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Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan
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Mr. President,

The current situation in Afghanistan is certainly the most complex we have experienced for many years. However, if managed well, I believe that it could also become a turning point in our efforts to bring the conflict to an end.

The situation is complex because we have to keep to so many perspectives and processes in mind at the same time: the need to ensure an election process that is credible and where the result can be accepted by the people; the need to stimulate promising and positive developments in several sectors in spite of the noise from the election campaign and an intense fighting season; and the need to look beyond the elections and shape a more focused agenda for the next five years—an agenda which will have to include a credible peace process as an integral part of that overall strategy. I say “we”, but, of course, in all these processes, it is the Afghan institutions and the Afghan people that will have to take the lead. The role of the international community must be, as always, to provide its full support.

The August election is about more than choosing Afghanistan's future leaders. It is about strengthening the peoples' confidence in the democratic processes, and about strengthening Afghanistan's democratic institutions. It is not only about who will lead, but about the legitimacy of leadership.

I have therefore urged all candidates to campaign with dignity and with fairness. An election campaign will always be divisive. But in this country and at this juncture it is critically important that the disagreements of campaign are managed, and that they are replaced by unity of purpose in building the country when the next presidential inauguration has taken place. All candidates must keep this longer-term perspective in mind.

And I have called on all Government institutions and officials to maintain impartiality during all phases of the election process. The President has, as you know, issued a decree prohibiting interference by state institutions. Ministers and Heads of security institutions have assured me in my many discussions with them of their determination to protect the integrity of their institutions. We will maintain a continuous dialogue with all of them to address cases of interference if and when they occur.

I have also called on all candidates to avoid any inflammatory language and to conduct a campaign focused on their vision for Afghanistan's future. We need a campaign focused not only on who will lead the country, but where they will lead the country.

And I have called on the international community to avoid any interference or appearance of interference in the election process. Any such interference would undermine the legitimacy of the process and people's confidence in its future leaders. And it would, in particular, harm a future government's ability to bring the Afghan people together in a credible peace process.

Nobody's interests can be served by an election result which is disputed by the people and affects the legitimacy of a future Government.

These elements—non-interference, a dignified policy-oriented debate, and total international impartiality—are critical elements of the level playing field that we are all seeking to achieve.

Another element is, of course, the ability of candidates to conduct their campaigns. I am encouraged to see that the Afghan media will have a significant number of presidential debates during the campaign. I appeal to all media, including the public media, to ensure that candidates have fair access.

The Minister of Interior has offered to provide close protection to candidates during their campaigning. The Minister of Defence has offered transportation for candidates within the limits of his capabilities. Both measures will contribute to a credible election campaign.

Two weeks ago, I visited a so called "call center", where voters can call in to ask questions about the elections. This center now receives around 25.000 calls every week from voters – in particular young voters – from across the country. It is an important part of the efforts of the Independent Election Commission's outreach programme and efforts to mobilize voters. The UN has appealed and will continue to appeal to all voters to take part in the election process. Such participation is essential to the legitimacy of the election results and to the future strength of democratically elected institutions. Our call goes to all Afghan citizens without any exceptions.

Mr. President,

The Secretary-General's report describes some of the progress we have seen during recent months, in strengthening security institutions, in reforming agriculture and the private sector, in improving revenue collection and the government's internal coordination, and in developing comprehensive civilian capacity-building programmes.

There is a totally new momentum in these areas. My fear, however, is that the noise from the election campaign and from the fighting season will absorb so much energy and so much attention that it will overshadow these positive trends and affect the momentum which has now developed. If we do not succeed in maintaining that momentum, then I am afraid we will witness new stagnation and more disillusionment among the public.

These positive trends are mainly the result of competent Afghan ministries. But they are also a result of a strong and long-term commitment by the international community. We

must remain firm in that long-term commitment, on which continued progress will depend. However, progress will also depend on a short-term ability to respond to new opportunities.

The work now underway in the Ministry of Agriculture will result in a gap assessment and proposals for how to reform the agricultural sector. The work underway in the Ministry of Finance will result in a list of priorities for civilian capacity building efforts. It will also result in a plan for more ambitious revenue collection. All these topics will be discussed in the JCMB in a few days time. The work underway by the Ministry of Interior and the international community will result in proposals for a stronger and reformed Afghan National Police. When these proposals are presented to us we must be able to respond quickly and flexibly. It cannot be that we ask Afghan authorities year after year to address our concerns, but when a new Minister responds we reply that we cannot react on this year's budget.

