



Remarks at the Fourth Ministerial Meeting of G7+ countries by the Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan, Mr. Mark Bowden

[as delivered]

Kabul, 23 March 2016

Distinguished Ministers and Representatives,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first of all congratulate the Government of Afghanistan on its progress in developing its country fragility assessment “Afghanistan’s Pathways towards Resilience and Stability”. As a founding member of the G7+, Afghanistan’s experiences in transitioning out of fragility are essential to the dialogue this group is developing. And as other countries transition out of conflict these G7+ dialogues are critical tools for improving development interventions in post-conflict settings.

Building on the work that has been done in the fragility study, I would like to touch upon a few of the key lessons and observations on peacebuilding, statebuilding and development cooperation from the perspective of the United Nations in Afghanistan. Particularly as they relate to the five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals. Much of what I say hopes to reinforce the points made by Deputy Minister Mastoor.

First of all, we must acknowledge the complexity involved in adequately addressing the security-development nexus. It is often said that there is no lasting security without development, and no development without security. Security is crucial for Government provision of essential services

to its citizens and for the creation of a growth-enabling environment – both key aspects of state legitimacy. Meeting security needs, however, has fiscal implications for states with developing revenue bases – the challenging fiscal context in Afghanistan illustrates this challenge all too well. The demands made on government's budget and revenues in previous years provoked a fiscal crisis. The continuing demands of maintaining the security sector limit the development options for the government.

An important lesson learned in Afghanistan is in getting the right balance between security and development. It is critical to balance but not confuse or conflate these two agendas. The securitization of the development agenda in Afghanistan created a number of distortions into the economy. One example was that assistance was disproportionately concentrated in insecure provinces in order to secure the support of local communities. This has had a longer term and major impact on infrastructure development, essentially disadvantaging peaceful areas across the country and limiting their access to power, roads and water infrastructural development.

Focused on short-term, local and ad hoc solutions, the security-driven development agenda also overlooked the development principles and structures developed over time to support aid quality and effectiveness. After the 2014 security transition, the loss of large cash inflows channelled through the international military contributed to a sharp decline in the GDP growth rate, from a 9.4 per cent average in 2003-2012 to 1.3 per cent in 2014. That drop added another source of societal and economic uncertainty at a challenging juncture for the Afghan state.

A further observation is that coherence between short and long term priorities is a fundamental challenge to development interventions in fragile contexts. In addition to ensuring that we have the right balance in the security-development nexus, we must also achieve the right balance between humanitarian and development assistance. Interventions in fragile states tend to expand definitions of humanitarian assistance. In my experience, humanitarian assistance has often been used as a stopgap measure in many New Deal countries. This can result in the creation of parallel, unsustainable structures and disregard the need to engage in the longer term process of building Government capacity – the challenging task of restoring, reforming and reinvigorating complex bureaucracies.

In Afghanistan, as the UN humanitarian Coordinator, I have promoted a focused approach to humanitarian assistance with clearly defined humanitarian objectives such as meeting the immediate support needs of the civilian population affected by conflict or by natural disasters. Humanitarian appeals have as a result been consistently better supported and in areas of conflict have been used to support and sustain national systems of basic service delivery.

International and national NGOs and civil society are often key organisations in times of crisis, being involved in both development and humanitarian interventions. Our experience suggests that any international development and humanitarian interventions must engage with national reconstruction processes. They should also include realistically planned transition from shorter-term service delivery mechanisms to Government leadership as national and subnational state institutions develop and strengthen. Patience and a willingness to engage in frank mutual dialogue are vital to minimize the risk that this essential transition does not compromise equally essential services, and undermine the objective of building state legitimacy.

Humanitarian assistance can and should work more effectively towards statebuilding goals. For example, many fragile states, including Afghanistan, are more prone and vulnerable to disasters. In fragile states, the impact of disasters is intensified by weak response systems and the strain caused by large scale population movements on the fledgling state structures as well as on security. As DRR systems are built, short term humanitarian interventions must be complemented by long term investments in capacity building and in early warning and mitigation systems. So that governments have the ability to reduce risk and to better anticipate responses to natural disasters.

