

**Statement of Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the United Nations
Secretary-General in Afghanistan, to the Security Council
6 July 2011**

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Members of the Security Council:

The last time I briefed the Security Council, as the Council is aware, I insisted, against the rules, on allowing Ambassador Tanin to speak first, as a sign of attention and respect to the growing need for the Afghan people to be recognized as a sovereign country. But this time, Ambassador Tanin has insisted, with me, to go back to the rules, to show that Afghanistan intends to stick to international rules. Therefore, with his permission, I will apply the old approach and take the floor as he kindly requested me to do.

We meet today at the moment when we are at a special crossroads. July is a significant month in 2011, as decisions have been taken that relate to the beginning of transition. Transition has been announced, but it is also going to be based on the decisions taken at upcoming meetings of the international community with the Afghan authorities, starting approximately in mid-July. This is also the month when we are starting to see the gradual implementation of the decision announced in the speech by President Obama with regard to a gradual redeployment of international forces, in particular those of the United States. In other words, we are at a crossroads between national sovereignty and what comes with it, namely, responsibility and accountability, and between continuing conflict and a politically inclusive dialogue.

First of all, on the transition, it is like a train that is moving forward. According to every indicator I have — and as we heard at the meeting we had on the transition conference in Kabul — it is also on track. The transition will also of course address seven areas, provinces and cities. As usual, we will see that the devil is in the details. But the transition is on track.

An issue on which we are working — and on which we should be working more, as was recognized in the meeting to which I referred — has to do with the fact that transition cannot be, and should not be, only about security. It has to be about something more. It needs to be a transition to something that the Afghan people recognize and identify with. That is why we are working together in order to ensure that the results in the social, economic and human rights aspects are linked to the transition. In that sense, while the transition is irreversible like a Swiss train, we need at the same time to make sure that it becomes solidly irreversible with regard to the socio-economic aspect.

In that context, one element that has been discussed in the past few days, and which may come up again, is the idea of seeing whether we could have some of the projects that may emerge that are related to transition linked to some type of transition dividend. In other words, there will undoubtedly be some savings on the military side. Some of it may be utilized to ensure that local Afghan authorities and the people in the

areas that are being transitioned feel that there is continuing interest and substantive support for their development. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) will do its part in that regard, based on its very clear mandate, in particular to facilitate that aspect of the transition.

That leads me to my second point, which is normally the first one in Afghanistan, that is, security. As the Council knows — and there have been many reminders of this — the security situation has been an issue of concern recently. But we have to look at it in context. God knows I do so with care and caution, having just experienced tragedy on 1 April. There have been attacks on the Intercontinental Hotel. Many of us have been there and we know its iconic value. It was shocking. There have been attacks inside the city and in military hospitals, and even in the Ministry of Defence. There were attacks in Kandahar for two days, as well as attacks in Herat on the Italian provincial reconstruction team.

But let us put it into context. All the attacks were taken care of in an effective way by the Afghan military and police — albeit perhaps sometimes in a rather confusing way, as we are all in the process of training. Even at the Intercontinental Hotel, in a way, the end of the attack was supported by International Security Assistance Force helicopters. Again, however, the Afghan forces were up front.

I think that is an important point, because there is a perception of improvement in terms of the security situation, which is true. There has been a surge and there has been an improvement in the perception of the momentum being reversed. It is also true, however, that there is a constant attempt by anti-government forces — during the spring offensive, as they call it, and in the summer — to try to reverse that perception by giving signals of dramatic surgical attacks. But I must say that, so far, the first impression still prevails. The Afghans have been able to handle it. That does not mean that in the next few weeks or perhaps months, as the summer is not over, there may not be moments of great difficulty in the security situation.

That is why it is so important, first, to address the issue of civilian casualties, which is affecting the Afghan people, and, secondly, to actually go into the other phase, namely, a political search — as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and, recently, President Obama have indicated, and as has President Karzai several times. Everybody recognizes that no military solution is conceivable in Afghanistan. We now need to move more effectively into a political search.

That means reconciliation. Where are we on that? Well, as is clear for all to see, there have been a lot of contacts. Unfortunately, there have also been leaks to the media, which have not helped those contacts. But there is clearly a need for dialogue, and we are getting indications that this will be resumed in a more concrete way very soon.

Meanwhile, the United Nations is doing its part, in close coordination with Afghan authorities and international stakeholders. We are focusing specifically only on what we are mandated to do, and where we perhaps have added value, that is, on

confidence-building measures. These are important, because they are the measures that prepare for substantive discussion, which can only be carried out by the Afghans with the Afghans. They will actually have to do what we have always said, namely, ensure that this is Afghan-led.

But confidence-building measures do matter, especially at this stage. They include issues such as looking at civilian casualties and giving the Taliban a chance, if they want to be involved, to actually qualify by doing so with facts and not with words and by reducing the tremendous negative impact that they are having on the civilian population, especially in the most recent period.

