



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

[as delivered]

New York, 18 December 2014

Mr. President, Esteemed Members of the Council,

I would like to begin by expressing on behalf of the United Nations family in Afghanistan my most sincere condolences to the people of Pakistan who two days ago suffered a cruel national tragedy. An attack on school children is an attack that can never be justified.

Mr. President,

At the last Security Council briefing, the results of the elections had yet to be announced and the country was in the midst of a protracted political crisis. I am pleased to report that significant progress has since been made. A political agreement has been signed, the winning candidates of the Presidential and Provincial Council elections have been announced, and the Government has committed to an ambitious program of governance reforms.

UNAMA has been greatly encouraged by the peaceful political transition. While the electoral process was prolonged and challenging, the result is a leadership that is legitimate, freshly mandated, and broadly supported. President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah are to be commended for their on-going commitment to make the national unity arrangement work. In their stated commitment to the partnership they have created, they have indicated that this partnership is one of their own choosing, not an imposition. Their sense of common purpose and clear commitments to reform, combatting corruption, and sustainable economic growth has given rise to renewed hope and palpable sense of expectation amongst the Afghan people.

The political agreement was brokered following an unprecedented 100 per cent audit of a paper-based election. This difficult exercise, not without its flaws, was designed to be comprehensive, thorough, independent, and transparent. Conducted in conformity with available international best practices the process, however imperfect, was neither biased nor arbitrary, and would lay the foundation for the negotiation of the political agreement which followed.

Mr. President,

UNAMA remains convinced that there was no better way forward than a National Unity Government. The agreement between the two candidates ended a political crisis that, if

unresolved, would have, at best, left the country divided and at worst, could have reignited past cycles of conflicts. President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah recognized that this moment called for statesmanship over gamesmanship and they themselves have suggested that the choice they faced was to swim together or to sink separately.

I would nonetheless now urge the political leaders to conclude the process for the appointment and approval of senior Government officials. A politically representative yet merit-based cabinet can strengthen the population's confidence that Government intends to deliver on its promises. It will demonstrate the workability of the National Unity Government arrangement and signal that the new government is ready to govern.

Mr. President,

Prior to the London Conference on Afghanistan, many in the international community asked themselves how its success would be measured. The broad consensus was that it would need to deliver a clear pledge to critical reforms by the Government, as well as a reaffirmation by the international community of its enduring commitment to Afghanistan. I am pleased to report that both these objectives were met. The Government's paper, "Realizing Self-Reliance", sets forth a thoughtful, bold and much needed program of reforms. The paper's emphasis on public accountability, transparency and human rights mirrors many of the issues advocated for by Afghan civil society.

To maintain the momentum created by the London Conference, the Afghan Government will need to take action to overcome its current budgetary difficulties. Due to a further drop in revenue collection, the fiscal situation seems to be graver than that portrayed in policy discussions in London. The receipt of emergency donor support in November has helped the Government cover key expenses up till December. The fundamental problem, however, has not been resolved. Significant arrears will need to be carried into the next budget. This is not sustainable and risks derailing the Government's development agenda and the country's path to stability. The international community needs to work with the Government of Afghanistan on concrete measures to implement the Government's reform agenda, in time for the forthcoming post-London Senior Officials Meeting.

The new administration has pledged to make the legal, institutional and policy reforms needed to sustain hard-won gains made in regard to women's rights during the last 12 years. UNAMA will continue to emphasize that upholding and advancing women's rights is an essential step on the road to peace and development. To this effect, I welcome President Ghani's commitment to appointing a substantial number of women to senior positions in government.

Initial steps taken by the Government to combat corruption must also be acknowledged. They have signalled the National Unity Government's will to put an end to impunity for those who have appropriated the nation's resources for themselves. Those efforts will need to be combined with measures to diminish the corrosive social and political impact of the growing illicit economy and narcotics trade. I leave further comments on this to UNODC Executive Director Yuri Fedotov.

Mr. President,

As evidenced by the President's recent regional engagements, the new Government recognizes the importance of strengthening relations with its neighbours. Afghanistan, by virtue of its geographical location, has an important role to play in the region's growth and stability. The

country can serve as a potential land bridge between Central Asia and South Asia. UNAMA will advocate with Afghanistan's northern neighbours that their security concerns are best promoted through connectivity and trade with Afghanistan rather than by hardening their borders.

