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The situation in Afghanistan

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The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [68/11](#) and Security Council resolution [2096 \(2013\)](#), in which the Council requested me to report on developments in Afghanistan every three months.

2. The report provides an update of the activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan, including significant humanitarian, development and human rights efforts, since my previous report, dated 6 September 2013 ([A/68/609-S/2013/535](#)). It also provides a summary of key political and security developments and regional and international events related to Afghanistan.

II. Relevant developments

A. Political

3. Amid political, security and economic transitions, the situation in Afghanistan remains characterized by uncertainty, although some areas have shown progress and increased predictability. There was greater momentum in technical preparations for the 2014 presidential and provincial council elections during the reporting period, while the final candidate list provided greater clarity on the shape of political competition, which continues to evolve. The endorsement by a consultative loya jirga of a bilateral security agreement with the United States of America reinforced expectations of the approval by the National Assembly of an important framework for ongoing partnership and, by extension, continuity of broader international engagement.



4. During the candidate nomination period, from 16 September to 6 October, 27 individuals entered the presidential race, each with two vice-presidential nominees; there were 3,057 aspirants for seats on the 34 provincial councils. Women comprised 1 of the former and 324 of the latter candidates. The Independent Election Commission's announcement on 27 September that the deposits of unsuccessful female candidates would be refunded and that support would be provided for their campaign materials was aimed at galvanizing the registration of women. On 22 October, following the process of verification by the Election Commission, a preliminary list of 10 presidential candidates deemed to have met constitutional and legal requirements was released. Sixteen nominees were disqualified, including the sole woman, and another was removed before the formal process began, apparently because of an incomplete submission. It is understood that decisions on disqualification were related mainly to a constitutional bar on holding dual nationality and a new legal requirement that there be 100,000 voter endorsements from at least 20 provinces. Provincial council candidates were reduced to 2,704 (of whom 309 are women). The main reasons for disqualification included not meeting age and educational requirements. Candidates and civil society objected to the three-day delay in the announcement of disqualifications and an alleged lack of transparency in the process, including the Election Commission's application of a "tolerance" level to the verification of voter endorsements given incomplete voter data and the failure to individually inform disqualified candidates of the reason for their exclusion. On 28 October, the Election Commission provided written notification of the grounds for disqualification to concerned individuals.

5. On 15 September, President Hamid Karzai named five Independent Electoral Complaints Commissioners (four men and one woman). The new commissioners elected a political analyst and former presidential legal adviser, Abdul Satar Sadaat, as Chairperson. The Commission, now legally a permanent body, has worked to set up new premises, policies and procedures and to recruit personnel. On 23 September, President Karzai ordered that the Government provide the Commission with initial funding of 20 million afghanis (approximately \$350,000) and premises in Kabul, as well as vehicles and protection for its members. On 9 October, donors approved funding structures for international assistance provided to the body. The Complaints Commission, which started to receive objections and complaints about candidate eligibility related to the preliminary list on 22 October, decided that adjudication would be conducted in Kabul and that its provincial presence would be established in time to receive complaints related to other steps of the electoral process. A total of 1,056 objections and complaints were received. Following adjudication, on 19 November, the Complaints Commission presented its findings to the Election Commission. The next day the final list, which included one additional presidential candidate and nine additional provincial council candidates (308 women), was released.

6. The 11 presidential candidates, in the order in which they will appear on the ballot, are: Abdullah Abdullah, Daud Sultanzoy (reinstated on the final list), Abdul Rahim Wardak, Abdul Qayum Karzai, Mohammad Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, Sardar Mohammad Nader Naim, Zalmai Rassul, Qutbudin Hilal, Mohammad Sahfiq Gul Agha Sherzai, Abdul Rab Rasul Sayyaf and Hedayat Amin Arsala. Three of the candidates have female vice-presidential nominees.

7. To maximize voter enfranchisement, on 17 September the Election Commission decided to extend the district-level voter registration update exercise

by 45 days, until 10 November, with mobile registration teams to expand access. By the end of this phase, more than 3 million new voter cards had been issued, about a third of them to women. To promote inclusiveness of the electoral process, the United Nations in Afghanistan made “Political participation is everyone’s right: women as voters and candidates” the theme of its annual open day on issues surrounding women, peace and security. On 2 October, civil society participants identified the pervasiveness of male attitudes, insecurity, the location of polling stations, insufficient female polling and security staff, and low awareness among women as the main challenges to women’s full inclusion. On 3 November, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), working with local partners, launched 14 interactive events and panel discussions across the country to support awareness of poll-related issues and provide space for public debate.

8. The security of electoral personnel, candidates and supporters, voters and electoral material is recognized as being essential for active participation and strengthening confidence in the process. Both the Taliban and the armed faction of Hezb-e Islami, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, have publicly called upon Afghans not to participate in elections, and there have been reports of threatening leaflets in some parts of eastern Afghanistan. Four districts in Zabul, Ghazni and Helmand Provinces (two in the latter) were not included in the Election Commission’s voter registration update exercise for security reasons. Since September, there have been 4 attacks on voter registration offices and 10 involving electoral personnel, including the killing of a Kunduz provincial election officer on 18 September. The circumstances of this incident remain unclear, and there is as yet no evidence of a strategic threat to elections. On 3 October, a code of conduct for security institutions during the electoral process was set out in a presidential decree, which emphasized the need for impartiality and respect for human rights in the discharge of duties. On 29 October, the United Nations-administered Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan steering committee, chaired by the Minister of the Interior, approved a proposal to recruit and train 13,000 female searchers to better secure access for women voters.