Secondly, and I know this is personal judgment, but it is one based on the perception held by many in Kabul, the decision that the Council courageously took to split the list of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999) between Al-Qaida and the Taliban is certainly an indicator in the right direction, if we want to continue to push for reconciliation. To give one example, some of the members of the High Peace Council, which is the ultimate authority and to which we will refer when there is a substantive discussion, happen to still be on the list. That is very difficult to manage when we, as the United Nations and UNAMA, assist them logistically and substantively and try to travel with them and bring them around in order to make sure that we have meetings.

One area for confidence-building measures is certainly the possibility of establishing a venue — let us not call it an office — where meetings could eventually take place between the Taliban and stakeholders, in particular Afghan partners, without a feeling of insecurity and with an atmosphere of sufficient discretion. That is not yet there, but it is one of the areas.

Let me mention an additional area, which has come up in the past few weeks. It has to do with education. If there is one area that the international community and the Afghan authorities should be proud of, in terms of improvement after the departure of the Taliban, it is education. Seven million children are currently enrolled and going to school, many of them girls. We continuously witnessed the tragic decisions taken during the Taliban's rule regarding schools in general and girls in particular. There are some indicators that they appear for the first time to be sending messages — even publicly through the Internet — that they might have learned from that mistake. We hope that this is not just a tactical decision and that they are in fact indicating their interest in not attacking schools.

There have been some contraindications. Some teachers have been affected recently, but on the whole our own research indicates that some 400 schools, newly established in certain areas that could clearly be influenced by a Taliban presence, have seen a substantial reduction of attacks. Minister Wardak has drawn my attention to this. We, together with UNICEF, will continue studying the situation; if this is a trend, we will recognize it as a confidence-building measure. But it needs to be verified.

There is one area that I think we need to refer to when we talk about reconciliation. That is reintegration. The institutional architecture is there, and all members of the Council have contributed substantially — some very substantially — to actually making sure that this is a real and well-prepared eventuality. So far, there has been some traction and momentum. More than 1,800 people are currently in the programme. But challenges exist.

First of all, it is clear that until real reconciliation takes place, it will be very difficult to see major momentum. But having it ready in order to attract and respond to possible changes is very important, and the proof is that figure of 1,800. We have some concerns and are working on how to ensure that there is sufficient vetting. I must share with the Council the fact that one of the preliminary indicators of the attack in Mazar-e-Sharif was that three out of the five people who violently and brutally killed my colleagues were actually reintegrated ex-Taliban. That shows, first of all, that we need to be very careful about vetting and that none of this is waterproof until there is a final reconciliation.

My next point is that, regardless of whether or not reconciliation takes place, without a regional context it will never be totally sustainable. That is why, over the past few months, we have been looking with great satisfaction and interest at the substantial increase in bilateral, trilateral and multilateral meetings, from the Shanghai process to the several meetings that have taken place between the Afghan, Pakistani and United States authorities. The same applies to the meetings taking place in Istanbul, in which Iran was included in addition to Pakistan and Afghanistan. We therefore hope and believe that the Istanbul meeting to take place on 2 November will be quite an opportunity for this to be addressed.

As members of the Council know, there is an international contact group. It is informal, but is growing in its impact and influence. We had a very good and constructive meeting in Kabul, where, apart from other major issues related to transition, Deputy Foreign Minister Ludin came up with an initiative that we are planning to support. The initiative will seek to determine whether we may come to some understanding in Istanbul on stability, along the lines of what was done in the Balkans some time ago or during the Helsinki process. In other words, it will seek something in writing that reassures all sides about mutually reinforced stability.

That would make more sense, of course, if there were also a mechanism to support it and a financial trust fund for regional incentives. All that may be on the table by the time of the Istanbul meeting, but we are certainly working seriously with the Afghan and Turkish authorities and all participants, regional and beyond, to get something moving in that regard.

There is no question that, at the moment, there are some clouds related to regional understandings, such as that currently prevailing on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This should not be overly dramatized and should, frankly, be left to the Afghans and Pakistanis to discuss. They have recently held very constructive and useful meetings,

both in Islamabad and in Afghanistan, and they will be neighbours forever. We will be there for a while, but they will always be there. So while we are looking at these events with concern, we are also hopeful that this type of bilateral discussion will be a move in the right direction.

There is another issue that is important in the context of the regional environment, and that is the concern of some regional neighbours over the ongoing ambiguity about the nature of the strategic pact or understanding that may be discussed between the Afghan authorities and, in particular, the United States. Some countries have been very concerned about the possibility of permanent, large foreign bases in Afghanistan. We have been trying to reassure everyone that this does not actually seem to be the case and that it is actually up to the Afghan authorities to reassure the neighbours about the real nature of whatever strategic agreement may be reached. Having travelled in the region, I recognize that it is still an issue that we believe would be better resolved with clarity before Istanbul. We hope it will. There have been statements issued by the United States authorities — even from the highest levels in the Pentagon — trying very rightly to offer reassurance in that regard, but some additional homework would probably help to dissipate that cloud.

