

STATEMENT OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL TO AFGHANISTAN TO THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL

As delivered - 29 September 2010

I thank you, Sir, for giving us the opportunity on behalf of the whole United Nations system in Afghanistan to give the Council a brief update.

Much has happened, as is often the case in Afghanistan, during these past few months. Since my last briefing, some key events have taken place. I would like to review some of those events, which preceded the recent and highly anticipated parliamentary elections, in order not to lose sight of the progress that is being made in Afghanistan.

Let me begin with something the Council is very familiar with, since many of us attended it at the time - the Kabul Conference. The Conference, which was held on 20 July, did indeed reinforce the Government's commitment to assuming greater control of its own future. That was the message we got from the Conference.

The substantive preparations undertaken, and which addressed a lot of varied issues, involved extensive cooperation between ministries and required a high level of engagement on the part of the international community with the Afghan authorities and with civil society. The Government of Afghanistan, including its own Afghan National Security Forces - and I am glad to see that our friend the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan is here with us to hear it publicly - should be commended, because everyone who attended the Conference was impressed with the way it was organized and how it unfolded. It required a lot of logistical, organizational and substantive preparations.

The Conference was a key moment in the Kabul process, as we call it now, that began with President Karzai's second inaugural speech. While that speech set a broad governing agenda, the Conference added details to that agenda by elaborating a series of joint commitments. These commitments include the development of a framework, clear timelines, benchmarks for national priority programmes, progress towards the Afghan security lead, improvement in governance and, of course, the very serious and important issue of tackling corruption.

Since the Conference, the Government has taken a number of important steps in terms of technical planning. First, it has indicated its intention - and we confirm that this is taking place - to continue, through the cluster approach - that is, various ministries working together with the international community - to pursue agreed priorities. That was the bottom line of the Conference: trying to identify priorities with which we could all realign our own priorities. Second, it has begun to roll out the 21 national priority programmes agreed on at the Conference.

Third, the Government has made an immediate start to public finance management reforms, which are a concern to everyone, including a review of 14 line ministries, led by the Ministry of Finance. Fourth, the Government has indicated that it will make a start on tackling the anticorruption agenda agreed at the Conference, which also includes the creation of a joint monitoring and evaluation committee by the end of this month.

Let us now look at one issue that has been front and centre for us over the past few months—the elections. The campaign period for the elections ran from 23 June to 15 September, and frankly - we were discussing this just this morning - it was characterized by a very big change from the events of 2005. People were showing their faces, people were campaigning, and women were present. There was an active and very creative style of campaigning in these elections. More than 2,500 candidates - actually, 2,521 - stood for re-election, including almost 400 women—398, to be precise. Of those, only one withdrew during the campaign, while two men did. That also shows the level of courage and determination they displayed in wanting to be part of this democratic process, as complicated and, sometimes, as difficult as it might be. Of the 249 sitting Members of Parliament, 229 sought re-election, demonstrating their own interest, and also, to a certain degree, their confidence in the democratic system in Afghanistan. Of the 2,521 candidates, there were many new entrants and many new, young faces. Of course, it remains to be seen where they are at the end of this process.

We must not forget that one of the main achievements of these elections is the fact that they actually took place. Afghanistan is still a country in a very tense conflict. The fact that an election took place at all, not least in such a short time after the previous one and during a comparatively more volatile period - because security has not improved; in fact the contrary is true - is an accomplishment in itself.

And, while there were no high-profile incidents, quite a number of security incidents did occur. They were not sufficient, however, to disrupt the elections overall. The proof is that almost 4.3 million votes were cast. Of course, we will now need to see how many actual voters were a part of that, but this is quite an achievement compared to the previous and current environment.

While the consolidation of figures on security is still going on, election day security incidents were estimated at about 490, compared to 290 in the previous elections. That represents a big difference, but the impact of those incidents was basically comparable, if not less. Again, the proof is that people went to vote. The incidents' intensity was lower. The overall deterioration of the security situation from last year to this was in any case greater, so that also has to be taken into consideration.

About 1.6 million of the 4.3 million ballots cast to date - we have to see how many voters that means - were in female polling stations, again an indicator of a direction that we should all welcome. This is the point. According to all of us, frankly, it is too early to give an overall assessment of the elections, except for the fact that they took place and 4.3 million Afghans had the courage to go, and that according to many people the systems were better. But the outcome remains to be seen, and that is why we are being cautious about it. We also need to see how even or uneven the actual turnout was over all in the provinces and in the country.

According to everyone, the Independent Electoral Commission has demonstrated a significant improvement compared to last year's presidential election, despite immense security and logistical challenges. In contrast to last year, the location of all polling centres was announced publicly a month before polling day. The Council will remember that last year, during the presidential elections, the list of polling centres was publicized two days before voting, and that

was the biggest reason why there was so much concern about fraud. This time it was publicized a month beforehand. That was probably the biggest mitigating measure that could have been taken to avoid massive and systemic fraud. Despite significant challenges, the polling materials arrived on time in most places, and 5,510 polling centres opened, of the 5,897 that had been announced on 18 August. Another major improvement was the security arrangements for the design, use and movement of sensitive materials, including ink. I think that Minister for Foreign Affairs

Rassoul and I can still testify with our fingers that the ink that we used, at least, was quite indelible, and after 10 days I am still looking forward to getting rid of it. We publicly put our fingers in some bleaching products, and it is still there. That does not mean that in some places there was not some faking, but the ink that was provided on a massive scale for the election was quite good.