9. A legal bar on holding official positions while running for election meant that five ministers and seven members of the National Assembly stepped down during the candidate nomination period. Previously, on 25 September, following an earlier reshuffling, the Wolesi Jirga (the lower house of the National Assembly) confirmed Mohammed Umar Daudzai as Minister of the Interior and Mohammed Akram Khpalwak as Minister of Border and Tribal Affairs. Given election resignations, seven new representatives were introduced to the Wolesi Jirga on 19 October and another was introduced to replace a deceased member. On 27 October, President Karzai named Zarar Ahmad Moqbel Osmani acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammad Akbar Barakzai acting Minister of Mines and Petroleum, Shakar Kargar acting Minister of Commerce and Industry, Arif Noorzai acting Minister of Water and Energy and Din Mohammad Mubarez acting Counter-Narcotics Minister.

10. Efforts to establish a formal peace process remained stalled. On 20 September, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan announced the release of Mullah Abdullah Ghani Baradar, once the deputy leader of the Taliban, as requested by the Government of Afghanistan. The latter considers that Baradar has the potential to play a constructive role and welcomed the move as a sign of goodwill. On 9 October, the Taliban issued a statement in which it claimed that Baradar was still in detention and called upon Pakistani officials to clarify his status. The Chairperson

of Afghanistan's High Peace Council travelled with a delegation to Islamabad between 19 and 21 November, where he met with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, other Pakistani officials and reportedly also Baradar. Council activities around the International Day of Peace included an international Ulema Conference on Islam and Peace, hosted jointly with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Kabul on 24 September. The event drew together 200 religious scholars from 13 countries, who issued a joint declaration condemning violence and extremism. On 26 September, a Council meeting with civil society representatives in Kabul resulted in a joint framework for future coordination and cooperation. Women's participation in the peace process was the focus of a conference, on 22 September, organized by the High Peace Council and supported by UNAMA, in Jalalabad. Participants noted women's particular role in mitigating differences across segments of society. On 5 October, an international conference on women, peace and security hosted by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs underlined the need to enhance women's role in Afghan political life.

11. The joint secretariat of the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme reported that as at 19 November, 7,532 individuals had joined the programme and that 168 line ministry projects and 170 small grants had been completed or had commenced. Starting 1 October, UNAMA launched a series of local dialogues to mitigate inter-ethnic and intertribal tensions and build confidence between communities in Daikundi, Kapisa, Nuristan, Kunduz, Takhar, Gardez and Jawzjan Provinces. UNAMA also continued its support for the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace, a civil society initiative to develop provincial road maps in support of peace. Between September and November, 44 focus group discussions — of 200 planned in total — were conducted, involving 1,093 Afghans, of whom 486 were women. Measures proposed by participants included the removal of corrupt officials, ensuring merit-based appointments, and mechanisms for public oversight.

12. Negotiations between Kabul and Washington over a bilateral security agreement continued with increasing urgency, given the planning timelines for any future military commitments by the United States and other countries, including States members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member States. On 11 and 12 October, the United States Secretary of State, John Kerry, and President Karzai, meeting in Kabul, agreed on a number of outstanding issues. Emphasizing the importance of broad consultation on matters of national sovereignty, President Karzai convened a consultative loya jirga, from 21 to 24 November, prior to the agreement's being put to the National Assembly. On the eve of the gathering, the text of the agreement was circulated, together with a letter from Barack Obama, President of the United States. President Karzai spoke to more than 2,000 assembled delegates in support of the agreement, which would remain in force until 2024 and beyond, as it provided a chance to transition into stability. At the same time, he maintained that prior to signing the agreement there should be a demonstration of its benefits, including the delivery of peace before the 2014 elections. The overwhelming majority of participants supported the agreement, urging its finalization within weeks, yet the President repeated his preconditions. Earlier, on 23 October, in Brussels, NATO defence ministers had endorsed a strategic planning assessment for command and control arrangements and capabilities for a potential training and advisory mission following the conclusion in 2014 of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mandate. Any further development of the mission will depend on a legal framework regarding the status of any NATO troops in Afghanistan.

