

## **Briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Ján Kubiš, to Security Council, 19 September 2013**

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Mr President, Esteemed Members of the Security Council,

Last week Afghanistan's first international football victory triggered exuberant celebrations of an historic achievement. In a display of national unity and national pride the streets filled with dancing, flag-waving crowds. Following decades of war which devastated the country's institutional and social fabric, the South Asian Football Federation Championship win was a welcome sign of Afghanistan's gradual return to normalcy and success on the international stage.

The three months since I last appeared before you have seen progress in Afghanistan's political and security transitions. Considerable challenges remain and the situation is volatile, but efforts are on track.

In this period I personally have had a particular focus on regional issues. This recognizes the vital importance of the neighbours, and near neighbours, support for - and engagement with - Afghanistan. The stability and ultimate sustainability of transition processes depend upon it.

I travelled with the Secretary-General to Islamabad to meet with Pakistan's new leadership. I represented the Secretary-General at the inauguration of Iran's new President and at the council of the heads of state of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in Kyrgyzstan. I also undertook working visits to Tajikistan, Russia, India and China.

Mr President,

Tranche Five, the final tranche, of the security transition was announced just the day before my last briefing.

Since then security incidents have increased on 2012 – but not to the record levels of 2011. A campaign of bloodshed by anti-Government elements has targeted mostly Afghans – both in uniform and civilians – including in previously calmer districts. They have however failed to achieve a significant military victory. The majority of violence takes places away from populated areas.

The Afghan army and police have shown courage and increased capability 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 requested to trust them as well.

In recent meetings with senior Afghan military personnel I was pleased to hear that instilling public trust in the army's capacity and cohesion is recognized as an institutional priority.

Yet, Afghan security forces capabilities are not yet fully developed nor completely sustainable. ISAF Commander General Dunford recently stated that international support will be required for at least the next five years in enabling entirely independent operations.

I welcome the numerous bilateral partnership agreements that now underlay multilateral commitments from Chicago. These are a demonstration of the seriousness and long-term nature of international support.

Mr President,

The 2014 elections remain at the forefront of political life in Afghanistan. More broadly, a stable leadership transition through timely elections in accordance with the Constitution is central to everything else to be achieved.

President Karzai recently again emphasized that polls will be held, recognizing that “retaining power without elections will raise questions about the systems' legitimacy”.

The last three months have seen significant progress in technical preparations. This includes passage of two key laws, appointments to the two independent electoral management bodies, and rollout of the district-level voter registration update. A six-week extension of the registration effort will help ensure maximum participation, including that of women.

An acceleration in registration since Ramadan means that more than one million new voter cards have been issued, nearly 30 per cent of these to women. Numbers continue to grow steadily.

I welcome the attention Afghan authorities are giving to securing the elections. Improved coordination of security institutions; robust security assessments; planning and implementing risk mitigation measures; and instilling greater confidence through public awareness are necessary now.

Again, President Karzai has recognized that “any election is better than no election. We cannot delay elections for security considerations.”

With the launch of candidate registration earlier this week, the political contest is formally underway. Clear visions for the future of Afghanistan need to be articulated to allow voters to make their choices. Direct or indirect appeals to narrow ethnic or factional interests must be avoided. Democratic transfer of political authority should contribute to national unity.

A level playing field, including equal access to state resources as well as balance in media coverage will be important aspects of a fair process and help ensure a widely accepted result.

There is increasing concern over the slow progress in creating an appropriate legal framework for the media, especially in this election period. The legislation on the right to information and the media law have both been delayed while violence against journalists is seen to be on the rise.

Press freedom is one of the success stories in Afghanistan and must be protected.

Mr President,

Across the region there is growing recognition of the need for constructive bilateral and multilateral engagement with Afghanistan. The transnational nature of challenges – including instability, terrorism, population displacement, and narcotics – as well as the opportunities – in trade, infrastructure and connectivity – seems to be understood.

I welcome the positive initial signals and engagements from the new leaderships in Iran and Pakistan.

President Karzai's visit to Islamabad was of particular significance. A new tone in relations seems to be emerging, narrowing the trust deficit.

This was 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. He stated that Pakistan has no favourites in Afghanistan and that the policy is one of "non-interference".

Afghan officials are also "reasonably hopeful" of better cooperation with the new Government of Pakistan.

Confidence building measures including in the area of economic development can help build trust through shared interests and prosperity.