That leads me to another issue — counternarcotics. At a time of possible gradual changes of focus on the part of the international community in Afghanistan, there is a concern that the so-called economic environment will be changing. That is proven by facts. The military drawdown will also reduce the impact of everything that is financially linked to a substantial military presence. The particular fear of my colleagues in the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, to which I draw the Council's attention, is that the narco-economy may then become more appealing to some Afghans. There is therefore an important need for us not to forget that aspect, which as Council members know is substantively affecting not only Afghanistan but also, again, its neighbours.

That leads me to the issue of human rights. If there is one area where I believe the United Nations will be remembered in Afghanistan, it is probably the way it has held the fort and raised high the flag about the need to respect human rights. That is why the civilian casualties report is so important and has been a major irritant, frankly, particularly to the Taliban, who have told us many times that it is hurting them. We have been telling them that there is a way to avoid that — by not hurting civilians.

This has also had an impact on the interventions of the International Security Assistance Force and NATO, particularly air raids. I know that the errors that have been made are increasingly drawing the attention of the United States and NATO authorities, whereas the horrors that the Taliban have been perpetrating in many places — such as the recent attacks on the bank and a hospital — have also drawn attention, and they are annoyed by that. We hope that this will help everyone, and the Taliban in particular, to understand that there is a moment when the popular support that they believe they enjoy is being affected by the level of civilian casualties they have been causing.

The issue of women is still very important. We have 69 women in Parliament. We count on them to be able to defend what has been achieved by women in Afghanistan, but we remain worried about the reports we are getting about the many cases of concern, such as the judiciary sometimes punishing women when they move out of their homes or decide not to marry.

The same thing obviously applies to the issue of children. There have been cases of children used as suicide bombers. There have been cases of children being attacked in a way that has drawn the attention of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

On the humanitarian side, there is one area to which I need to draw the Council's attention. At the moment, the welfare programme is having a difficulty with resources. It is one of our own stars, trying to show the Afghan people that we will not abandon them at any time, as well as actually providing food to more than 6 million children. At the moment, it has had to substantially reduce the number of beneficiaries due to a lack of resources. I draw attention to that because it is an important issue for all.

Aid coherence is crucial, and it is also important to recognize that there is a body for aid coherence. It is called the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB). The JCMB is the best body; there is no need to invent a new one. The United Nations specializes in creating new bodies, so I would be reluctant to suggest one. Rather, the JCMB should be reinforced. The JCMB has the possibility and potential to deal with aid coherence. But there is a cloud — it is the Kabul Bank. I do not need to remind the Council of that, but it is an important issue that is, in a way, an obstacle to progress at the moment on the JCMB and even to the follow-up to the Kabul Conference.

That issue is not the Council's responsibility, but that of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF is engaged and, to be fair to Minister Zakhilwal, eight out of the 10 indicators that were requested to be deployed in order to reassure the international community and the IMF have been addressed, but two remain. We hope and have been contributing to drawing the attention of the IMF to the possible consequences of an Afghan default, so to speak, which is not imminent if that is not approved but is certainly of concern. At the same time, Kabul Bank is a serious issue to the Afghan authorities — \$800 million is not something to gloss over. Therefore, serious attention is being focused at the moment.

The same applies to the issue with which the Council is very familiar — the parliamentary crisis. We were hoping that would not take place 10 months after the elections and six months after the President had solemnly inaugurated the Parliament. We would then have been going through an election that, while imperfect, would be handled by the Afghan institutions during a continued political process.

Unfortunately, this has not been the case. A special court has indicated that 61 members of Parliament should perhaps leave their positions. There is a current tension, as the Council is aware. Our position is the position of the Security Council —

22 December. We will not change it. The second position is that, indeed, the judiciary has the right to prosecute anyone who has committed a crime, but not to change the outcome of elections, and that the solution must be an Afghan solution and a political solution, but not a judicial solution.

We are hopeful and will continue to work on behalf of the Council, together with the Afghan authorities, to avoid prolongation of that institutional crisis. Afghanistan needs checks and balances; it needs a Parliament, an executive and a judiciary that all work together. At the moment there is a cloud, but since I am an optimist, I am not expecting much rain, yet, on that issue.

The last point I will make, with the Council's permission, is a message. This is a transition period in every sense. But there is also a message, which we must be certain the Afghans hear, that 2014 will not be 1989. They are worried, and rightly so, that for the third time during their recent history they will be graciously abandoned by the international community. I know that is not our intention and certainly not that of the United Nations or UNAMA. We are going to review our footprint. We will review the way that we must work, because transition is taking place everywhere. But we will be there — if everything is there and if the Afghans want us — for a long time. And I think that, from the international point of view, we need to constantly reassure the Afghans of that. That will help them to pass through the transition in this difficult period.