B. Security

13. The traditional summer fighting season was characterized by an aggressive push by anti-Government elements, countered by Afghan security forces. Local security institutions, in particular the Afghan National Police and the Afghan Local Police, have been the primary target of anti-Government elements, with 74 per cent of security incidents between 16 August and 15 November aimed at their bases, convoys, checkpoints and personnel. ISAF accounted for 2 per cent of anti-Government targets in the same period. The majority of security incidents — 70 per cent between 16 August and 15 November — were recorded in the southern, south-eastern and eastern parts of the country. Sangin district, in the southern province of Helmand, was particularly contested, and there was a clear pattern of anti-Government elements seeking to assert control in the border areas of Nuristan, Kunar and Nangarhar Provinces. Anti-Government elements continue to target road and transport networks and assert considerable influence in rural areas, where there is often little government reach or service, including increasingly in the west, north and north-east. Armed clashes accounted for 48 per cent of incidents in the period from 16 August to 15 November. The size of armed groups concentrated against specific targets has also increased, including in the brief takeover on 28 September of a district administrative centre in southern Badakhshan. Anti-Government elements have not, however, succeeded in seizing significant population centres.

14. The capabilities of Afghan security institutions continued to grow. Local forces planned and executed a growing number of operations, while ISAF provided air support and assistance in countering improvised explosive devices. As at 31 October, there were approximately 185,300 Afghan National Army personnel (with a target of 187,000) and 6,800 Afghan Air Force personnel (with a target of 8,000 by the end of 2016). In September, a gender and human rights department was established within the Ministry of Defence and a female recruitment programme was launched for the army, which as at 1 November had 458 women employees. As at 18 November, the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan supported 141,660 police personnel and 4,901 Central Prison Department guards. In support of Afghan community outreach efforts under the Police-e-Mardumi programme, the United Nations democratic policing project facilitated police safety briefings in seven provinces as well as monthly consultations between police and community leaders, including women, in 15 districts in Uruzgan, Baghlan, Helmand, Ghor and Balkh Provinces. The new Minister of the Interior reiterated the commitment to a service increasingly oriented to traditional law enforcement functions and pledged to employ 10,000 women police, with mechanisms to protect them from abuse and harassment, by the end of 2014. Currently, the Ministry of the Interior and the Afghan National Police employ 1,999 women.

15. The Afghan Local Police security initiative continued to expand, with a primary focus on the south-east. As at 19 November, the number of personnel stood at approximately 24,500 in 122 districts in 29 provinces. It continued to experience a disproportionately high number of attacks by anti-Government elements. Nimroz, Panjshir, Samangan and Nuristan are the only provinces in which the programme is not yet in place. UNAMA continued to document allegations of abuse — in most cases with impunity — involving Afghan Local Police, particularly in the north-east and east. In other places the force has been performing to the satisfaction of the local population.

16. As Afghan security forces took the lead on the battlefield, casualty rates continued to increase and attrition remained high. Figures are often disputed. On 29 October, a senior Ministry of the Interior official was quoted in the media as stating that 1,273 Afghan National Police and 779 Afghan Local Police personnel had died since April. On 21 October, the defection of an Afghan special forces commander was reported in Kunar Province. Between 16 August and 15 November, there were five insider attacks against the international military, in Kandahar, Paktya, Paktika, Zabul and Kabul Provinces, down from 14 during the same period in 2012. The ranks of anti-Government elements also suffered losses. A number of high-level commanders on Security Council sanctions lists were killed, including Hakeemullah Mehsud, killed in a drone attack on 1 November; Nasiruddin Haqqani, killed by unknown assailants on 10 November; and Mawlawi Ahmed Jan, killed on 21 November.

17. The United Nations continued to monitor security-related events relevant to the work, mobility and safety of civilian actors, particularly those events that affect the delivery of mandated activities and programmes. From 16 August to 15 November, 5,284 incidents were recorded, a 13.9 per cent increase over the same period in 2012. In the first 10 months of the year, incidents were on average 13.2 per cent higher than in 2012, but 16 per cent lower than 2011. There were 89 suicide attacks in the first 10 months of the year — the same as 2012 — with 45 of them in Kandahar, Helmand, Paktika and Kabul Provinces. High-profile complex attacks included the assault on the United States consulate in Herat on 13 September, in which at least eight people died, and the explosion on 15 October at a provincial mosque during an Eid al-Adha commemoration service, killing the Governor of Logar Province and three others. On 18 October, in the capital's first suicide attack since July, an international military convoy was targeted on the outskirts of Kabul outside a commercial compound housing United Nations personnel. Two civilians were killed in addition to the attacker. On 16 November a blast near facilities being prepared for the consultative loya jirga killed 8 civilians and injured 23 others. Particularly notable was the continued increase in the scale of explosive devices, including the discovery on 14 October of the largest potential truck bomb yet found in Afghanistan, carrying 27 tons of explosives and 68 anti-tank mines.

18. The United Nations, its implementing partners and other humanitarian entities experienced a variety of direct and collateral incidents, including threats and hostile surveillance against facilities. Fluid, high-risk security conditions remained under constant review by the United Nations security management system in Afghanistan, which was rated “very good” by a Department of Safety and Security compliance and evaluation mission in October. Inasmuch as the United Nations relies on the host country for the security of its premises and personnel, there is some concern over the future of the Ministry of Interior's Directorate for the Protection of International Institutions. The Directorate's police units have been operating in three regions and provide escorts for United Nations convoys. They have proved their value, in particular during the attack in May on the International Organization for Migration compound. The programme was due to be expanded by June 2014, however, donor assistance is already exhausted.

