

**UNAMA****United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan**

Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit, Kabul, Afghanistan

**SRSB Briefing**<http://unama.unmissions.org>

**Briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and  
Head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)  
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**To the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council with Non-NATO ISAF Contributors at the  
level of Defence Ministers**

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Secretary-General, Excellencies,

I welcome the opportunity to address you today amidst this critical electoral period. It is by no means over, and great challenges and risks remain. To date, however, the electoral process has gone as well as can be expected – far better than not only pessimists but also optimists predicted.

For this I would firstly like to recognize the efforts of the Afghan electoral management bodies and security forces in administering, adjudicating and securing what is truly an Afghan led, Afghan managed, electoral process. I further acknowledge the important support role - while much smaller than previously - that the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has played.

The timely and successful transfer of political power is vital to the unity and stability of Afghanistan and the region. The maturity of the candidates and electorate and the performance of the security and electoral institutions shown to date have been impressive and have reinforced national and international confidence in Afghanistan's future. There is now a joint responsibility to safeguard the credibility of this decisive election.

Campaigning in the first round was hard-fought but respectful. Amidst the inevitable sharpening of rhetoric ahead of the second round, there is a need for statesmanship and I again urge campaigns to remain focused on substance. Appeals to ethnic and factional interests could only lead to polarization and division and could stand in the way of finding inclusive solutions after the run-off, for the sake of unity and stability of Afghanistan..

The first round of polling of 5 April was an improvement on past processes – while certainly not perfect. In strict conformity with my mandate, and United Nations neutrality, I have been working with all stakeholders in support of the inclusiveness and integrity of the process – and ultimately an outcome which has broad acceptance by the Afghan people.

At this critical juncture, ahead of the 14 June run-off, the two candidates are rightly demanding further improvements. The electoral management bodies are still maturing, still learning. What is vital is that the electoral management bodies are seen to act in good faith and to continually strive for technical improvements. In line with my mandate, I have been working with all stakeholders in support of the inclusiveness, transparency and integrity of the elections - and ultimately an outcome which has broad acceptance. I continue to urge the electoral management bodies to ensure full transparency in their decision-making and conduct. Clear and timely lines of communication with all stakeholders will be critical.

In turn, a large measure of responsibility for the stability and credibility of the process rests with the candidates. I appeal to these two respected, national figures Dr. Abdullah and Dr. Ghani Ahmadzai to guide and shape the actions and attitudes of their supporters. This includes calling on their supporters to refrain from any act of fraud, as well as publicly committing to respect the authority of the electoral bodies. Candidates must recognize that not winning is not prima facie evidence of fraud. Where there are documented grounds for complaints they must work through the legally mandated institutions.

I welcome the continuing strong signals of neutrality by member states in recognising that this is a choice for Afghans to make. When a winner does emerge, I have been reassured by both candidates, that the need for an inclusive administration is widely understood.

Crucial for the final success of the elections is a continuous proactive approach by Afghan security forces. They are in the lead of what is a truly national operation. At the same time I recognize and welcome the support that NATO/ISAF has provided. National security forces stepped up to the challenge in the first round, with clear political direction to act impartially, early planning, and sound preparations demonstrating institutional maturity. Very importantly this included serious commitment by the Minister of Interior, and others, to securing women's participation as candidates, electoral workers, voters and observers. The confidence inspired by the performance of security institutions played its part in around seven million Afghans turning out to vote on 5 April.

Looking ahead to 14 June, I urge all eligible Afghan citizens – women and men – to once again exercise their franchise. This is your universal democratic right. It is also a responsibility in strengthening Afghanistan's democratic institutions and a rejection of force, violence and intimidation as a means by which Afghanistan chooses its leaders.

I deeply condemn the insurgents' continued attacks on civilians and civilian institutions. Until 22 May this year UNAMA has documented 1,075 civilian deaths and 2,090 injuries – a 13 per cent increase on the same period in 2013. The number of women and children killed and injured in this period were both up 22 per cent.

Of these casualties, 79 per cent are attributed to anti-Government elements. Recent Taliban statements where they have identified the electoral process and judiciary as targets are of grave concern. I underscore that attacks on civilians or indiscriminate violence in civilian locations goes against international obligations and the fundamental tenets of Islam. The legitimacy that such groups claim to seek is only undermined by such actions. While the armed faction of Hezb-i Islami has chosen to boycott the second round of polling it has – rightly - clearly stated that it will not target the process.

The insurgents' campaign of fear and increased violence that accelerates has not translated into gains on the ground. In assuming the lead Afghan security forces have proved themselves up to the job with high morale and increasing confidence.

President Barack Obama recently confirmed that by the end of 2016 American military presence in Afghanistan will cease, but the United States' commitment to Afghanistan will endure. Indeed, well beyond this 2016 timeframe and the physical presence of foreign troops, pledges of both development and security assistance must endure if the gains of the last decade are to be protected. It is widely understood that Afghan military and police – new institutions which are proving their mettle amidst the most challenging of circumstances – will require long-term extraordinary support. This involves not only the United States but all committed friends and partners of Afghanistan. September's NATO summit must recommit to the spirit of Chicago, and indeed Tokyo, the spirit of true transition, and communicate it well to the Afghan and world public to ensure they understand Afghanistan is not being yet again abandoned.

The required assistance is not only financial or material, although it is critically important to enhance certain capacities and capabilities, as mentioned by Minister Bismillah Mohammadi. As Afghan security institutions assume the lead this includes responsibilities and accountability for which I hope to see NATO's continued support. Assistance is required in sustaining Afghan counter-IED capacity given that this menace remains the leading cause of civilian casualties. Monitoring and support in improving Afghan detention practices can help prevent torture and ill treatment. Improvements in the working conditions of women in the Afghan army and police services are essential in ensuring inclusive, community-oriented institutions and ultimately contribute to operational effectiveness.

I underscore again that everything that has been achieved to date will depend on a credible political transition. It is this that can ensure a popular mandate for wider political, economic and social development agenda. In the lead up to both the NATO Summit and November's Development Ministerial it cannot be business as usual. A new leader will need to quickly grapple with the many challenges in ensuring Afghanistan's security and economic self-sufficiency.

The latter will require deep-seated reforms and tough decisions in strengthening the licit economy and undercutting the burgeoning illicit economy which threatens the stability of Afghanistan and the wider region. Donors meeting their commitments in ways that are predictable and which reinforce Afghan institutions and processes through the transition and transformation decade will be essential.

Finally, I appreciate the increasing regional support for constructive Afghan-led solutions through bilateral relations and regional platforms in recognizing that a stable Afghanistan is in everyone's interest. Particularly around elections I would like to acknowledge the strong and constructive support for a credible electoral process. There is recognition of the importance to the stability and security of not just Afghanistan, but also the wider region, of a smooth leadership transition. Importantly, neighboring countries pledge to remain impartial and to work with whoever will win the elections.

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