

UN Security Council
6 January 2010

Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan
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Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Members of the Security Council:

Allow me first to express my deep gratitude to the Secretary-General for his generous words and strong support.

These very days, nine years ago, the UN undertook its post-Taliban engagement in Afghanistan. Together, we have achieved much, notably in the fields of education, health and building of state institutions. However, today, nine years later, I am worried about negative trends. I am worried about growing impatience in public opinion in donor and troop-contributing countries; about the frustration in the Afghan public over what they see as a failure to meet their expectations; and about the difficulties of the international and Afghan military forces in putting the insurgency on the defensive. If these negative trends are not soon reversed, then there is a risk that they will become unmanageable.

The political calendar for the next few months has been set, with the London conference three weeks from now and the Kabul conference later this spring. Now we have to get the political agenda right – or rather, quite frankly, return to the priorities set both at the Paris and The Hague conferences. We have lost valuable time, especially in the last six months, when the protracted election process diverted energy from pursuing the priorities we had set.

The London conference will focus mainly on security issues. On 20 January, the JCMB will decide upon an increase in the police force as well as a reform programme for the police. The London conference should endorse these decisions. It should also signal an acceleration of the training and mentoring of the army and a gradual transfer of authority from international to Afghan security forces. This will be the first major step in a new transition strategy, which can allow Afghans to be in charge of their own future.

However, this transition strategy must include key civilian areas: a systematic build-up of civilian institutions to enable the government to deliver services, and the development of the Afghan economy to enable the government to pay for these services when international aid is reduced.

If we do not take these civilian components of the transition strategy as seriously as the military component, then we will fail. What we need is a strategy that is politically and not militarily driven. For years, there has been a consensus—at least in rhetoric—that this conflict ultimately cannot be solved by military means. But most of our focus has been on the number and activities of military forces. The political strategy is too often shaped as an appendix to military thinking.

For years there has also been a consensus— at least in rhetoric—that the process of “Afghanisation” must be accelerated. However, parallel structures to the Afghan government have not been reduced. According to the latest Donor Financial Review, 80% of aid to Afghanistan has been provided through bilateral projects, bypassing the Government, less than 10% of total aid has been provided to the Government, but only a

quarter of that amount is not earmarked for a specific activity in the budget. The situation has been improved somewhat over the last year but basically remains the same. These figures do not demonstrate a mindset where Afghans are allowed to take the lead.

To me, the London and Kabul conferences represent critical opportunities to agree on a politically-driven strategy where Afghan ownership and capacity stand at the center of our activities.

The military surge must not be allowed to undermine equally important civilian objectives and the development of such a politically driven strategy. It must not lead to an accelerated pressure for quick results in governance and economic development efforts, which could divert resources from a long-term approach to civilian institution building and economic growth. Furthermore, it must not lead the military to expand their engagement into key civilian areas, such as those I just mentioned. That could result in a situation where the international community becomes more entrenched rather than a situation where the Afghans are more empowered.

Let me outline what I see as the key components in a political strategy. First of all, a systematic approach to the building of civilian institutions. This is not only a question of appointing officials that are not corrupt, although anti-corruption policies must be a prominent part; it is a question of training and education, of infrastructure and of incentives. Soon, the Civil Service Institute will have the capacity to train 16,000 existing civil servants in key bureaucratic skills. At the moment, 1,700 young men and women from all provinces are trained as future administrators in the National Institute for Management and Administration. The institutions exist, but are fragile and underfunded. Furthermore, we need attractive incentives to ensure that young people who are trained by the government also work for the government, that young people who come from the provinces and districts return to their provinces and districts. Today, the district governors earn 70 dollars per month, half of them have no dedicated office, and an operation budget of 15 dollars per month. It will cost hundreds of millions of dollars to implement an ambitious institution-building programme, but it is one of the best investments we can make for Afghanistan's future.

Today, the government lacks the delivery mechanisms – in terms of sub-national institutions able to provide services. Our main challenge is to develop these tools, to expand the reach of the government instead of continuing to rely on parallel international structures that will one day be withdrawn.

Second, the human resource development – the education system – is seriously unbalanced. While the number of primary and secondary students has reached 7 million, there is only room for 60,000 students in universities and 20,000 in vocational education. These imbalances affect the development of the country's economy and its ability to become less reliant on international assistance.