19. In the mine-action sector, supported by the United Nations, about 300 minefields were cleared in 100 communities, with an additional 7 districts declared mine free. It is estimated that 4,536 minefields remain, affecting 1,628 communities across

33 provinces. Accidents involving mines and explosive remnants of war, including in areas recently vacated by international military forces, have increased compared with 2012, with 344 casualties, including 99 deaths, recorded between 1 January and 31 October. The United Nations has worked with ISAF to help ensure that premises being closed or transferred are cleared of mines and unexploded ordnance.

C. Regional cooperation

20. Pakistan and Afghanistan continued to seek constructive engagement in economic cooperation and security as well as in regard to an Afghan-led peace process. On 10 and 11 September, a delegation of the Pakistan Senate's Standing Committee on Defence met with Afghan counterparts to review security issues and cooperation. This was followed by the seventh round of the Pakistan-Afghanistan parliamentary dialogue, held in Islamabad on 26 September. On 8 and 9 October, after a long hiatus, the fourth meeting of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Coordination Authority, seeking to generate momentum on bilateral agreements, was held in Kabul. On 29 October, the fourth Afghanistan-Pakistan-United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland trilateral meeting was held in London, focusing on regional stability, economic cooperation and the peace process.

21. Afghanistan continued to engage other neighbours bilaterally and in regional forums. On 12 and 13 September, President Karzai led a high-level delegation to Bishkek to attend the thirteenth summit meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, where he committed to further strengthening relations with the Organization. On 16 and 17 September in Islamabad, participants at the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Council on the Central Asia-South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project adopted three resolutions establishing contract structures and procurement and finance committees. On 27 September, President Karzai paid an official visit to China, meeting with President Xi Jinping, who confirmed Beijing's commitment to stability and economic development in Afghanistan and the region. In Dushanbe, on 21 October, President Karzai and the President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, signed an agreement on demining, border crossing protocols and insurance cooperation. Particular attention was given to implementation of the Central Asia-South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project and a proposed railway connecting Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. On 30 October, the heads of the Russian, Tajik and Afghan border police met at the Sherkhan Bandar border crossing. Tajik and Afghan border force commanders expressed concern about the infiltration of criminal and extremist elements along the Afghan-Tajik border and asked the Russian Federation to provide technical and logistical support. The three countries signed a protocol on border cooperation and agreed to establish a joint committee. On 10 November, at their twelfth annual trilateral meeting, the foreign ministers of the Russian Federation, India and China emphasized the need for continuing international support to and greater regional integration with Afghanistan. At a senior-level trilateral consultation on Afghanistan on 20 November, Pakistan, the Russian Federation and China stressed the need for deeper international engagement in the country's economic development.

22. The Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan continued to demonstrate its potential for the region. On 23 September, at a meeting of senior officials of the Istanbul Process in New York,

Afghanistan presented the progress achieved since the Almaty Ministerial Conference on the Istanbul Process was held, in April, on the six confidence-building measures. In preparation for the meeting of senior officials in New Delhi, now set for 18 January 2014, an expert study on alternative funding modalities for the Istanbul Process and its six confidence-building measures is being undertaken.

III. Human rights

23. From 15 to 17 September, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, visited Afghanistan. She met with senior Government and security officials, including President Karzai, and held talks with the Chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, representatives of civil society, the diplomatic community and ISAF. She urged that the human rights gains of the past 12 years not be sacrificed to political expediency amid the demands of the transition processes and highlighted, in particular, the need to protect and strengthen the rights of women and children and the accountability of Afghan security institutions. She expressed concern about the non-consultative process of appointing the five new members of the Commission and the potential impact on the body's standing, given the upcoming five-year accreditation review by the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions. On 18 November, the Commission underwent the review, with a formal recommendation to follow at a later date.

24. The conflict continued to take a toll on civilians. Between 1 August and 31 October, UNAMA documented 2,572 civilian casualties (846 deaths and 1,726 injured), bringing the total for the first 10 months of 2013 to 7,394 (2,568 deaths and 4,826 injuries), a 13 per cent rise compared with the same period in 2012. Three quarters of the casualties were attributed to anti-Government elements. Their use of improvised explosive devices, including in complex attacks and suicide attacks, accounted for 49 per cent of the casualties and remains the biggest threat to civilians. UNAMA attributed 10 per cent of civilian casualties to pro-Government forces and another 11 per cent to ground operations and attacks that could not be attributed to any party; the remaining 4 per cent resulted mostly from explosive remnants of war and cross-border shelling. Most striking in the first 10 months of the year was the number of civilians killed (456) or injured (1,454) during ground engagements between pro-Government forces and anti-Government elements: an increase of 36 per cent was recorded compared with the same period in 2012. The eastern region is of particular concern, with a 52 per cent increase in civilian casualties from ground engagements.

