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Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan
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Mr. President, This is certainly decision-time in Afghanistan and for Afghanistan. A number of critical decisions will be made over the next weeks. Together, they will determine the prospects for success in ending a conflict that has become more intense over the last months. Let me mention a few of them:

Very soon, the final results from the 20 August presidential elections will be determined and then certified.

Then, the future president will decide on the composition of his new government and its agenda for the years ahead.

Among the decisions the government will have to take is how a process of peace and reconciliation can be launched.

Decisions will have to be made concerning the future size and composition of the international and Afghan security forces.

And decisions must be made concerning the priorities and allocation of international development assistance.

Faced with such important decisions, I must emphasize that doing more of the same simply is not an option any more. We must change our mindset. Nothing of what we need to do is dramatically new. Much of it has been said and written – and even agreed solemnly at international conferences over and over again. But it has not been implemented. If implemented, it can have a tremendous impact on the ground. But if we shy away from difficult decisions, then the overall situation on the ground will continue to deteriorate.

First, the elections. Yes, there has been fraud and irregularities committed by election officials, candidates and their supporters as well as government officials. The turn-out was low – almost as low as during the elections for the European Parliament. But Afghanistan is a country in conflict, and a long and intense campaign of intimidation took place to frighten voters away from the polling stations. No other day since 2002 has seen so many security incidents as we experienced on 20 August. Nevertheless, more polling stations opened than during previous elections. The security forces and the Independent Election Commission (IEC) did their utmost to provide access for voters. They did so in a country that not only is in conflict, but has a weak infrastructure, weak institutions, and a huge illiterate population confronted with a ballot paper containing 41 presidential candidates.

But I would also like to emphasize a few positive elements that now seem to be almost forgotten: The election campaign was characterized by a public engagement that Afghanistan has never seen before. There was a real debate between political alternatives—one that this country has never witnessed. In my view, the strong public engagement proves that the Afghan people wanted these elections. They wanted to continue the democratic process of this country.

Two weeks ago many believed that we were almost on the verge of collapse. But it has been kept on track. The IEC and the Electoral Complaint Commission (ECC) have worked together

in this final stage. With the assistance of experts brought in from abroad an audit process has been agreed to determine the level of fraud and the final results. The ballot boxes will now be brought to Kabul so that the final audit can take place. This process is at every stage in accordance with international standards. It has been used in other complex elections. It will enable us to have a credible and legitimate result. At the same time this audit procedure will enable us to determine the final results in a short period of time. That means that a second round—if required—can be organized before winter sets in, thereby avoiding a lengthy period of political vacuum and instability. We have been assisted by some of the most experienced experts you can possibly find – in electoral processes and statistics – in addition to the excellent people who have been on the ground throughout the process.

The challenge of the ECC will be to determine and reject fraudulent ballots while at the same time avoiding disenfranchising voters who have cast their votes in good faith and in an Afghan cultural environment—where many people have not seen a ballot paper, or not used a pen.

When the final result has been certified it must be respected – by candidates and their supporters. What most Afghans – by far – now want – is to see the process come to an end, a government formed, and their lives improved.

Then important decisions must be taken by the future Afghan president. This means—first of all—appointing a government which can inspire the people and its confidence. That will also be a first important and necessary signal to the international community and will help consolidate the commitment of the publics in donor and troop contributing countries. At this point in time, with an increasing debate about Afghanistan in the international community, such a signal will be of vital importance.

Furthermore, we cannot allow anymore the warlords and power-brokers of the past and their policy of fragmentation to contaminate the institutions of the future. We need a unity of purpose, a sharing of responsibility that has so far been lacking. To eliminate the influence of fragmentary forces of the past cannot be done overnight. These forces must also understand that in a conflict which is expanding in scope and intensity, they will be expected to step back from their policies of fragmentation and personal interests. Local and regional power brokers cannot be allowed to hinder efforts to build a coherent Afghanistan and thereby offer opportunities that insurgents can exploit. In this respect, the international community has an important role to play: instead of paying tribute to and instead of enriching those who oppose the government with undemocratic and illegal means, we must make it clear that the alternative to unity of purpose is marginalization.

