In close consultation with the Government, UNAMA will continue to engage all parties to this conflict in order to assist them find that common ground.

I can also confirm that UNAMA continues a frank dialogue with the Taliban on humanitarian access and on human rights, notably on protection of civilians. In this regard, the Mission notes that as a result access for immunization teams in Helmand province have been restored.

Mr. President,

An integral component of the political agreement that led to the formation of the National Unity Government is the pledge made to establish an Electoral Reform Commission. Comprehensive Electoral reforms will be essential to restoring the faith of the Afghan people in the democratic process and strengthening political stability. UNAMA therefore welcomes President Ghani's renewed commitment to establish this Commission shortly. We strongly encourage Afghan authorities to clarify the electoral calendar, improve fraud mitigation measures, enhance sustainability of elections, and engage the Afghan people in a transparent and consultative manner.

Mr. President,

In the past months, I have undertaken a number of visits to Afghanistan's neighboring countries and met with senior officials inter alia from Iran, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan. I am pleased to report that in each of these meetings, many interlocutors have recognized the importance of enhancing regional collaboration. They affirmed their readiness to play a constructive role in Afghanistan and appreciate that stability and economic cooperation are ultimately a matter of mutual self-interest.

In addition, a proper intra Afghan peace dialogue will require strong regional backing, in full respect of Afghanistan's sovereignty. In this regard, we note the positive initiatives taken by the leaders of Afghanistan and Pakistan in recent months.

Mr. President,

The state of the Afghan economy remains of significant concern. The Government's Self-Reliance agenda presented at the last December London Conference was rightly lauded for its vision. It now needs to be implemented to allow for the Government to further mobilize its revenues, increase its capacity to deliver services and create employment opportunities. Although the rain and snowfalls of the past weeks have alleviated some of the concerns that Afghanistan could be affected by a debilitating drought this summer, preventive measures still need to be put in place to assist the most vulnerable.

Mr. President,

UNAMA has repeatedly stated its persistent concerns about the continued increase in civilian casualties. UNAMA documented over 10,000 civilian casualties in 2014, the highest annual number of civilian casualties recorded since UNAMA began systematic monitoring in 2009. The rise in civilian casualties resulted mainly from increased ground engagements in which Afghan forces and insurgents used indirect fire in and on civilian populated areas. Parties to the conflict must understand the impact of their actions, take responsibility for them, uphold the values they claim to defend, and make protecting civilians their priority. We need to see concrete steps towards a real reduction in civilian casualties in 2015.

UNAMA together with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights released, in late February, their third report on torture and ill-treatment of conflict-related detainees in Government detention facilities. The report found that one-third of all detainees interviewed were ill-treated or tortured. Although this shows a decrease from a 49% incidence of torture in the previous reporting period, more remains to be done to prevent torture, which is still pervasive and systemic. We welcome the new administration's immediate commitment to end these practices including its announcement to bring forward a national plan on the elimination of torture. UNAMA calls on the Government to send a clear message of zero tolerance towards these practices by prosecuting perpetrators, and thereby putting an end to impunity.

Mr. President,

Recent military operations in Helmand and Kunar provinces are a demonstration that the Afghan Security Forces have improved their planning and operational capacity. They are now in a position to conduct large-scale operations without direct combat assistance from international military forces. This development is encouraging even though we expect to see an intensification of combat in the upcoming fighting season as insurgents seek to test ANSF capacity to hold ground on their own.

Recent reports have indicated that the Islamic State of Iraq, or DAISH as it's called in the region, has established a foothold in Afghanistan. It is UNAMA's assessment that the group's presence is of concern but that ISIL's significance is not so much a function of its intrinsic capacities in the region, but of its potential to offer an alternative flagpole to which otherwise isolated insurgent splinter groups can rally.

Mr. President,

Noting the continuation, Mr. President, of the Mission's core mandate, UNAMA will maintain its efforts, in a manner consistent with Afghan sovereignty, to provide good offices, promote human rights, as well as to promote coherent support by the international community to the priorities set by the Government of Afghanistan. We stand ready to participate fully in the broader discussion on the role of UNAMA, donors and the international community as Afghanistan enters the Decade of Transformation.

Mr. President,

In less than a week, Afghans will be celebrating Nawrooz, the day that marks in this region the beginning of the New Year and is widely recognized as an occasion signifying hope and renewal. I therefore take this opportunity to wish my colleague Ambassador Tanin and all

Afghans a peaceful 1395. It is my most sincere hope that this will be the year which brings tangible progress towards peace.

Thank you.

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