

Briefing by the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Ján Kubiš, to the North Atlantic Council, 8 October 2013, Brussels and OSCE PC/FSC, 9 October 2013, Vienna

Excellencies,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the NAC. I agree with your assessment of our cooperation and take this opportunity to thank all of you for the support.

I was at the NAC meeting in Brussels yesterday. The distinctive feature of the discussions was that the recognition of the progress made. At the same acknowledging the challenges faced in transition. I stand with this assessment; the efforts are on track, but the situation remains volatile and fragile. For the elections there is progress in building inclusive legal framework. There is success for ANSF in security transition, even though they suffer heavy casualty.

There is progress in strengthening regional cooperation. Signals from regional countries are for increased cooperation and for future engagement in Afghanistan. The situation is still volatile and fragile at this moment.

The September 2013 United Nations Security Council debate on Afghanistan assessed the transition and reconfirmed support of the international community for the country. All that in spite of multiple serious international crises and internal processes in many of key partners of Afghanistan that naturally shift the focus of attention. While nobody closed their eyes to risks, challenges and problematic developments as regards the transition processes in Afghanistan, international partners perhaps for the first time since the beginning of the transition recognised

important progress in many areas, adding their weight to gradually rising confidence in the future of the country. I share the assessment of member states that efforts are basically on track. Considerable challenges remain and the situation is volatile and at times fragile, but year on year progress is evident. Progress in building a credible and inclusive electoral framework and in preparations of inclusive, transparent and credible elections; progress and successes scored by the ANSF as they assume full responsibility for security, regardless setbacks problematic developments and heavy casualties; and third key element, progress in strengthening the regional relationships, when regional counties are increasingly willing to share responsibility with broader international partners for future stable Afghanistan and the region with broader international community, conducive environment for economic development.

Afghans at every level express immense eagerness and pride in taking control of their own destiny, raising confidence in Afghanistan, at this point of time, among international partners.

Security Transition;

The 5th tranche of the security transition is going on and currently the security in the country is the responsibility of Afghan security forces. The civilian casualty is higher compared to last year, but not as high as 2011. The situation is not as critical as 2011. Rouge and criminal elements target mostly civilians. The situation in the north is volatile and there is attempt to deteriorate the situation in the western region. These campaigns failed to achieve military success for insurgency. ANSF is rising up to the occasion. They have the support of the people. The international community should continue supporting them through training and providing equipment. COMISAF have stated that ANSF requires at least 5 years

of support. Air capacity of the ANSF is not sufficient and air support is also needed for medevac operations, as the capacity is not sufficient. Continued support is needed for 5 years.

Political and security transitions will culminate in 2014 but this year is critical in ensuring that the fundamentals are in place. The complex transition must be approached holistically. Security and development achievements will only be sustainable if there is a widely accepted political transition in which all Afghans will have a voice. The criticality of the elections is recognised. From the long-term perspective the key is economic and social development underpinned by sustainable and effective institutions of good governance coupled with gradual suppression of illicit, notably drug-related economy.

Excellencies,

On-going conflict inevitability raises questions about the security transition. It will succeed when the Afghan people will have confidence that their security forces controlled by legitimate state structures can ensure the necessary conditions, governance and services for their daily life and business. Only then they will believe in their more secure and prosperous future in stable Afghanistan and will fully engage. From this perspective equally essential is confidence that the international community will meet its commitments of long-term assistance in security, development and humanitarian areas through the transition and the decade of transformation.

With the start of the fifth tranche, the security transition has entered its final phase. And while security incidents have increased on 2012 it is not to the record levels of 2011. A campaign of bloodshed by anti-Government elements and including rogue, criminal elements has targeted mostly Afghans – both in uniform and

civilians – including in previously more stable areas in the North of the country. They have however failed to achieve a significant and lasting military breakthrough.