25. Afghan children continued to suffer the impact of the armed conflict. Between 1 August and 31 October, UNAMA documented 444 incidents of children being killed and maimed by conflict-related violence — 138 deaths and 306 injuries. This reflects a 6 per cent reduction in deaths and a 23 per cent rise in injuries. Artillery and rocket shelling, together with crossfire shootings during ground engagements, killed 42 children and injured 145, a 67 per cent increase over the same period in 2012. Unexploded ordnance and landmine detonations resulted in another 13 child deaths and 27 injuries, on par with the same period in 2012. Most child casualties (62 per cent) were attributed to armed opposition groups and 14 per cent to pro-Government forces, with the remainder not being attributable. UNAMA also documented 23 attacks against educational facilities, including firing by

anti-Government elements on a school in Maiwand (Kandahar Province) on 26 October, which killed an 8-year-old boy. Seven incidents of child recruitment — two by Afghan Local Police and five by anti-Government elements — were recorded. On 24 September, the Government's technical working group on children and armed conflict met to accelerate the implementation of the action plan for the prevention of underage recruitment. All relevant ministries were requested to provide feedback on the road map for compliance with the plan. Between 20 and 22 October, the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund visited Kabul. In meetings with Government officials, civil society, the private sector and United Nations partners, he reiterated the Organization's long-term commitment to the women and children of Afghanistan and appealed for increased funding for human and social development aid for the most vulnerable.

26. UNAMA continued to monitor the implementation of the law on the elimination of violence against women and efforts to end such harmful practices as forced and child marriage. Under the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, the Government of Afghanistan committed to preparing a report on the implementation of the law. In October Government representatives stated that the report would be ready later in the year. The United Nations is providing technical assistance in the preparation of the report, as requested by the Ministry of Women's Affairs. On 25 November, the Organization supported events across Afghanistan to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the start of the annual 16-day campaign of global activism to end gender violence. Focus group discussions, debates and workshops with youth groups, religious leaders, government officials and civil society continued throughout the campaign to raise awareness and to reinforce the critical need for further action to end violence against Afghan women and girls and to advance women's rights.

27. UNAMA continued to visit Afghan-run detention facilities throughout the country to assess the treatment of conflict-related detainees and the implementation of presidential decree No. 129 on preventing torture and ill-treatment. Between August and October, UNAMA personnel visited 27 locations in 13 provinces, including facilities run by the National Directorate of Security, the Afghan National Police, the Central Prisons Directorate and the Afghan National Army. Concerns about new incidents of alleged torture and ill-treatment were raised with the new Minister of the Interior and the Director of National Security, who committed to addressing abuse in their institutions. UNAMA also continued to work with ISAF on reviewing detention practices in select Afghan-run detention facilities. ISAF conducted its second certification review to identify locations to which detainees could be transferred from the custody of international military forces to Afghan security institutions without the risk of torture.

28. UNAMA, with key stakeholders, has supported the redrafting of 173 prison-related operational directives, to be completed by the end of the year. To date, 114 of those directives have been promulgated. UNAMA also continued to work with the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan and relevant partners to improve the prison infrastructure in Afghanistan.

IV. Implementation of the Kabul process and coordination of development assistance

29. To ensure continued momentum in meeting Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework commitments, UNAMA facilitated discussions between the Ministry of Finance and donors in preparation for the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board meeting in early 2014, which will take stock of progress and identify key areas of focus between the Government and international donors prior to a development conference to be co-hosted by the Governments of Afghanistan and the United Kingdom later in 2014. A steering committee for the review meeting has been established that includes representatives from leading donors, the Ministry of Finance, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and UNAMA. On 19 September, members of civil society selected representatives for the three technical working groups of the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (planning, national priority programme implementation, and the law on the elimination of violence against women and human rights).

30. Slow progress on the elaboration of a development agenda during the electoral process and the transfer of power is inevitable but worrisome, particularly given the challenging economic conditions. The resignation and replacement of ministers and senior officials has had an impact on the speed of planning and implementation. For instance, as work continued on finalizing the last of the 22 national priority programmes, on transparency and accountability, both the senior minister responsible and the head of the High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption stood down to run for election.

31. On 7 October, the Government of Afghanistan circulated the first draft of a provincial budget policy, as required under the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework. The policy seeks to balance the role of the central Government while strengthening the ability of provincial and district authorities to improve direct service delivery. On 23 October, the Government's expenditure report for the 1391 fiscal year (21 March 2011 to 20 December 2012, shortened because of a change in the fiscal year) was presented to the Wolesi Jirga after discussion in its technical commissions. The house's finance and budget commission stated that 25 of 55 government budgetary units had spent less than 40 per cent of their allocated budget. While there was criticism of the budget execution rate and concern over some budget lines, the lack of a quorum prevented voting. On 3 November, the Minister of Finance introduced the national budget for the fiscal year 1393 (21 December 2013 to 20 December 2014) to the Meshrano Jirga. This was for \$7.9 billion, of which \$4.9 billion was for the operating budget and \$3 billion for the development budget. The Minister stated that a large proportion of spending was necessary for the army and police. After comment by the upper house, the budget will be presented to the Wolesi Jirga.