Beyond the short term, economic growth and livelihoods in fragile states are generally highly dependent on agricultural production. Ownership and access to land are key to build stability in post conflict situation which are often characterized by widespread displacement. One of the lessons learnt, here and elsewhere is that access to justice and legal reform must be given higher priority, from the outset, in post-conflict interventions. We must think about justice not simply in terms of international norms and standards, but as a highly localized need that is fundamental to state legitimacy, economic growth, and human dignity.

Moreover, helping citizens access justice – not just projecting the rule of law – is a critical element of security and peacebuilding. Local government is the first interface between citizens and their state. Small scale and local conflicts are easily instrumentalised and exploited by national political actors and insurgents alike. Weak relations between the centre and the periphery have created vacuums in governance that can be used to escalate local conflicts. The development of effective and responsive sub national governance structures are critical in ensuring local conflicts, service delivery and other Government functions are managed in a way that supports wider statebuilding and peacebuilding goals.

Afghanistan will continue to face important development challenges and require sustained donor assistance for the coming years. Despite heavy investment and initial high rates of GDP growth since 2002, the lives of millions of Afghans have not substantially improved and the number of people living in absolute poverty has increased. The economy has yet to recover from the 2014 Transition and is characterized by low growth and high unemployment. In moving from a development process that has in past years been dominated by security priorities greater efforts will be required by donors and government to stimulate productive and inclusive growth in the economy benefitting the poor and helping to meet the rapidly increasing employment needs of the youth of Afghanistan.

These long-term efforts must be sustainable. Expanding domestic revenues and strengthening tax collection and compliance are an essential part of rebuilding the state. The Government should be congratulated for the significant improvement in revenue collection last year. Donors must be cautious in their demands so as not to compromise the fiscal health of the Government.

Facing these challenges requires political courage, thorough planning, and a willingness to take on some risk both by Government and by donors. At the London Conference on Afghanistan in December 2014, the Government presented a solid reform vision, *Realising Self Reliance: Commitments to Reform and Renewed Partnerships*. This vision has since informed the refreshed aid partnership framework, the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework, agreed at the Senior Officials Meeting in Kabul in September 2015 and which succeeds the 2012-2016 Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework. Both the SMAF and its predecessor, based on the principle of mutual accountability, acknowledge the importance of

Afghanistan's ownership and leadership of its development trajectory and of the aid effectiveness agenda developed in Paris and Busan.

The Government is now preparing a new Development Strategy, supported by eleven sectoral National Priority Programmes. The integration of fragility into development analysis and planning is central to our future collective successes. With this agenda in mind, the International Community is looking forward to engage with the Government on its national development strategy in the coming months, as we prepare for the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, at which new pledges for 2017-2020 will be made.

The United Nations Development Group has endorsed the New Deal since the onset. The New Deal defines the "rules of engagement" that guide our efforts to implement the newly approved Sustainable Development Goals. The inclusion of Goal 16 on "Promoting peaceful societies, effective institutions and justice for all" illustrates the importance of the New Deal in channelling the collective voice of fragile states into the development agenda. The UN stands ready to work with Afghanistan to incorporate the SDGs into its development plans. As such, I am pleased that the UN system here in Afghanistan is working with the Government's Central statistical Office to address the data deficit that exists here as in other New Deal countries. The use and analysis of satellite and aerial imagery will provide the CSO with up to date estimates of population numbers and distribution which are essential in guiding the better allocation of resources and development infrastructure.

Ultimately development planning and interventions must rest on the partnership between this administration and its international partners. At the Senior Officials Meeting, in September, SRSRG Haysom called for an inclusive, candid and constructive dialogue on the challenges ahead. The G7+ Summit fully contributes to this dialogue by providing a channel for Afghanistan and other post-conflict countries to share experiences and lessons learnt with each other and with development partners during their arduous transition from fragility to stability. The discussions that are held here today and tomorrow will continue to guide and inform the UN system in its engagement with the G7+ countries and in its engagement and support for the New Deal.

I would like to express our appreciation of the partnership we have developed with the G7+, and other promoters of the New Deal, like the International Dialogue, the International Network on

Conflict and Fragility, and the Civil Society Platform on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding for the key role they played in the development of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. The UN supports the G7+ work through the New Deal Facility hosted by UNDP. We think this partnership works and will be strengthened even further by the signing of the MOU between the G7+ and UNDP in Stockholm.

We will continue to stand by the Government of Afghanistan and other G7+ members as they strive for peaceful and prosperous futures.

Thank you.

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