The Afghan army and police have shown courage and increased resilience in rising to the challenge of security transition. They increasingly trust themselves and work to earn the trust of the population despite heavy casualties in the ranks. We are rightly requested to trust them as well, but even more importantly, to equip and train them up to their needs. To be able to stand up to their tasks, the ANSF require a continuous substantive support in the years to come, notably as regards critical enablers. COMISAF has repeatedly emphasised that international support will be required for at least the next five years given shortcomings in sustainment and planning capabilities in particular. One of the critical areas is air support, both operational and medevac. Heroic afghan soldiers and police are ready to risk their life and limb, but are increasingly concerned that they suffer unnecessary losses due to insufficient medevac resources at their disposal, as now they are in the lead of military ops.

Excellencies,

At this time of change, flux and uncertainty, predictability and clarity as regards support of international partners is critically important for sustainable transition. Timely unwavering implementation of the numerous bilateral partnership agreements as well as the commitments made at NATO's 2012 Chicago summit are important, indeed indispensable building blocks of such sustainability.

Predictability of support is important and to achieve this future partnership are critical. The SPAs are important, especially the one with US. Critical discussions are on-going between US and Afghan authorities. The discussions are on a critical

stage. The Presidents of Afghanistan and US shown commitment to complete the agreement; the President is committed for the partnership – I can confirm. I hope it will be completed before the elections. If prolonged too long, it might become an issue in elections. If it happens, it may create opportunities for regional countries to hedge their bets about the outcome and long-term future of Afghanistan.

Therefore it is of concern that the future of the US security engagement still lacks clarity. While negotiations on the BSA have been reinvigorated and apparently reached a decisive, political phase, their perspective remains still unclear. I can confirm, through my discussions with leadership in Afghanistan and as stated publicly many times, both Afghanistan and the USA are committed to their strategic partnership. Both sides also stated their hope for the US-Afghan Bilateral Security Agreement to be completed in the coming period, with an expectation that a decision on the NATO status of forces agreement and US force size will come soon afterwards. Progress on the BSA is eagerly awaited in Afghanistan by diverse stakeholders who are wary of mixing this issue with the forthcoming election campaign. They are increasingly concerned of security vacuum that might open the doors to insecurity and instability. Similarly, they fear unpredictability that this unresolved situation, if lasting till late next year might bring as regards continuation of international support to Afghanistan.

Excellencies,

The 2014 Presidential and Provincial Councils' elections remain at the forefront of political life in Afghanistan. The quality how it is held, the outcome is important for successful transition. President Karzai has repeatedly emphasized that polls will be held according to the Constitution, recognizing that, and I quote, “retaining power without elections will raise questions about the systems' legitimacy”. It is

necessary to accept the implications of the fact that this time the elections are fully Afghan led and managed. Symptomatic is another statement of President Karzai that “any election is better than no election. We cannot delay elections for security considerations.”

In recent months there has been significant qualitative and operational progress in election preparations – which six months before polling days are more advanced and solid than for any previous election in Afghanistan, in the modern history of Afghanistan. The passage of two key laws, appointments to the two independent electoral management bodies, and rollout of the district-level voter registration update are all important aspects of strengthening the electoral framework and environment, adding to credibility of the process. To date close to 2 million of new voter cards have been issued , to newly registered voters, some 31 per cent of these to women with a six-week extension of the registration till early November helping ensure maximum participation, notably that of women.

Electoral preparations are much more advanced compared to the previous elections. The elections are being conducted on electoral laws passed by the parliament and not on Presidential decrees. Both IEC and IECC are established or being established.

I welcome the increased attention of the Afghan security institutions, to issues of election security with planning and efforts further ahead than any previous polls, but still with problems and gaps. What is needed is improved coordination between security institutions; robust security assessments; planning and implementation of risk mitigation measures; and public awareness campaigns to instil greater confidence. The international military’s support is greatly needed and appreciated and I am glad to note a strong commitment of COMISAF to do the maximum here.