32. Uncertainty surrounding the political and security transition contributed to a slowdown in economic growth in a country in which economic activity is largely dependent on the fluctuating agricultural sector. The World Bank's October economic update stated that the growth rate, a strong 14.4 per cent in 2012 following a bumper harvest, is projected to drop to 3.1 per cent in 2013. The first six months of 2013 saw an 11 per cent decline in revenue collection compared to 2012. Weak institutions, together with the wider slowdown, are seen as contributing factors. The Ministry of Finance introduced a number of measures to stabilize

revenues, including leadership changes at the customs department; however, the risk of missing International Monetary Fund targets, and thus having access to Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund incentive payments, remains.

33. Progress continued on developing the United Nations Development Assistance Framework for the period 2015-2020. Five priority areas were agreed: equitable economic development; basic social services; social equity and investment in human capital; justice and rule of law; and accountable governance. As part of the rule of law pillar, shared objectives were agreed among relevant United Nations partners and a programme of cooperation is under development. The establishment of a justice and rule of law multi-partner trust fund is being explored to help ensure greater coherence in the provision of support to the sector.

V. Humanitarian assistance

34. Between 1 August and 31 October, 7,097 refugees voluntarily repatriated to Afghanistan. Of those, 5,108 went from Pakistan, 1,957 from the Islamic Republic of Iran and the remainder from other neighbouring countries. This brought to 36,194 the number of returned refugees assisted by the United Nations for the first 10 months of 2013, a drop of 51 per cent compared to 2012. On 18 and 19 September, the third Quadripartite Steering Committee meeting was held in Islamabad, attended by representatives of the Governments of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan and the United Nations. The parties agreed on the development of a joint resource mobilization strategy.

35. Between 1 August and 31 October, the Internally Displaced Persons Task Force, co-chaired by the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation and the United Nations, recorded a total of 18,500 persons displaced owing to the conflict. This brought the total for the first 10 months of 2013 to 112,998, out of an overall total of 620,000. In this quarter, the highest levels of displacement were in Wardak, Paktika, Ghor, Faryab, Badghis, Farah, Kunduz and, in particular, Helmand Provinces.

36. Since the beginning of 2013, in nine rounds of polio vaccination, 8.3 million children under 5 were vaccinated with multiple doses. As at 25 October, 8 confirmed cases of polio were reported in Afghanistan for 2013, an 80 per cent reduction from the same period in 2012. These were confined to the provinces of Kunar and Nangarhar, where efforts to combat the circulation of wild polio virus have been particularly difficult because of insecurity. No polio cases have been reported in southern Afghanistan since November 2012, and 90 per cent of the population is assessed as living in polio-free areas.

37. In October, dry conditions in the west and central highlands resulted in a poor harvest, food shortages and displacement. With the support of the United Nations, non-governmental organizations distributed 1,800 tons of food and non-food items to 8,600 households identified as severely insecure. Mild conditions are forecast for the winter, but, given chronic poverty and lack of basic services, which aggravate the impact of the season, winterization plans are being implemented among vulnerable communities in 100 districts of 22 provinces.

38. Between 1 January and 31 October, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded 235 incidents against humanitarian workers, with 27 deaths, 24 detentions, 45 injuries and 72 abductions. In October

alone, 24 incidents of targeted and indirect violence were reported across 15 provinces, including the killing of an aid worker by a poorly targeted rocket in Nuristan and the death of a local health worker while trying to escape his captors. Abductions and hijackings were most common on the main roads in Herat, Paktya, Wardak and Kunar. In contested areas, the rise in civilian casualties has put pressure on emergency service providers. Access to trauma care is challenged by a lack of capacity, given increasing demand, and by the failure of the parties to the conflict to respect humanitarian principles.

39. The Common Humanitarian Action Plan was 69 per cent funded by 31 October, with funding of \$326 million. A common humanitarian fund, under the leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator, will be launched in 2014 to ensure greater strategic and geographic identification and prioritization of needs.

VI. Counter-narcotics

40. Released on 13 November, the Afghanistan Opium Survey 2013 recorded a record high level of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. The total area under cultivation was 209,000 ha, over a third higher than in 2012. This yielded 5,500 tons of opium, a year-on-year increase of 49 per cent. The Ministry of Counter-Narcotics and the United Nations, having jointly produced the survey, attributed the rise to the high price of opium as well as speculation given uncertainty over events in 2014. Eighty-nine per cent of cultivation was in habitual poppy-growing areas in the south and west, also among the country's most insecure regions. Cultivation rose by 34 per cent in Helmand Province, which alone was responsible for 100,693 ha of poppy. The total number of "poppy-free" provinces dropped from 17 to 15, with Faryab and Balkh in the north losing this status.

41. On 9 November, the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics, with technical support from the United Nations, released the Afghanistan Drug Report 2012. The first of what is planned to be an annual report, it presented an overview of progress on aspects of the national drug-control strategy. It highlighted that eradication in 2012 had increased by 154 per cent over 2011, with 9,672 ha of opium poppy fields destroyed. In terms of usage, it estimated that there were some 1 million adult drug users in Afghanistan. While treatment capacity increased — with an estimated 102 centres in 2012, up from 43 in 2009 — it covered only 5.9 per cent of the country's opium and heroin users. Meanwhile, the number of cases before the Criminal Justice Task Force rose from 395 in the Afghan year of 1388 (March 2009 to March 2010) to 588 in 1391 (March 2012 to March 2013). In the current reporting period, the most significant case was the trial of the former Chief of Police of Nimroz Province, who was found guilty on 18 September of drug-related offences and sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment; the case is currently under appeal.

