

Briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and  
Head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

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To the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council with Non-NATO ISAF Contributing  
Ministers at the level of Defence Ministers

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**AS DELIVERED**

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Excellencies,

Secretary-General,

I welcome the opportunity to address you today. It is a particular pleasure to do so in the presence of our Afghan colleague, Minister Bismillah Khan Mohammadi. As a year of historic change gathers pace, we are proud to stand with our Afghan partners.

Along with the NATO/ISAF service members whom we honour and remember, I would also like to pay my respects to the EUPOL personnel who lost their lives in the 17 January attack in Kabul, which also claimed four UN staff. I also take this moment to give tribute to the civilians and Afghan National Army personnel who continue to pay the greatest toll, as on 23 February when they suffered an attack in Kunar Province in which 21 soldiers lost their lives and six remain missing.

Amidst these and other challenges, I am pleased to report that political, security, and economic transition processes continue, albeit in an environment of pressing uncertainty, caused notably by the continuous lack of clarity as to the signature of the BSA.

These transition processes are the bridge to a future Afghanistan, but each plank must be laid in good time, and solidly. The direction is clear, the work is well underway, but the deepening uncertainty shakes confidence and reinforces speculation in Afghan society and establishment.

Under these circumstances, the timely and successful transfer of political power through the April 2014 presidential and provincial council elections gains even more weight as the critical event for the unity and stability of Afghanistan, for the predictability of the way forward, and confidence in the future.

The preparation for and the successful conduct of credible, transparent, and inclusive elections on time underpins all other efforts. Since the December 2013 Meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers, there has, again, been significant progress in preparation for the 5 April elections. They are further advanced than they have been at the same juncture in any previous electoral cycle. Never has the country had in advance of elections such technical preparations and human capacities in place.

Crucial for the success of the elections is the proactive approach by Afghan National Security Forces and Police who are in the lead in securing these polls. The completion by the Minister of Interior of the polling centre security assessment, in cooperation with the Afghan National Army, National Directorate for Security, and Independent Electoral Commission, has enabled timely planning by the electoral authorities. I welcome the support by NATO/ISAF for the Afghan security institutions, who are in the lead for protecting polling stations and ensuring the safety of voters, election workers, candidates, and international and national observers. I am confident that the partnership between electoral management and security institutions will continue, so that assessments are realistic as the security situation evolves, security risks are addressed in a way that would work against electoral fraud, and the candidates and public gain confidence

in the process. It is encouraging that the Independent Electoral Commission and the security institutions are engaged in regular consultations with the candidates on issues of security and fraud prevention, so critical for inclusive, representative, and credible elections and the legitimacy of the future leadership both inside and outside of Afghanistan.

Since the start of the presidential campaign on 2 February, on the airwaves and television screens, posters and social media, the eleven candidates are making their cases for how they will deliver a better future for the country. By and large, the debate has been so far inclusive, focused on substance and encouraging voters, who increasingly state their strong desire to cast their ballots. Rather than appeals to ethnic or other factional interests, the candidates have shown a sense of responsibility for national unity and the historic nature of what will be the first democratic transfer of power in the country. They should continue to act in this way.

This sense of responsibility, and willingness to address the future, were on display in January, when the United Nations along with the Afghan Ministers of Finance and Foreign Affairs convened a meeting of key donors and international representatives (*the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board*). According to the joint statement by the Government of Afghanistan and the international community in Kabul last month, “the momentum generated in the implementation of Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF) has been sustained,” although progress notably on reforms, accountability, anti-corruption, good governance and subnational governance is much wanting. I am pleased to note that all eleven presidential candidates joined the event.

In their remarks, the presidential candidates stressed their readiness for ensuring continued progress under the mutual accountability commitments. They showed dedication to strengthening continuity and momentum in Afghanistan’s

development, economic, reforms and rights agendas. They pledged support for the BSA.

For their part, representatives of 50 member states reiterated their long-term commitment to Afghanistan. Together with the Government, they also undertook a forward-looking agenda for the Ministerial development conference on Afghanistan to be held at the end of this year.

Excellencies,

Regarding the BSA, in my contacts with relevant stakeholders I have noted a firm understanding that the US-Afghan Bilateral Security Agreement is needed and the strong hope that it will eventually be signed. The signature remains uncertain and planning for other contingencies is underway, but the commitments of the international community should remain strong. I am encouraged by the progress on the Resolute Support SOFA negotiations and hope that consensus would be reached soon. That will send the right signal to the people of Afghanistan at the time when such signals are sorely needed.

The United Nations is committed to long-term support for Afghanistan and its people. Next month the report of the Secretary-General on Afghanistan will be discussed by the Security Council, where I expect that this commitment will be reaffirmed through 2014 and beyond. We share one goal: a stable, self-sufficient Afghanistan adequately supported by its international partners that can be secure, meets the needs and hopes of its people, and contributes to regional security and development.

Thank you.