Only the elections as inclusive as possible, with reasonable voter participation across the country, including the volatile South and South-East with majority Pashto population and with reduced fraud in comparison with the past can ensure acceptance of their results by both the winner and the loser, credibility and legitimacy of the future government, and thus stability in transition and through the transformation decade.

I am encouraged by a general consensus among the political elite of the country that the historic democratic transfer of political authority should contribute to national unity. The slates are – somewhat - clearer with the end of the candidate nomination period last Sunday, 6 October. A total of 27 candidates filled nominations for the Presidency, with nearly all tickets multi-ethnic in composition. Clear visions for the future of Afghanistan are now needed in allowing voters to make informed decisions in how to vote. I emphasise that these are choices for Afghans to make – they know the candidates well, these are after all largely figures that have been part of the Afghan political landscape for many years, some even decades.

Democratic transfer power through democratic process. Most of the teams are balanced to the extent possible. They are not mono-ethnic. The process should contribute to national unity. Most of the candidates understand this.

Inclusive participation across a diverse country includes women's participation – as voters, candidates and electoral workers. A meaningful and respected voice for women in public life is not just about rights but repeatedly proven to be a strong factor in improving the quality of the election, governance of the country, the country's developmental indicators or prospects for peace and its sustainability. Over a quarter of MPs and senators in Afghanistan are women and make an

important contribution. In those who have signed up – subject to a challenge period – only one woman runs for President but the Provincial Council races have for 458 slots (with 20% places reserved for women) 334 women out of 3056 registered candidates, at least one women candidate in each of the 34 provinces. This is a good result at this point of time.

When the campaign period begins a level playing field, including non-interference and impartiality of state structures, equal access to state resources and balance in media coverage, will be important aspects of a fair process. Media independence is an important factor here, and all of us will follow with interest the further proceedings in the Parliament of the Media Law, notably as the Afghan Independent Journalist Union expressed certain concerns as regards some revisions of the draft.

I am glad to note the resolve of the international community to avoid, through word or action, steps that could lead to perception of support of favouritism for particular candidates. This election process must be decided by Afghans, without external or internal interference. Yet, it doesn't mean that the international community will abstain from providing support for the elections, as requested by the respective authorities and institutions of the country, that we will not share the best international practices and lessons learned from previous elections with our Afghan partners in order to avoid and prevent past mistakes and problems, notably fraud that marred the previous election cycles.

Among positive measures to improve quality of the elections, there is a need for massive international and domestic election observation. It has the potential to enhance electoral integrity by deterring fraud and irregularities and promoting public confidence - and in turn participation. I have emphasised bilaterally to

international partners of Afghanistan and have approached a number of multilateral organisations with a request to deploy election observation or electoral support teams and hope to see them in Afghanistan in force.

OSCE had provided election support teams to Afghanistan for the past elections. Out of the many electoral observation teams the Afghan authorities only invited OSCE for consultations to implement some of the recommendations from the last observation mission. IEC has sent the letter of invitation to OSCE observe the elections. The observation should not be only on the E-day but you should observe the whole process. My plea to you; to send the electoral observation mission sooner than later.

The goal is an outcome that is widely accepted as legitimate by the majority of Afghans as a result of reasonably fair, inclusive and credible elections that can be achieved at this stage of the development of democracy in still volatile and insecure Afghanistan. It is this which will best contribute to stability. It will further be one of the very best, perhaps the best, insurance of the international community's commitment to meeting pledges of long-term assistance to Afghanistan.

Excellencies,

Across the region there is growing recognition of the need for constructive bilateral and multilateral engagement with Afghanistan. The challenges – including instability, terrorism, population displacement, and narcotics – are transnational ones. So are the opportunities – in trade, infrastructure and connectivity.