The second challenge for a future president will be to formulate an agenda, which truly corresponds to the concerns of the people. Better governance at the provincial and district levels, an intensified struggle against corruption, strengthened respect for the rule of law, bringing an end to the culture of impunity and promoting social and economic justice must be prominent parts of this agenda. We need a new “compact” between the Afghan government and its people. That “compact” will be a cornerstone in a renewed commitment by the international community to Afghanistan.

I am often asked if there should be conditionality in our assistance. There is, in my view, a de facto conditionality; decisions of donors and troop contributing countries are not made around summit tables, in government tables, or even this Security Council table. They are made around kitchen tables and in living rooms where public opinion is shaped. The strength of that public support depends on the readiness of the Afghan government to come closer to the concerns of its people. The future Afghan government must understand that too.

Important decisions will also be required by the international community. On the security side, General McChrystal has now presented his assessment. It is clear, straightforward and it is demanding. His main themes are the need to change the operational culture and get closer to the people, improve unity of effort, focus resources and improve the effectiveness of the ANSF. I welcome his assessment, not least his emphasis on cultural sensitivity and the need to develop a different relationship to the population in many areas.

I do not want to comment on the debate over the need for additional international fighting forces. However, I do want to comment on the longer-term perspective. We agree on the need to improve the strength and capacity of the Afghan army and police.

The increase of the Afghan army is ahead of schedule and could reach the 134,000 goal by October next year instead of 2012 as originally planned. That is encouraging. A further and significant increase will be required in the following years. But if the army is to take greater responsibility and conduct independent operations, much more than numbers will be required. Decisions concerning procurement of equipment and weapons will have to be taken soon. More international troops for training and mentoring in the field will also be required

Similarly with the Afghan police. A decision to increase the number of police to around 140,000 should be taken before the end of the year. But again, it is not only a question of numbers. The current attrition rate for the Afghan police is 20-25 per cent. That illustrates the need for better training, better equipment and better incentives.

All this—the training, mentoring and equipping of the Afghan army and police—cannot be a U.S. effort alone. There must be a wider engagement. I therefore strongly appeal to other contributing countries to step up their efforts in manpower as well as financial resources. I did the same to the Defence Ministers of the European Union three hours ago, when I spoke to them by video link to Sweden.

On the civilian side, I see two main areas that must now be given urgent priority.

The first is institution building. If the Afghan government is to link up better with its population a huge institution-building programme is needed—and I've said it before. It can be divided into five components:

Training and education for current and future civil servants. Institutional frameworks already exist but they must be expanded. Today, 25% of district governors are either uneducated or have only primary education.

Building of sub-national infrastructure. Today, half of the district governors have no office; two thirds have no power supply and one third no vehicles.

Building an IT network that enables provincial and district governors to link up to their employers in Kabul and link up to Afghan national development plans.

Strengthening of incentives. When you know that a district governor earns \$60 a month, it makes it difficult to attract qualified personnel to dangerous districts.

Stronger emphasis on merit-based appointments and accountability.

The government must demonstrate readiness to fight corruption and strengthen its institutions. But the responsibility for building viable and accountable governance is one we must share. And the shortcomings I have just mentioned illustrate the complexity of the problem and that we must have realistic expectations with regard to how fast we can go forward.

Our second priority is sustainable economic development. I understand the growing impatience in the international community and the need to demonstrate results for all the sacrifices and resources that are committed. However, it must not lead us to an accelerated pressure for quick impact results on the development side of our engagement. If that were to happen, then it would distract us further from what is required for sustainable economic development that will enable Afghanistan increasingly to rely on its own resources.

We need a two-track approach with doable projects in conflict areas—that can visibly increase the quality of people's lives—and greater investments in long term projects centred around growth engines in those stable parts of the country that can enhance revenue collection and gradually reduce dependence on foreign aid. Today, the balance is simply wrong, with too little resources and attention given to the longer-term investment. It will lead to a situation where much of what we have been doing will become in a few years unsustainable.

At the G8 meeting in Trieste, I presented on behalf of the Government and the UN proposals for significant infrastructure projects: a railroad and an electricity grid that would employ thousands of Afghans in the short term, and in the longer term enable Afghanistan to exploit

its own and rich mineral resources, not least its vast iron ore resources. They would stimulate the private sector and provide an engine for growth in significant parts of the country.