We are confident that recent agreements with Azerbaijan, China, Pakistan and Turkey, and an expanding regional energy and transportation network can lead to increased trade and cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbours. This in turn will bolster employment and government revenues, and ultimately lead to greater stability. Creating such opportunities is not charity, but is in the self interest of all Afghanistan's neighbours.

The recent Beijing Declaration put on record the region's support for timely Afghan-led reconciliation. It is a recognition that support from regional stakeholders is essential to any peace process. China's renewed engagement in this regard is to be welcomed. President Ghani's visit to Pakistan, followed by an exchange of visits by senior officials to and from Kabul and Islamabad, has paved the way for a more productive and forward-looking dialogue, and will lay the groundwork for closer cooperation between the two countries.

Mr. President,

Stability and prosperity will, quite simply, not be achieved in the absence of a durable peace. Ultimately the solution to the conflict in Afghanistan is a political rather than military. President Ghani himself has made this clear and has extended an invitation to those who oppose the Government to enter into an inter-Afghan dialogue to resolve the conflict. This commitment to direct dialogue between the Government and the armed opposition through an Afghan-led peace process is to be welcomed. UNAMA stands ready to support Afghan-led and owned reconciliation and political processes, and will engage all parties in support of this, in full consultation with the Government.

The necessity for a peaceful resolution to the conflict is underscored by the appalling human cost borne by ordinary Afghans. As of 30 November, UNAMA recorded more civilian deaths and injuries this year any other full year since [it began records in] 2008. Civilian casualties increased 19 per cent overall from last year, with a figure of 33 per cent increase in respect of children. These casualties resulted mostly from ground engagements between parties to the conflict, improvised explosive devices, and suicide and complex attacks carried out by anti-Government forces.

The increased targeting of market places, de-miners clearing unexploded ordinance, and various sporting and cultural events suggests a shift in approach by anti-government elements. By way of example, the 23 November suicide attack of a large crowd watching a volley-ball match in Paktika killed at least 53 civilians, including 21 children.

As Afghan security forces assume the lead in protecting the civilian population, international forces must remain engaged with the ANSF in mitigating the devastating effects of conflict on civilians.

I can report that UNAMA continues to engage with the Taliban on the critical issue of responsibility for and avoidance of civilian casualties.

Mr. President,

With the conclusion of the ISAF mission, I would want to recognize the contribution of all contributing member states and honour those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the pursuit of a peaceful and sovereign Afghanistan.

The Government has now taken full responsibility for the security of the country. Afghan National Security Forces are meeting the challenges of the insurgency with determination and courage but at great cost. In this regard, the joint decision taken by NATO and the Government of Afghanistan to launch Resolute Support Mission as of 1 January 2015 and this Council's resolution in support of that mission is vitally important. Sustained and predictable international security assistance is vital.

The recent surge in security incidents is cause for concern. It is too early to assess whether this surge is timed to coincide with the withdrawal of international military forces, or is the "new normal". UNAMA itself is reassessing its security measures but is not curtailing its activities

Mr. President,

When they voted in such large numbers in the Presidential and Provincial elections, Afghans acted on their belief that elections would deliver a better future. The ensuing political stalemate, however, has left many questioning the value of the democratic process. It is therefore the responsibility of government to convince the Afghan electorate that duly adopted reforms will deliver less fraudulent elections.

One of the first steps will be for the Government to bring certainty to the electoral calendar by announcing realistic dates for the holding of the Parliamentary and District Council elections. We note that the political agreement signed between the two of them provides for comprehensive electoral reform prior to the Wolesi Jirga and District Council elections envisaged in 2015. We strongly encourage the Government to use the opportunity offered by this reform process to engage the Afghan people in a transparent and consultative manner as a way to improve their confidence in electoral institutions.

Mr. President,

I would also like to thank my predecessor, SRSB Jan Kubis, for his leadership of UNAMA during a most challenging period of transition. He has left a mission held in high regard by the Afghan population.

For the last 13 years the international community has rendered unprecedented support – military, financial and political - to Afghanistan. With the conclusion of the political and security transitions the means and form of support will necessarily evolve and change, more specifically as this Council reconsiders the UNAMA mandate next year. What will not change, however, is the shared goal of a peaceful, sovereign and increasingly prosperous Afghanistan.

Thank you for your attention.