I welcome the positive initial signals and engagements from the new leaderships in Iran and Pakistan. This is something I have witnessed for myself having attended the inauguration of President Rouhani in Teheran, as did President Karzai. I also

participated in the UN Secretary General's August 2013 visit to Islamabad to meet with the new leadership and was encouraged by what I heard there. I hope these signals will materialize in positive results.

President Karzai's visit to Islamabad soon afterwards was of particular significance and a new tone in relations seems to be emerging, narrowing the trust deficit. This has been confirmed by statements of Sartaj Aziz, the Pakistan Prime Minister's adviser, where he emphasized genuine efforts to facilitate an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. It was emphasised that Pakistan has no favourites in Afghanistan and that the policy is one of "non-interference". Afghan officials have expressed hope to me of an era of better cooperation with Pakistan. Confidence-building measures and cooperation, including on peace and reconciliation, border management and economic development can now assist in building trust through shared interests and prosperity.

Regional countries are ready to assume certain responsibilities. Stability in Afghanistan needed for economic revival in the region. Afghanistan can help in developing regional connectivity. Neighbouring countries are trying to protect from the negative fallout; they are trying to work with Afghanistan. The two new governments in Pakistan and Iran are trying to work with Afghanistan.

In New York last month I attended a Senior Officials' Meeting of the Istanbul Process. It demonstrated value of this process as a truly regional effort in placing Afghanistan at the "Heart of Asia". The People's Republic of China's offer to host its 2014 ministerial meeting can be considered and a signal of trust in the process and its viability as well as a proof of Beijing' seriousness of intent to support all efforts that can contribute to stability in Afghanistan and the region.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is also positioning itself to play an increasing role in support of Afghanistan, in pursuing stability in the region, while at the same time taking measures to protect its members from possible negative impact of certain developments in Afghanistan, notably linked to spread of terrorism and drug trafficking. I attended the September 2013 SCO summit in Bishkek where I noticed clear interest and resolve in moving beyond anxiety and expressions of concern about the situation post-2014. The emphasis was rather on shared responsibilities, together with Afghanistan and the broader international community, in building durable solutions for Afghanistan's and regional stability and development.

Indeed, throughout my recent regional travels to almost all countries of the wider region, I noticed a shared opinion that political solutions will be the key to sustainable peace, security and economic prosperity in Afghanistan and the region. Most immediately this means elections resulting in a legitimate and peaceful transfer of power. More broadly this must include early dialogue on peace and reconciliation, as stated in a number of countries.

I understand the legitimate concerns of the Government of Afghanistan about events surrounding the opening of an office for authorised representatives of the Taliban in Doha. Missteps and miscommunication are disappointing but to be expected, in what will be an incremental process. I hope that new, mutually accepted, modalities can be swiftly agreed. I welcome the appeal by Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Masood Khan to the Security Council not to lose hope and recognising dialogue as indispensable. He underscored the need for unity of purpose, and I quote: "We need to pursue this goal together."

The United Nations continues to support the efforts for such dialogue

Excellencies,

Afghanistan is by far the largest centre of opium production in the world. Narcotics are a source and symptom of violence and institutional weakness which increasingly threatens every sphere of development in Afghanistan: political economic and security. If not resolutely curbed, it has the potential to turn into a determining factor of future instability and insecurity.

Fedotov has highlighted the influence of narcotics in Afghanistan and throughout the region. It is a critically important to tackle this issue. The trends are getting worse and worse. What is the economy of the country? Three major factors contributed in the last 12 years. International aid was a major component which contributed to the GDP of the country; it was mostly connected to ISAF and the military deployment. The contribution of agriculture was around 30 per cent and it employs around 60-70 per cent of the population. This factor won't change even with massive urbanization. The third major contributor is the illicit economy, the narcotics.

Once international military withdrawal is completed the ISAF induced situation will change. The aid money is disappearing; Agriculture is volatile and depending on good precipitation. Good harvest during last year was mainly due to sufficient rains. In the last 12 years the GDP grew around 14 per cent, according to the World Bank. The World Bank forecast that the economy will grow between 4-5 per cent for the next decade. In all these the illicit economy is growing and the insecurity and unpredictability contribute to the growth of illicit economy. To counter the illicit economy the development efforts should have a holistic approach.