42. The United Nations Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries continued to work with drug control agencies and stakeholders across the region to support collaboration between judicial and law enforcement institutions, the prevention and treatment of drug dependency, and policy and advocacy. On 9 October, under the auspices of the Programme, the second ministerial-level meeting of the Afghanistan-Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan initiative was held in Bishkek. The three countries adopted a formal declaration strengthening joint cooperation on

countering drug-related crime. On 29 November in Dushanbe, a meeting was held with the ministers and heads of the counter-narcotics agencies of Afghanistan, China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, the United States and Uzbekistan.

VII. Mission support

43. On 28 October, the proposed budget of UNAMA ([A/68/327/Add.4](#)) for 2014 was presented to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. The \$191 million proposed budget represents a reduction of 2.5 per cent, or \$5 million, compared with the 2013 budget. The savings would be achieved through the further downsizing of offices, staff and air assets. Key achievements of the 2012-2013 biennium included a forecast 100 per cent budget implementation and an efficient and transparent downsizing exercise. As of 2013, and further to capital investment, new integrated compounds, with offices and residential accommodation, were completed in Kandahar, Mazar-e Sharif and Bamyan.

44. The UNAMA field offices provide the Mission with a unique national reach to undertake mandated tasks and activities. Access is under constant review and has recently notably increased in Kandahar, enabling outreach outside of the city. To respond to distinct local needs, financial constraints and security conditions, UNAMA will increasingly move away from a “one size fits all” approach, with offices more specifically tailored to local conditions. Most immediately planned is the reprofiling of the Bamyan office as a multi-agency compound. In Kunduz, UNAMA has been exploring co-location options with United Nations partners. Assessment continued regarding the potential impact on the United Nations of the drawdown of international military forces, particularly the security of air hubs, medical support (including mass-casualty capacity) and in-country safe havens, which will revert to pre-2005 levels.

VIII. Observations

45. Afghanistan is entering its final year of political and security transition in an environment of uncertainty. There are some positive indicators. Afghan security forces have taken the lead for national security and solid institutional foundations are being built. The consultative Loya Jirga’s endorsement of the bilateral security agreement with the United States illustrates wide Afghan recognition that international security and, by extension, development support are essential for some years to come. Ensuring that such assistance is maintained and delivered in ways that reinforce and strengthen Afghan institutions and sovereignty will be critical. The United Nations has an important role in facilitating continued international support and in assisting Afghan-led political processes, which are the foundation of future peace, stability and development.

46. The 2014 presidential and provincial council elections mark a historic political transition and are the immediate focus of Afghan, United Nations and international attention. Amid fierce political competition, a timely and inclusive election, in accordance with Afghanistan’s legal and constitutional framework, is all the more important. It is the surest basis of internal and international legitimacy and continued support. Technical preparations for elections are advanced and legal

frameworks and electoral management bodies have been established. The depth of political and public interest is evidenced by the number of candidates — 11 for the presidency and 2,713 for provincial councils — and by the issuance of over 3 million new voter cards. I welcome the diversity of presidential teams that cut across factional and ethnic lines. The participation of women as voters, candidates and electoral workers strengthens a vital voice in the public sphere. I commend steps taken to encourage women's participation and to ensure secure access for women voters. Robust domestic and international observation of all stages of the electoral process will also contribute to increased confidence. I urge Member States and international and regional organizations to consider requests by the Government of Afghanistan for observation support.

47. My Special Representative has facilitated clear messaging within the international community and has exercised his good offices in underscoring to electoral management bodies the importance of an inclusive, transparent and clearly communicated process in accordance with Afghan laws. He continues to meet with presidential candidates to emphasize that a legitimate and credible process is also in their interest. I urge all political actors to commit to a peaceful and ethical campaign to ensure that elections contribute to national unity. Discussions among candidates on an inclusive new administration — whomever the people elect as leader — can help guard against a “winner takes all” scenario.

48. Security challenges with regard to the electoral process are real and need to be addressed proactively. At the same time, they should not be used as a pretext to disenfranchise parts of the electorate or to avoid holding elections within the constitutional framework. Strengthened security cooperation among Afghan institutions, including robust security assessments, appropriate risk mitigation measures and public awareness campaigns to instil greater confidence are required. I urge all parties to respect the civilian nature of elections and the right of the Afghan people to exercise their vote.

49. Progress on a peace process has been disappointing in recent months. After the failure of the initiative to open an office for authorized representatives of the Taliban in Doha, the focus on establishing an Afghan-led dialogue has been moved from establishing a physical address to identifying appropriate interlocutors, modalities and facilitators. With political competition and attention focused on the 2014 polls, a comprehensive settlement of the conflict is unlikely in the short term. The initial steps in building the understanding necessary to support future direct talks between the Government of Afghanistan and the armed opposition can and should continue, however. There is also the potential to generate momentum for future initiatives through addressing discrete and specific issues. This should include efforts to mitigate the impact of the conflict on civilians by building better awareness of and compliance with international humanitarian law and the norms of war. A properly targeted and fully implemented sanctions regime also has an important role as part of a comprehensive approach to combating violence and advancing reconciliation.

