

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

Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit, Kabul, Afghanistan

Briefing to Security Council<http://unama.unmissions.org>**Briefing to the United Nations Security Council by the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Ján Kubiš***[as prepared for delivery]***New York, 17 March 2014**

Madame President, Esteemed Members of the Security Council,

Khanjar Wabel Abdallah of Lebanon, Basra Hassan of the United States and of Somali origin, Nasreen Khan of Pakistan, and Vadim Nazarov of the Russian Federation, are four members of the United Nations family brutally murdered in January. They died, along with 17 other Afghan and international civilians, in a suicide assault in Kabul city. For many in Afghanistan they were not only colleagues but close friends. I offer my deepest condolences to their families in recognizing the sacrifice of these dedicated international civil servants.

Madame President,

In less than three weeks' time Afghanistan intends to hold Presidential and Provincial Council elections which will see the country's first democratic transfer of power. Leadership and commitment remain critical to holding of this historic event. In underscoring a stable political dispensation, these elections are a defining moment that will earn President Hamid Karzai a place in history.

I urge all eligible Afghan citizens – men and women - to exercise their franchise on 5 April. This is a universal democratic right. It is also a responsibility in strengthening your country's democratic processes and representative institutions. Do not let spoilers and terrorists deprive you of your choice, of your future. Participation as voters, elections officials, and observers, is a rejection of force, violence, and intimidation as the means by which your proud nation decides its leadership. At this delicate juncture in Afghanistan's transitions, it is a credible political transition that can provide much needed stability and predictability through a popular mandate across ethnic lines for wider political, economic and social development agendas - including peace and reconciliation.

Technical preparations, for what is an Afghan managed and Afghan led electoral process, remain on track and of a better quality than previously including in fraud prevention and mitigation. The United Nations does not have a role in the administration, observation, or adjudication of these elections. As per my mandate, I have been, and will be, using my good

offices to work with all stakeholders in support of technical preparations promoting the timeliness, inclusiveness and integrity of the process in better ensuring results which have broad acceptance.

I urge the electoral management bodies to remain committed to full transparency in their decision-making and conduct, ensuring clear and timely lines of communication. This will be particularly important with regard to final decisions on the opening of polling centers and control of sensitive ballot materials. The adjudication of complaints will, by definition, be another challenging element. I welcome the seriousness with which the new Independent Electoral Complaints Commission has set about establishing itself even as its mandated work is underway.

In addition to state and independent electoral authorities, responsibility for peaceful and credible polls largely rests with political leaders, candidates, and their supporters. I commend the respectful conduct of campaigning to date. I urge all candidates to guide and shape the actions and attitudes of their supporters with serious public commitment to opposing fraud committed in their name. Where there are alleged electoral violations, complainants should seek immediate redress through institutional means.

Elections will necessarily have losers but, notably in the current conditions of Afghanistan, should not be a “winner takes all” contest. While in no way replacing the people’s voice at the polls, I urge candidates to come to understandings that not being the winner is not prima facie evidence of fraud. Threats of civil disobedience over alleged fraud now, weeks before the elections or resort to civil disruption only increase tensions and create confusion.

Madame President,

Security will have a major impact on these polls. To date election-related violence has been of a lower order than in 2009 and 2010, even as general security incidents have increased. However electoral-related violence is on the rise. In leading security planning for the process, the Ministry of Interior has continued to demonstrate serious commitment - including an emphasis on protecting women’s rights of participation – in coordination with the election commission.

I welcome the support for the electoral process expressed by parts of the insurgency, notably Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s armed wing of Hezb-i Islami. However I want to make very clear that even groups, such as the Taliban, that reject the elections have obligations to respect a civilian process. I am gravely disturbed by the Taliban’s recent declaration that it will seek to disrupt the process by force, unleashing a campaign of terror. Voters, electoral workers, candidates and observers are all civilians. Targeting civilians, or indiscriminate attacks on polling centers and other civilian locations, undermine any claims to legitimate political status and is punishable under international law.

Madame President,

The widespread desire for peace is clear from the discourse of the presidential candidates’ debates and my own interactions with Afghans around the country.

I bear with me, for the Secretary-General, a message signed by some quarter of a million Afghan women in support of peace. I commend the organisers and petitioners who have raised their voice – the voice of the majority of Afghans. These women demand only the chance for a secure future for their families. It is a message of hope and resilience amidst the misery and

death inflicted by terrorism, extremism, trans-national criminal networks, and local powerholders.

Civilians bear the heaviest toll in the conflict, with the trend of rising civilian casualties in 2013 continuing into this year. In January and February UNAMA recorded 359 civilians killed and 647 injured, a 19 percent increase on the same period in 2013. Once again anti-Government elements were responsible for the vast majority of these casualties - 78 per cent.

A breakthrough in direct talks between Afghan authorities and the Taliban remains elusive, so far, despite some interesting recent initiatives by the High Peace Council. Efforts to build understandings and agreed frameworks must continue in patiently building an environment conducive to more formal efforts later where the United Nations should, and would, have a more prominent role.

UNAMA's current work includes support for the mitigation of local conflicts which, left unchecked, can add to instability. Through the Mission's nationwide network of 13 field offices, UNAMA facilitated seven peace initiatives in eight provinces in 2013. A further two initiatives, involving seven additional provinces, have been launched so far this year. Efforts span a variety of political good offices from confidence-building and dialogue between ethnic communities to conflict prevention and mediation. An increasing area of focus has been working with ulema and religious scholars, including in promoting a peaceful vote.