There is little apparent end to this and indeed amidst a predicted economic slowdown narcotics will likely be seen as an economic “buffer” by powerbrokers seeking to maintain patronage networks. I am alarmed at assessments that this year will see a truly significant rise – yet again – in opium cultivation and production and a continuing drop in “poppy-free” provinces.

Renewed attention to mainstreaming counter-narcotics efforts is essential and ultimately a matter of political will – by Afghan authorities, regional partners and international donors - to support a long-term coherent and comprehensive multi-sector strategy to reduce illicit economy.

Excellencies,

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, recently visited Kabul and met with President Karzai and senior officials as well as civil society representatives and human rights activists. Ms Pillay noted commendable progress in some areas of human rights and the commitment of President Karzai and other key officials. However she stated her concern that momentum of improvements in human rights may not only have peaked but is even waning. She urged additional efforts to ensure that justice and human rights - in particular women’s rights - be preserved and consolidated rather than undermined or sacrificed to political expediency.

This year’s rise in civilian casualties is of deep concern, the vast majority of these at the hands of anti-Government elements and rogue or criminal armed groups. In the first eight months of the year UNAMA has documented 2056 civilian deaths and 3668 injured – a 16 per cent increase from the same period in 2012. Targeted killings of civilians and the use of improvised explosive devices, together with a rising toll due to ground engagements, account for most of these.

Given the devastation wrought by IEDs, I appeal for ISAF's continued support in developing Afghan capacity in the tracking and disposal of these devices. Afghan structures mandated to track and provide accountability for civilian casualties by Afghan forces also need strengthening in ensuring transparent and timely investigations and improved responses and mitigation measures.

Explosive remnants of war remain a dangerous legacy of the years of conflict in Afghanistan with UNAMA documenting a 29 per cent increase in civilian casualties in the first seven months of the year. Of these, 79 per cent of victims were children mostly boys searching for scrap metal. I welcome recognition by NATO and ISAF of the seriousness of the issue and appreciate commitment to doing its part in ensuring that firing ranges and properties used by international troops are made safe as their rapid hand-over to Afghan authorities continues.

Major progress has been achieved in Human rights. It was at the bottom 12 years back. Now there is major progress. The process of transition the HR is under stress; the human rights situation will be affected. In a hypothetical situation if the Taliban is part of a future government in Afghanistan the people won't allow the situation to deteriorate. The growth of urbanization and the youth bulge, 60 per cent of the population is below 25 years of age; the young population will push back the regressive forces.

Progress in addressing torture and ill-treatment in Afghan detention centres remains slow. ISAF's process for inspecting and certifying facilities where it intends to transfer detainees has been robust, transparent and consultative. In close cooperation and consultation with us, ISAF has provided assistance on issues of access to facilities by human rights officers, for which I am grateful. It has been an effective collaborative effort with a visible impact. In maintaining momentum this

should form a clear part of continuing “train, assist, and advise” efforts. It should be not only about training and inspections, but development and strengthening Afghan oversight and accountability mechanisms as part of institution building.

I would also request – in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 – that NATO look for ways to reinforce the rights and role of women in its post-2014 presence.

Excellencies,

A further line of the United Nations efforts in Afghanistan is humanitarian. This is work that is currently, unfortunately, increasing. I am thus pleased to note that there is now agreement and commitment from the international donor community to support a Common Humanitarian Fund for Afghanistan which should become operational in early 2014.

The heightened uncertainty and violence has seen a rise in internal displacement, now affecting over half a million individuals - over 100,000 of these during the first seven months of the year. Meanwhile there are reports of a rise in attacks against aid workers and health facilities at a time when the health sector is also facing funding challenges. Humanitarian agencies assess that 450 health centres were closed in recent months, of which 250 were in government areas and 200 in contested areas. This is at the very time when the number of conflict casualties is rising.