Third, the critical sector of agriculture continues to be seriously underfunded, in spite of the fact that 80% of the population is dependent on this sector and in spite of the fact that it was identified as a priority in Paris and The Hague last year. Some say that the development of agriculture will decide if the country fails or succeeds in light of its impact of poverty reduction, job creation and revenue collection.

Fourth, infrastructure remains a neglected sector in spite of the rich mineral resources which could be exploited, provide huge incomes and employ tens – perhaps hundreds - of thousands of Afghans. The country has Asia's largest iron ore deposits and a number of other exploitable minerals. The UN and the Government has identified a transportation network and energy supplies as top priorities for starting mining projects that could provide real economic growth.

And finally, a peace and reconciliation process must be launched and become an integral part of the political agenda. It must be based on the Constitution and must be Afghan led and Afghan owned. If the insurgency agrees to join a peace process, then this will

significantly enhance the prospects of troop withdrawals. However, by joining a peace process, the insurgents must also distance themselves from the past and embrace the future as well as the progress which has been achieved in Afghanistan over the last years. I have said before that I have been ready to meet anybody anywhere to promote reconciliation. I believe that it is the role of the UN – whenever the Afghan government seeks our support and within the framework of our mandate.

These are, in my view, the key components of a political agenda. The London Conference can endorse a number of decisions, in particular in the security sector. In other areas, it should provide a roadmap leading up to a subsequent conference in Kabul. At the Kabul conference, we should aim at having fundable projects, prepared by the Government, ready for donors to finance. Together, these two events should provide a new momentum to the strategy of transition that can contribute to turning current negative trends.

With this challenging agenda ahead of us, it is important for us all – first and foremost the Afghan people - that a strong and reform-oriented government be put in place without further delay. The Parliament's rejection of 17 candidates last week was a set-back because it prolongs the situation where Afghanistan is without an established and functioning government. That is particularly serious in a country in conflict, where so many challenges need to be addressed urgently.

At the same time, the Parliament demonstrated that it is far from a rubber stamping body. Soon, the President will present new candidates. It is my strong hope that Parliament will then be able to consider these candidates as quickly as possible.

In addition to a functioning government, we will need further improved coordination mechanisms. There has been progress over the last year. Politically, the international community speaks much more with one voice. The JCMB reforms that the UN initiated in 2008 have yielded a more effective coordination mechanism. Together with the Afghan Government we have also been able to identify priorities more clearly and develop critical initiatives within areas such as agriculture and capacity-building. The next challenge is to align donor resources behind these priorities – and there are promising signs that this is happening. But we need stronger coordination instruments. I have – together with the Minister of Finance – elaborated proposals that we believe will represent an important step forward. It will be based on a continued UN coordination umbrella and with all of us working more closely under Afghan leadership. It will integrate officials of key donors into UNAMA's coordination structures. This will ensure that we are constantly plugged into donors' planning processes and can influence them at an early stage. However, these efforts must also be accompanied by greater efforts within ISAF to bring PRTs in line with Government plans, and to gradually transfer civilian projects carried out within the framework of military structures to civilian institutions.

This coordination must now have a nationwide perspective. I have repeatedly emphasized the importance of not concentrating resources only in conflict areas in the south and east, but also investing in the center and north. This has not happened. Before leaving for New York, I asked a number of Afghan politicians why the insurgency has spread over the last years. There is no simple answer. But one element mentioned by all was the neglect of stable provinces in the allocation of development resources. For that neglect we now pay a high price. However, let me add that we should be realistic—in Afghanistan and elsewhere—concerning the ability of the UN or any other organization to coordinate such a multitude of donor countries, structures, agencies and NGOs.