Let me take one example: The Ministry of Agriculture this spring asked for an urgent contribution of 5.5 million dollars for the purchase of wheat seed to allow farmers to plant next year's crop. In spite of a number of appeals, it has not been possible to obtain and provide the resources required. We cannot end up in a situation where we have to turn to Bill Gates to meet urgent requirements of this nature. If we respond quickly and effectively where encouraging new developments occur, then this would stimulate similar developments in other sectors. If we fail to respond, then I fear that we could face setbacks even where progress can now be seen.

But I must emphasise that we are seeing some new and promising trends in the international community. In particular, the review of US development policies over the last weeks is producing important results. I welcome the readiness to support the new national agriculture programme and the Government's plans for civilian capacity-building efforts and for revenue collection. There is a trend to support Afghan plans and Afghan priorities more generously than before. This could represent a major shift and lead to greater aid effectiveness and better coordination. The shift in US counter-narcotics policies, combined with the new Afghan programme for development of alternative livelihoods, could also have a significant impact on our efforts to combat poppy production.

However, the inequitable distribution of resources within Afghanistan continues, making it easier for the insurgency to destabilize previously stable provinces and districts. There is still a serious lack of reporting on how and where development resources are spent, which complicates planning and coordination. I hope that the ongoing gap assessment in key sectors will lead donors to provide more information about their spending and to a distribution of resources which provides greater resources for underfunded provinces. The UN has, of course, worked intimately with the relevant ministries during the elaboration of the new plans that have now been presented. And we will continue this

cooperation during the implementation phase. And we are already working with other ministries to address serious imbalances, such as the entire educational sector.

There is still much talk about lack of coordination. And it is justified. However, I do feel that on this subject many are still continuing yesterday's debate. The situation has changed over the last few months. I believe that we are now turning a corner: the Afghan Government is better coordinated, there are encouraging signs in the international community towards better coordination, and the ability of the UN to carry out its coordination mandate has improved.

More effective and coordinated development efforts will enable us, of course, to meet the concerns of the Afghan people and their legitimate demands for greater economic and social justice. It will also enhance the people's confidence in their own Government and in the international community.

And then we must also strengthen efforts to ensure that the military engagement of the international community remains supported by the Afghan people. In his report, the Secretary-General appeals for a review of the operations of special forces—which by far account for the majority of civilian casualties caused by pro-government forces. He appeals for a review of the use of air power in populated areas, which has led to loss of lives due to tragic mistakes. And he appeals for better training of international military forces to prepare them better for the Afghan cultural and political context in which they will operate. It is my view that the political costs of recent mistakes are simply disproportionate to military gains and that such reviews are urgently required.

I therefore, Mr. President, strongly welcome General McChrystal's commitment to a "fundamental shift in attitude". That is an important statement, we all know that it is impossible to fight the insurgency effectively without maintaining the support of the population. With additional international forces on the ground, that challenge will become even more critical. The UN will continue to monitor and address incidents of civilian casualties in an independent way, based on its human rights mandate. But—and more importantly—we are ready to work with the new commander in his reviews to help avoid the loss of civilian lives in whatever way we possibly can.

But let me repeat again: the clear majority of civilian casualties are caused by the insurgency. And for them, it is not a result of tragic mistakes, but of deliberate policy.

What I have said now is not an attempt to present a rosy picture of the overall situation in Afghanistan. The prospects for progress are seriously undermined by the ongoing conflict. The number of security incidents rose beyond the one thousand mark for the first time in May and the number of such incidents increased by 43% over the first four months compared to the same period last year. However, I should add that those figures are not a good indication of the success or failure of the insurgency. There are more incidents in parts of the country which have up to now been stable. This is the most intense fighting season we have experienced.

It is also clear that the fight against widespread corruption is still only in its early stages. Institutions are still weak, not only in human capacity, but in physical infrastructure, especially at the sub-national level. Six provinces still do not have offices for their governors. Only half of the district governors have an office building and 288 do not have a vehicle. This impacts tremendously on their ability to administer the country and deliver services to the people.