The Istanbul Process remains a valuable regional effort, placing Afghanistan at the very "Heart of Asia". I look forward to the meeting here in New York on Monday to hear about progress since Almaty. And I welcome the People's Republic of China's preparations to host the 2014

ministerial. Beijing' seriousness of intent was highlighted during my recent visit.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is also positioning itself to play an increasing role in support of Afghanistan. At this month's heads of state summit there was clear interest in moving beyond anxiety and expressions of concern about the situation post-2014. The emphasis was rather on shared responsibilities, with Afghanistan and the broader international community, in ensuring durable solutions, including through the increased engagement of regional countries.

Indeed, throughout my regional travels, it was clearly understood that political solutions will be the key to sustainable peace, security and economic prosperity in Afghanistan and the region. Most immediately for Afghanistan this means elections resulting in a legitimate and peaceful transfer of power. More broadly this must include early dialogue on peace and reconciliation.

The United Nations continues to support the need for dialogue. We hope that new, mutually accepted, modalities can be swiftly agreed.

Mr President,

Narcotics remain a key problem in Afghanistan and beyond. The annual Ministry of Counter Narcotics and UNODC survey found there was a reduction in cannabis cultivation in 2012 – although higher yields still saw increased production. I am extremely concerned at assessments that this year will see a significant rise – yet again – in opium cultivation and a continuing drop in “poppy-free” provinces.

Afghanistan is already by far the largest centre of opium production in the world. This is not an issue that can be compartmentalized. Narcotics are a source and symptom of violence and institutional weakness and threaten ever sphere: political, economic and security.

Farmers choose what they plant based on food security, access to markets and access to non-farm income. It is essential that counter-narcotics be main-streamed into agricultural policy.

Further up the value chain, narcotics trafficking engenders corruption, black markets and insecurity which risks undermining the very foundations of the state. Renewed attention to mainstreaming counter-narcotics efforts in every sector is essential. This is ultimately a matter of political will – by Afghan authorities, regional partners and international donors.

Mr President,

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, was in Kabul this week meeting 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. 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 by the President and the Government to ensure that justice and human rights - in particular women's rights - be preserved and consolidated rather than undermined or sacrificed to political expediency.

Issues of human rights and accountability need to be mainstreamed across all lines of effort – political, developmental and security related.

The rise in civilian casualties is of deep concern, the vast majority of these being at the hands of anti-Government elements and rogue or criminal armed groups. Targeted killings of civilians and the use of improvised explosive devices are increasingly frequent tactics.

Deaths during this period include the head of the Kunduz appellate court, the chief electoral officer in Kunduz, a district education head in Parwan, and a young woman taking part in vaccination campaigns in Jawzjan. Indeed, increasing attacks on women are of major concern. Only last

Monday a courageous female police officer in Helmand, Lieutenant Nigara, was gunned down as was her predecessor Islam Bibi earlier this year.

A renegade Taliban militia brutally killed Sushmita Bannerjee – a well-known social worker and author of Indian origin married to an Afghan.

The Taliban movement continues to assert in its public statements that anyone associated with the Government, or seen to support it, constitutes a target. This includes educators, judicial official and civil servants in clear violation of international humanitarian law.

Mr President,

A further effect of heightened uncertainty and violence has been increased population displacement. The changing nature of conflict to more ground engagements has a concomitant impact on civilians. There are now half a million individuals internally displaced, over 100,000 of these during the first seven months of the year. At the same time, the number of refugees returning to Afghanistan decreased by 41 per cent compared to the same period in 2012.

This year's humanitarian appeal has seen far higher levels of funding. Increasing humanitarian needs will however require more stable and flexible funding that will allow a rapid response to humanitarian crises. I am happy 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.

Mr President,

As Deputy Secretary General Jan Eliasson has already briefed you following his visit in this period, the key message from the people of Afghanistan is a desire for peace, justice, prosperity, and stability and the need to protect the gains made over the last decade. We are rightly requested to help.

Under-Secretary General Ray Kennedy of the Department of Safety and Security has also been to Afghanistan to see for himself the reality of a complex and volatile security situation and the implications for United Nations activities. The safety of personnel is a top priority in determining the means to stay and deliver.

There is clear progress in vital elements underpinning Afghanistan's transition processes. At the same time challenges persist in the security and narcotics sectors in particular.

More 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 issues like combatting corruption, the rule of law, and economic growth. This is what will ensure Afghanistan's ultimate institutional and financial sustainability.

I welcome the signals of positive support of the region and ongoing commitment of the international community in ensuring continued momentum in strengthening Afghan institutions, Afghan sovereignty, and Afghan solutions.