On UN role I would like to state that “ UN was there before; we will be there after”. We will be in many areas, human rights, donor coordination and humanitarian assistance, especially support for refugees. Iran and Pakistan two

countries which have accommodated millions of refugees and both these countries require assistance with refugees.

UN mission will have a coordinating role of the international efforts. My mandate includes working with regional countries and regional mandate including the coordination of regional efforts. We hope that UN will continue its work with our partners in Afghanistan.

Excellencies,

Much needs to be done in meeting mutual commitments under the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework. A focus on election preparations must not draw attention away from issue like combatting corruption, the rule of law and economic growth. This is what will ensure Afghanistan's ultimate institutional and financial sustainability. An additional challenge will be accommodating a youth bulge in which an additional 400,000 young people enter the jobs market each year.

Immediate economic challenges include unemployment generated by ISAF's departure and draw-down of general international presence, activities and support. Unemployed security providers as a result of less funding for state and non-state institutions are of particular concern. As past experience of disarmament programmes shows, in the absence of significant job creation there is the potential for fragmentation in the security environment.

Significant geographic, sectorial and financial distortions in the delivery of development across Afghanistan to date means that impacts are likely to be felt particularly in the south and southeast. The good news from this is the opportunity to normalise the development in the civilian sphere and ensure true Afghan lead in planning, prioritising and implementation. The international role – including that

of United Nations agencies – is rightly an increasing focus on advice and support for Afghan institutions rather than service delivery.

Excellencies,

The goal of Afghan authorities, the Afghan people and the international community is the same: a stable and self-sufficient Afghanistan that can be secure, meet the needs and aspirations of its people – men and women – and contribute to the security and development of the region. The international community is rightly requested to continue with its long-term assistance to these efforts. The message of the need to protect the gains of the last 12 years is clear. I welcome the signals of positive support of the region and on-going commitment of the international community in ensuring continued momentum in strengthening Afghan institutions, Afghan sovereignty and Afghan solutions.

The United Nations is committed to supporting the realisations of aspirations for peace, development, justice and prosperity. We fully share the Government's wish that our partnership evolve to reflect new realities and are actively discussing with our Afghan partners how to assist through this transition period and how our partnership can adapt post-2014.

The trends are not clear; any element of stability will solidify and strengthen the commitment among others.

Closing Remarks;

Excellencies,

I can speak a lot about other aspects of the development - continuation of work as regards implementation of economic objectives and trajectory that was determined

in Tokyo under the Tokyo mutual accountability framework, but I will stop with this.

I try to document that in spite of predictions of many analysts a year ago very strongly coming with predictions of chaos and sliding down to civil war, not necessarily, this is documented by the realities on the ground. But once again, while the progress is visible, while the trends are not bad in several areas, the situation remains fragile, unpredictable. And once again, any elements of predictability, solidifying both, these positive trends on the ground, though, for example, strengthening and bringing clarity on strategic partnership with the key partners, solidifying and strengthening the commitment of the international community, among others, to continue assistance and cooperation with Afghanistan in post-2014 period. And in this sense and also as regards your plans, NATO plans, all that is very critical to deliver now, before the elections, so as not to turn the elections into a completely different exercise, marred by unpredictabilities and hedging the bets, and marred by then increased appetite of regional countries to influence, for their benefit, the developments including the elections.

We have different situation in comparison with what was there before. Is it stable? No, as I said, it is volatile, unpredictable. That's why once again my points. Any points of stability, and its starts at this time with BSA, and luckily as I said, there is an understanding of the criticality of the BSA among the leadership starting with president Karzai, and political elites of the country, this is something that is important. And I hope that it will materialize. If not, as I said, we will have a completely different ball game, including with the elections.