I mentioned in the opening of my speech that we must also have a perspective that goes beyond the elections; Mr. President, in Paris and at the Hague conference clear priorities were set for our common efforts. We need a common strategic vision for the post-election period, a vision that can provide a clearer direction and guide us over the next years in support of a new government; a development strategy, which can enable us to move forward in a more disciplined and coordinated way and which allows for greater Afghan ownership; and a security strategy, which accelerates the build-up of Afghan security forces and their role in ensuring the stability of their country; and, finally, a political strategy which includes a credible and inclusive peace process, which respects the rights of all Afghans – men, women and children - and which brings the various parts of the Afghan society together in an inclusive manner. All these elements must be integral parts of our vision for the post-election period.

Two weeks ago, I addressed almost one thousand Afghan religious and intellectual leaders, including opposition leaders, at an event dedicated to the need for an inclusive peace process. My message to them was that such a process must be Afghan-owned and Afghan-led. But the UN must be prepared to be a partner in such a process and I am dedicated to bringing about such a partnership.

However, a credible and successful peace process can only take place if we have a government which enjoys the support of the people and has confidence in itself. And it can only take place if we have an international presence which enjoys the support of the people and has confidence in itself.

Last week-end I was invited to attend the G8 meeting in Trieste. It was the last of a series of meetings devoted to the regional potential for the development of Afghanistan. The need for closer regional cooperation on security matters is absolutely obvious. However, the potential goes much further. In the short term, experts from the region—who know the language, the culture and the climate, who can often be more effective and less costly than the experts from further away—could make a valuable contribution to the development of Afghan capacities. In the longer term, key infrastructure programmes could not only turn Afghanistan from being a barrier to trade to becoming a corridor for regional economic activities. Such infrastructure would also enable Afghanistan to exploit its own natural and human resources. Afghanistan is a very poor country, but it is not destined to poverty. It has vast mineral resources, such as the largest iron ore reserves in Asia.

Infrastructure—as agriculture—is seriously underfunded. If we could concentrate on a very limited number of strategic infrastructure projects, then the impact in terms of sustainable economic growth and in terms of employment and revenue collection, would be tremendous. A railway network from the Iranian border through Herat, north-east to Central Asia and China as well as from the Pakistani border through Jalalabad linking up in the north with the lines north to Central Asia and west to the Iranian border, would stimulate regional trade. And it would enable Afghanistan to exploit and export its mineral resources. Agreements already exist for the building of significant parts of this network. There is a need to fill in the gaps. And it would over time have a great impact on Afghanistan's dependence on foreign assistance. The expansion of the electricity lines from Central Asia through Afghanistan would have a similar impact and generate activities in a wide range of economic areas. This dimension should also be an important part of vision for Afghanistan and its region for the next five years.

Mr. President,

Let me say a few words about UNAMA: Its mandate is multi-faceted and ambitious. The expectations of the international community are high. I am certainly grateful for the additional resources the mission received in December last year. However the situation has evolved since the six months that have passed since our 2009 budget was adopted. With rising expectations and new opportunities emerging on the ground, there is also a need for greater resources: to fulfill our mandate in donor coordination; to meet the new opportunities in capacity- and institution-building; and to expand across the country, as requested in Security Council resolutions. UNAMA does not itself, as you know, bring financial resources. However, a country-wide presence of our mission could serve as a magnet to other civilian organizations and gradually draw development and governance efforts out of the military context and into the civilian context where they belong. And it could help to facilitate an all-inclusive political process through a better civilian outreach programme. I therefore appeal to you to support us in our urgent need for additional resources. And I will come back to you in more precise terms

In the discussions in March and in the mandate given to us, the Security Council asked the Mission to develop benchmarks for our activities. This work is underway and will be finalized for the Secretary-General's next report in September. It is not an easy task, since UNAMA's efforts form an integral part of the efforts of so many other Afghan and international institutions. It is also hard to establish timelines and means of measuring progress in political processes, especially in a context as unpredictable and complex as Afghanistan's. Nevertheless, consultations are underway with our partners, and I am confident that by September we will be able to present you with a set of meaningful benchmarks.

Thank you.