Madame President,

Afghanistan's ultimate stability and sustainability lies in the region. As other international actors draw down, I am pleased to see neighbouring countries and regional powers recognizing the need for active engagement in support of Afghan solutions. There is realization that a peaceful, stable, and prosperous Afghanistan is ultimately in the self-interest of all.

Given expanding interest and opportunities, I am dedicating increased personal attention to regional outreach. During this period I visited the Russian Federation, Turkmenistan, India and Pakistan for high-level discussions. In Islamabad it was reassuring to hear of continuing commitment to improved bilateral relations under Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's policy of non-interference including focus on shared economic development and active border management. The importance of credible Afghan elections without external interference was clearly recognized.

I am pleased to note continued practical progress being made under the Istanbul Process. Just recently in support of confidence building measures there have been workshops on countering terrorism financing and improvised explosive devices in Kabul and on anti-cannabis efforts in Moscow. Politically, increasing seriousness of regional actors' engagement is clearly seen in India hosting January's senior officials meeting ahead of the ministerial in China scheduled for August.

Madame President,

Peace and stability in Afghanistan will not be sustainable without economic and social transitions assisted by donors meeting their commitments in the years to come. At January's special Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB) meeting - with the participation of all 11 presidential candidates - representatives of 50 member states underscored their continuing support for Afghanistan. The levels of international assistance pledged remains truly

exceptional, while dependent on successful political transition and demonstrable progress in Government commitments to governance, reforms, economic sustainability and a rights' based agenda. I welcome assurances by the presidential candidates of commitment to sustaining and accelerating momentum under the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework.

Afghanistan's ultimate self-reliance demands increased attention to broad-based, inclusive and sustainable economic development and poverty reduction coupled with job creation. The World Bank provided the JCMB with a sobering analysis of the economic challenges ahead given a rising fiscal gap, lower than expected Government revenue collection, massive security expenditure, and rising costs. Afghanistan's economy has been distorted by years of war and, over the last decade, by the sheer scale of, and reliance on, the international intervention.

There are risks, but even more opportunities, in returning to a more normalized development agenda. In looking forward to the ministerial-level development conference with the new Government later this year it cannot be business as usual. Strengthening employment-generating licit economic activity and undercutting the burgeoning illicit economy should be central to all development approaches. Narcotics production and trafficking undermine the wellbeing of the population, economy, and institutions of Afghanistan and the wider region and also increasingly contribute to the financing of terrorism. Shared long-term strategy, high-level leadership, and genuine political will are required of both the Government and international community.

The Tokyo Framework remains the agreed instrument of civilian development assistance. Together with NATO Chicago Summit commitments to long-term support for the security sector, it forms the cornerstone of international engagement with Afghanistan and provides continuity of commitment through the transformation decade. Continued uncertainty surrounding finalization of Afghanistan's Bilateral Security Agreement with the United States has added a layer of unpredictability. But, with strategic patience, I remain confident of mutually agreed outcomes.

Madame President,

Sustaining the gains Afghanistan has made in human rights over the last decade - and in particular the rights of women and children - is not a luxury and must not be sacrificed to short-term political expediency. Justice, good governance, the rule of law and human rights are crucial elements of lasting peace, equitable development, and human security. The protection and promotion of the rights of all Afghans - men and women - was a key Government commitment in Tokyo and ultimately strengthens the legitimacy and effectiveness of state institutions. I welcome the launch on 1 March of the Government's report on implementation of the law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Baseline data and ongoing monitoring are vital elements of accountability. The ultimate impact on women's lives - with reduced violence and no impunity for perpetrators in the judicial system - will however be the real measure of progress.

I also welcome the Government's commitment to ending child recruitment by 2016 which requires that implementation of the action plan on underage recruitment be expedited. Ensuring that perpetrators of child recruitment are held accountable and enforcing agreed measures in deterring it will not only ensure that Afghanistan is on target for delisting, but also further promote the professionalization of the security services.

Madame President,

As the new mandate is renewed I again stress the United Nations' long-term commitment to a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan. Given the current elements of uncertainty, interlocutors - almost unanimously - stress the continuity and value that UNAMA brings in the exercise of good offices, protection and promotion of human rights, and facilitation of international development coherence. The Mission's national footprint continues to be an invaluable asset in undertaking mandated elections, outreach, and human rights activities. Indeed as other international institutions and member states reduce subnational presence, the international community is increasingly seeking our support in understanding and accessing a diverse country.

The need for greater coherence of efforts across the United Nations, and wider international community, in Afghanistan is recognized. Within the United Nations family I am working to improve consistency of focus, unity of effort, and leverage specialized agencies' expertise in support of agreed national priorities and regional initiatives. Humanitarian assistance is another distinct but vital element of the United Nations work in Afghanistan, with needs assessed as likely to increase in the immediate future even as international attention turns elsewhere. All this work, in implementing our complex mandate, requires adequate and predictable resourcing.

In highlighting progress and positive momentum, I emphasize that gains are fragile. Yet Afghanistan is not poised atop an inevitable post-2014 abyss as some doomsayers have predicted. What is needed in such a period of unpredictability is the smooth and timely transfer of political power. The success of the April 2014 elections will be of critical significance in reinforcing Afghanistan's institutional and political stability and instilling confidence in the future.

Thank you for your attention.

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