Afghanistan in this respect is more advanced in its thinking than we are. At the Special Envoy meeting in Paris earlier this month I circulated a paper elaborated by the Minister of Finance and the United Nations, which proposes a reorganization of the efforts of the Afghan government and its approach to economic development. Moving away from seven sector-based inter-ministerial committees, the proposal is to establish three main clusters: agriculture and rural development, human resource development, and infrastructure and economic growth. It represents a radical shift in thinking away from an un-prioritized competition among ministries to a strategic approach to sustainable economic growth. I wish we could follow. Because today, our aid bureaucracies are too rigid, they lack the ability to respond to new and better policies.

Finally, I indicated initially that a new government will have to develop and decide on a peace and reconciliation programme. Some—in particular in the international community—are talking about a reintegration process distinct from such a programme. I would like to appeal for some caution. First, I am convinced that whatever you call this effort, it must be led by the Afghan government with the support of the international community. Second, the distinction between hard core Taliban and those moderates who can be brought over with a chequebook is indeed simplistic. We must analyze better who makes up the insurgency. Yes, there are irreconcilable insurgents. And yes, there are those who join the insurgency for financial reasons. But there are many who have joined the insurgency because they feel politically and socially alienated. That will require a political process, greater inclusiveness, and a stronger justice system. There are important differences from region to region. The insurgency is a multi-causal issue and must be approached as such. Simplistic recipes will not work. We—the international community—can and must play a supporting role. But let's leave it to the Afghans to see how to move forward.

Mr. President, there have been a number of calls for a new international conference on Afghanistan. And I support such calls. However, if security persists I believe that the first such conference should take place in Kabul. A conference in Kabul at ministerial level and in the established JCMB format would be a strong political signal and underline that we are moving into a transition strategy where the main focus must be on a "Compact" between the Afghan people and its government, and where the Afghan government assumes greater responsibilities for the future of its country with the international community gradually in a more supporting role. That conference would be based on a new government programme and provide international support to it.

But I also believe we should look towards a broader conference to formulate in a wider sense the goals of our partnership for the years ahead, goals that are ambitious but at the same time realistic and realizable, and that would provide a new roadmap for a mutual long-term commitment. This will be four years after the Afghanistan Compact was concluded in London. It should centre around some of the themes I have mentioned above: the Government's ability to assume the full responsibilities of a sovereign state, institution-building, economic development, a peace and reconciliation process, and Afghanistan's future status in the region. It would mark the end of one phase of our relationship and the beginning of another.

Before I conclude, I would like to mention a few pieces of good news that have not received much attention but nevertheless are important:

First, the area under opium cultivation dropped by 22% this year, including a major drop in the Helmand province. The volume of production was reduced by 10% and the number of opium-free provinces increased further from 18 to 20.

Second, in August, the young student Parwez Kambaksh, who had been given a death sentence for downloading material concerning the interpretation of the Koran, was given a presidential amnesty on humanitarian grounds. This case had received global attention. He is now a free man.

Third, during the UN peace day campaign, 1.2 million children were vaccinated against polio. Only 3% of the target group was not reached, mainly due to ongoing fighting. Thanks to the cooperation of all, including the Taliban, access was obtained to areas that had been

inaccessible in previous years. For us on the ground this is important good news—and even more so for the children whose lives can be saved.

Finally, you have this month received a set of benchmarks as instructed in Security Council resolution 1868. They are formulated following a debate in Kabul on whether they should be UNAMA-specific or of a more general nature. There was consensus on the latter. They represent a first attempt and will be further refined, following the debate around this table and in Kabul.

The UN has, I believe, expanded its efforts in accordance with its mandate, not least in coordination of political and development issues. That work will continue. Our ambition is to expand further across the country and it is my aim to establish four new offices over the next months. There is also a need for a stronger coordinating effort—primarily in the areas of development and governance. I have therefore asked for additional resources in next year's budget in order to implement the mandate more fully. However, it is not only—as I have said before—a question of the number of staff. We need specialized personnel, which is hard to find. I therefore appeal to you for your continued support and for your assistance in finding the people we need in a very challenging environment.

Thank you, Mr. President.