Having said that, the elections this time had a major security element, reassuring us that at least they would be much more monitored than in the past. We had 397,000 national observers, and they were observing the interests of each candidate on their own. They represented, in that sense, quite an impressive capacity, wanting to make sure that there would be no massive fraud, at least. The sensitive materials were also moved quite safely, in spite of the Taliban having twice threatened to disrupt that.

However, this is just the beginning of the process. That is why, on the Council's behalf, in Afghanistan and outside, we are now being cautious. We pushed, we tried to support the electoral mechanism to go forward, and we tried to encourage the Afghan people to feel that it was worth taking a risk because democracy was moving forward, but now we are being cautious, because we need to see what the outcome is. Despite some retail fraud and, certainly, many problems, the outcome will very much depend on whether the Independent Electoral Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission will have the stamina, the courage, the neutrality and the determination to actually go over the 3,900 complaints received thus far and be able to say which are right and which are wrong, and take that decision before 30 October.

There are and there will be 2,000 losers - there are 2,521 candidates and 249 posts - and those losers are, unavoidably, already complaining. Again, the secret will be whether the electoral commissions will be able to stand in a credible way. We are ready to sustain and support them, but that is an Afghan responsibility.

Regarding conclusions on the election, on our side we should allow the requisite time for the process, which is until 30 October—8 October for the preliminary outcome and 30 October for the final outcome, more or less, based on the hard work that they will have to do now. We must not make premature judgments. We should note that the positive improvements over last year's elections - from which we all, including the United Nations, have all drawn key lessons, by being careful in making any type of declaration about the outcome before it is clarified - make us cautious but supportive of the steps ahead in ensuring the integrity of the process and accountability to the Afghan people. The final comments will come at the end of the month.

Once the elections have been successfully concluded in one form or another, hopefully, the real discussion regarding the future of the electoral system and long-term electoral reform needs to be initiated. We already know that. Many here are already keen on that, and so are the Afghan people. UNAMA will work with the Government, with the electoral institutions and all relevant Afghan and international partners, in particular the European Union (EU).

The representative of the European Union, Vygaudas Usackas - with whom, as the Council knows, we are working extremely closely - has already indicated publicly the interest of the EU in having a leading role in supporting the process of the electoral reform agenda with the Afghan Government. We will be supporting that ourselves. It will focus, most likely, on the electoral legal framework; the sustainability of the electoral calendar, because we cannot have an election every three months; the long-term status of the Electoral Complaints Commission, which is only *ad hoc*, making it very fragile compared to the Independent Electoral Commission; a single nationwide electoral roll, because, as the Council knows, we do not have that; and, the mother of all issues, building the capacity of both electoral commissions.

So what is coming up on the radar? Well, the year began, as the Council knows, with setting a series of stepping stones. The first was the Istanbul conference. Then we had the London Conference, followed by the Consultative Peace *Jirga*, then the Kabul Conference and now the elections.

What is next? Well, a broader political process. We heard this, and yesterday we heard President Karzai elaborating on launching the High-level Peace Commission, with more than 67 members from all sides of Afghan society. We will focus on supporting that, on the basis of the mandate given to us by the Security Council, and on the Kabul process. At the same time we will watch with interest, and potentially with substantive support, the transition, which is probably going to be discussed at the Lisbon summit and then in Kabul.

I am glad to acknowledge the presence here of our colleague and friend, Mark Sedwill, who is the Senior Civilian Representative of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). I have had the opportunity on other occasions here to say how closely we have been working together and how important it is that we are working in that way in order to avoid any type of confusion and to ensure that the Afghans feel that we, on the international side, are all together in supporting the Afghan lead.

Today, I would like to highlight some of key conditions that are essential for the so-called road map on our side in the Kabul process. The Kabul process cannot be just a technocratic exercise. All partners need to engage politically behind the agenda. We know that we can count on President Karzai's leadership in this.

Second, we need to avoid new agendas or competing initiatives. We should focus on identifying the priorities that the Kabul Conference said that we need to tackle first, and concentrate our collective effort behind them. The Government has sent a signal regarding the priorities they seek to pursue: the rollout of national priority programmes and public finance management reform. We need to support that agenda, and we plan to work on it.

Third, we, the international community, need to keep our own part of the bargain by aligning resources - or realigning resources - behind the Government's priorities. The United Nations is committed in Kabul to a "one-UN" approach, so that we too contribute to the realigning and not just help in the realigning of other partners.

Fourth, we must continue to strive to be more results-oriented, as the Afghan people are asking of us and the Afghan Government. I intend to work with the Government before the next meeting of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB), to be held at the end of November, to ensure that the Board, without having to create new bodies or new institutions, can be revitalized and be a follow-up to the actual Kabul follow-up conference.

Of course, all of that will go forward only if it is moving towards a consolidated peace and reintegration programme within a complementary, structured political process that leads to a future Afghanistan reconciled on the basis of mutual respect.

There is a unanimous consensus in the international community that there is no military solution for Afghanistan. In the end, the solution can and should be political and Afghan, a solution that can only be supplemented with broader regional support and a solution that we can all work towards. Yesterday, the Government of Afghanistan took a very significant initial step, and UNAMA, in accordance with its mandate, will do all that it can to support it.

The next few months will be critical, first, in looking at the follow-up to the election, and second, in seeing how transition can become a concrete, well-organized and fair approach in the eyes of the Afghans and the international community.

Transition does not mean exit; it means transition, and the Government of Afghanistan will continue to receive all possible support from all of us with a view to bringing about what we are all hoping to see, namely, a peace and reconciliation initiative.

I will stop there, Mr. President, with your permission.

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