50. The increase in dialogue between Afghanistan and Pakistan on stability and peace, underscored by economic cooperation, is encouraging. There is increasing recognition of shared mutual interests, which I hope will continue to grow. More broadly, increased regional engagement through bilateral, regional and multilateral forums is welcome and of vital importance to the prosperity and security of the

entire area. The United Nations will continue to support regional cooperation on peace and reconciliation, connectivity and trade, addressing the illicit economy and sustainable solutions for refugees. These are issues on which the Organization has particular expertise. Support for the Istanbul Process is one such example. While it is a political process, the “Heart of Asia” mechanism also has practical dimensions, embodied in the six confidence-building measures. These need greater momentum, however, to generate new relationships and approaches. The United Nations stands ready to increase practical programming and good offices support for this regionally owned initiative.

51. The recent announcement of record levels of poppy cultivation and opium production is deeply disturbing. This is a symptom and a source of instability at a time of uncertainty. It is also a critical hazard to the security, well-being and development of Afghanistan and the wider region. Successful and sustainable counter-narcotics efforts demand an integrated, comprehensive response, coordinated at the highest political levels between the Government of Afghanistan and donor partners. It is only through the exercise of genuine domestic and international political will that the illicit economy, and the criminality and corruption that accompany it, can be addressed. The United Nations is committed to supporting coordinated efforts in this sphere. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework currently under development prioritizes integrated efforts to address the illicit economy.

52. A decrease in large-scale military-driven stabilization activities may offer the chance of a more sustainable development approach, based on the agreed national priorities of Afghanistan. The trajectory towards self-sufficiency, in a country that is still heavily reliant on external assistance, is challenging, however. Government expenditures, including increasingly burdensome security costs, are rising at the same time as revenue generation is decreasing. Indicators of business confidence are also declining. In this uncertain context, predictability in donor support is needed. For Afghanistan’s longer-term sustainability and donor confidence, a real commitment by Afghan authorities to structural reforms is equally essential. This includes revenue mobilization, job creation and a strengthened regulatory environment. UNAMA continues to use its good offices in facilitating and promoting adherence to mutual commitments by the Government and donors in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework. To help better ensure continuity during political transition, the United Nations is also exploring dialogue on Afghanistan’s economic and development agendas and frameworks between presidential candidates, international financial institutions and donors.

53. Commitments made in Tokyo recognize the importance of protecting and strengthening the human rights gains of the last decade for Afghanistan’s future development. The protection of the rights of women and children remains a United Nations priority and the work of UNAMA in the area of civilian casualties is a unique strength. This includes the Mission’s verification and promotion of compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law by all parties to the conflict, taking advantage of its countrywide presence. United Nations tracking of specific incidents of civilian casualties, as well as broader advocacy on such issues as the impact of improvised explosive devices and the clearance of explosive remnants of war, has had a demonstrable impact. As Afghanistan continues its transition, United Nations human rights efforts will increasingly focus on support for national capacity, knowledge and accountability on human rights, including

among Afghan security institutions. Building State legitimacy and effectiveness will require progress in the delivery of justice and in the rule and enforcement of law, including in the areas of civilian policing and gender issues. These are priority areas for United Nations development activities.

54. Insecurity, economic challenges and limited government access are leading to an increased need for humanitarian assistance — another key area of United Nations activity. A clear and principled definition of what constitutes humanitarian assistance is being developed through the Common Humanitarian Action Plan to ensure impartial and independent delivery as set out in international humanitarian law. A pooled common humanitarian fund will reinforce the strategic, thematic and geographic prioritization of the action plan. In a country with chronic poverty, decades of violence and vulnerability to natural disasters, enhanced attention and promotion of the humanitarian-development nexus is necessary to build sustainable solutions and increased resilience.

55. The long-term commitment of the United Nations to the well-being of the Afghan people is best realized through a secure, inclusive and sustainable State. I recognize that the Security Council may address in more detail the role of the United Nations in Afghanistan when there is greater clarity on the impact of the political and security transitions. Continued Member State support and resources can provide a measure of stability, predictability and continuity amid these delicate processes. A countrywide presence remains critical, while UNAMA and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes explore appropriate co-location and cost-sharing arrangements to promote efficiency and coherence. The security of United Nations personnel is essential to enabling mandated tasks and activities and requires effective host nation and donor support. Without pre-empting Council discussions, I consider that greater focus on those areas where an integrated political effort on the part of the United Nations can contribute added value will be vital in supporting the post-2014 transformation of Afghanistan, namely, good offices in support of Afghan-led political processes; monitoring and advocacy on human rights issues, with particular attention to the rights of women and children; facilitating coherent approaches to equitable and sustainable development; and tackling the illicit economy.

56. I would like to express my gratitude to all national and international staff members of UNAMA and to my Special Representative, Ján Kubiš, for their continued dedication, often under challenging conditions, to fulfilling our commitments in support of the people of Afghanistan.