The IEC has announced that elections for the next parliament will take place on 22 May – in accordance with the Constitution. I cannot criticize the IEC – and the political leaders that were consulted – for adhering to the Constitution. The Constitution represents the foundation for all orderly political activity. But there are technical reasons that will make it challenging to keep this timeline. Security remains a major concern. And the presidential election demonstrated a need for reforms of the electoral institutions. Article 55 of the electoral law gives the IEC the right to postpone elections on the basis of security,

financial or technical considerations. Should Afghan authorities make use of this provision, then elections could be held later in the year in a way that still respects the Afghan legal framework. In terms of reform, the President has expressed his intention to “Afghanize” the election process. I would support that position as long as it results in elections that are considered to be fair and impartial by the Afghan public. During the last elections, there was widespread fraud, which demonstrated the weakness of electoral institutions and a difficult security situation. There was also a perception of international interference, which undoubtedly also occurred – before and after election day. Both must be eliminated in future election processes.

Let me add a few words about the presidential election that we now have behind us. The Secretary-General's report explains the approach that we took in some detail. I want to emphasize how fragile the political situation was in the aftermath of the first round. Significant economic resources left the country in anticipation of political instability. The number of visa applications rose dramatically for the same reason. This possibility of serious instability and violence was avoided through a careful handling of the process until the very end. The international community stood together under UN leadership, and the Afghan political actors behaved with responsibility and respect for the Constitution. These were important achievements and must not be underestimated.

Finally, let me raise a fundamental aspect of our international approach to Afghanistan. There is a tendency in the international community to shape strategies, make decisions, and operate in a way that Afghans perceive as disrespectful and sometimes arrogant. Afghans do sometimes feel that their country is treated as “no man's” land and not as a sovereign state. This perception contributes to unnecessary and dangerous tensions between the Afghan government and the international community. It fuels suspicions of unacceptable foreign interference and breeds a sense of humiliation. I cannot emphasize strongly enough the need to bring this phenomenon to an end.

With regard to military activities, civilian casualties, house searches, and detention policies are sources of recruitment for the insurgency. In the Afghan context, what affects one individual in a village affects all. I am pleased to see the efforts of General McChrystal to reduce such incidents and demonstrate greater respect for Afghan sensitivities. The military surge will make his challenge even more difficult. However, whether we are military or civilian, we must be better at understanding the Afghan society. Even among ordinary Afghans who want our presence – and they are the majority – there are many who resent what they see as disrespect for their religion, their culture, and their values. Success in our long-term partnership will depend on consulting more, listening more, and demonstrating greater understanding for a society which needs our assistance, but also demands our respect. We have to learn the pulse of the Afghan society, which is very different from ours.

Mr. President,

UNAMA has been through difficult months. UNAMA's staff consists of dedicated, knowledgeable, and brave people. The terrible attack against the Bakhtar guest house was traumatic and demoralizing and illustrated that the UN is today more a target of attacks. But it also demonstrated the strength and solidarity of those who work for the UN in Afghanistan. Every effort is being undertaken to ensure that we can all continue our work with adequate safety and security for UN staff. And I am grateful for the support offered by the Secretary-General and member states.

At the same time, we are facing a crisis in recruitment that jeopardizes the future of the mission. When I took over UNAMA in March 2008, UNAMA's vacancy rate was more than 30%. By working with the Department of Field Support we were able to reduce vacancies to 12% by the end of the year. Unfortunately, I have no such good news to report for 2009. The number of staff who has left the mission in the last six months of 2009 is 50, mainly due to security concerns and fatigue. The number of staff who has been hired by UNAMA during the same time period is five. The vacancy rate at the end of last year was around 25%. In addition to this come the new posts provided through the 2010 budget,

which will push the vacancy rate much higher until new staff has been recruited. The new recruitment system put in place in July 2009 simply has not worked. In many cases it does not offer the kind of staff that UNAMA needs. In every case it has been far too slow. All vacancy announcements have been closed, meaning that people who are recently interested in coming to Afghanistan are not able to apply. This is the result of a major systemic flaw in United Nations recruitment that affects not only UNAMA, but all peacekeeping and special political missions. If not corrected soon, it will threaten the effectiveness, possibly even the survival, of many of the current UN Missions.

This is my last briefing as SRSG in Afghanistan. I have set out the political agenda that is required to turn around the current negative trends. I am convinced that these trends can be reversed and that the conflict can be brought to an end in a way that serves the Afghan people and stability in a wider sense. But it will require discipline by all, constant efforts to give Afghans more of the responsibility for their own country and a commitment to a long-term partnership with a people that will continue to be in need of our support.