

**Briefing to the Security Council by Ján Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for
Afghanistan**
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Mr. President, esteemed members of the Security Council,

Ten years after the creation of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), we face a very different set of ground realities.

The international military presence gradually transfers full security responsibility in Afghanistan to the Afghan National Security forces (ANSF) and will finish its current mission by the end of 2014. Efforts continue to make institutions of national and sub-national governance gradually capable to provide governance, rule of law, development and social services to the population, to provide for their rights and fundamental freedoms. Voices in support of Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation are stronger, both from different parts of the Afghan society and from the region.

The profile and work of the United Nations in Afghanistan must reflect these realities, must take full account of the principles and requirements of the transition process. Active support of these positive trends and developments in partnership with Afghan authorities and society must be at the very core of the way we work.

Mr President,

During the first two months of my work in Afghanistan, I met government officials, political leaders and civil society actors in Kabul, Afghan provinces and across the region. Starting with President Karzai, each and every individual has offered a warm welcome.

If there was one thing I drew hope from, it was the strong expressions of the desire for peace. The message of the people is clear - it is time to wind down this war.

News about the nascent peace process has prompted a lively debate which needs to be harnessed and fed into constructive policymaking. Under the People's Dialogue supported by UNAMA, Afghans across the country shared their vision and roadmap for a peace process. The dialogue also revealed that corruption, lack of justice and abuse of authority are seen by many as the biggest problem facing ordinary people, coupled with lack of working perspective for the growing urban population of young people.

Another important point I drew from my meetings was a near universal recognition of the value of the UN's work and a great desire for UNAMA's continued presence.

Finally, I need to mention the recent tragedies that marked my first weeks in Afghanistan. I again offer my condolences and sympathies to the families of all casualties of the recent instances of violence, be it civilian or military. And I applaud commitment to full accountability.

At the same time I passionately emphasise the need for non-violent means of protest, even in response to such grave, albeit unintentional mistakes as the recent burning of the Holy Qur'an. I commend the appeals and actions of the majority of religious leaders and community elders who ensured that deep anger was expressed at peaceful community gatherings. And I condemn sermons and appeals of those few who called for violence. They only brought death and destruction, firstly to Afghans.

A series of killings also targeted international troops there to help and train Afghan forces and institutions. This is unacceptable. These malicious acts have potentially profound implications for these essential efforts, for public support needed for enduring commitment of the international community to assist Afghanistan and its people.

Also the UN was singled out for violence by some. Notably the UNAMA office in Kunduz was directly attacked which brought back frightening memories of the seven dear colleagues of ours killed a year ago under similar circumstances in Mazar-i-Sharif. The timely actions of the Afghan National Security Forces ensured that no UN personnel were hurt. Yet, six demonstrators, six persons lost their lives. We regret these losses.

In response international staff members have been temporarily relocated while security is reassessed. This may impact on some programmes in the short term and there are already statements from local leaders appealing for their return.

The security of all our staff, national and international, is however of critical importance. We continue to work with ISAF, but increasingly with Afghan authorities, to address this. And I expect, indeed request support and understanding of the Afghan authorities for our security requirements. They are sine qua non for our continuous work and presence in the country.

Mr. President,

Regardless those recent tragedies let us not lose perspective. Recent events should not eclipse, should not overshadow positive trends and developments. They should not push the international community and Afghanistan, the transition process off agreed plans and timetables. The transition so far has been on track and on target, the ANSF have so far proven that they are up to the tasks. The Chicago summit should firm up these developments and plans by specific and solid commitments. Absence of such commitments would mean set-back to the transition, to stability in Afghanistan and in the region. In looking to the future we must demonstrate we have learned from the mistakes of the past.

Transition, however, encompasses also accelerated Afghan leadership, responsibility and accountability in governance, rule of law, justice, economic development and combating corruption and poverty to mention but few. Stronger efforts in combating drug production and trafficking are critically important given the increase in poppy cultivation and opium production and thus increased threat to security, stability, development and governance in Afghanistan and in the region. Security gains must be supported by progress in these areas to make them and the transition sustainable.

Last year's international conference in Bonn saw commitment to an enduring partnership also during the transformation decade beyond the 2014. Mutual commitments need to be respected by both the international community and Afghanistan.

The challenge now is to translate political commitments into predictable funding for the National Priority Programmes (NPPs). Tokyo provides the opportunity. In the coming months, the Government and its international partners must intensify their engagement to ensure that properly sequenced NPPs serve as the basis for strategic public and private funding and the achievement of development outcomes identified by the Government as fundamental for self-reliance.

Long-term support and predictability is further enhanced by a number of comprehensive partnership agreements between Afghanistan and its bilateral partners and this process continues.

UNAMA works consistently for coherent approaches by the international community to supporting Afghanistan's development and governance challenges, including as co-chair of the JCMB.

Mr. President,

Many of my Afghan interlocutors have placed an emphasis on the 2014 presidential polls. Already the focus of intense debate and political mobilisation, the leadership change coincides with the planned culmination of the security transfer.

Elections are an Afghan process to be managed by Afghan independent electoral management bodies. For the results to be trusted the majority of my Afghan partners gave me a clear message – there is a need to strengthen and improve Afghanistan's electoral process, including electoral reform in order to increase its sustainability, integrity, transparency and inclusiveness. And UN supporting role at the request of Afghan authorities is welcome, indeed needed.

Mr. President,

The value of UNAMA's human rights work has been repeatedly emphasized to me by all parties.

As confirmed by UNAMA's impartial tracking and verification of civilian casualties, 2011 was the fifth year in a row that civilian deaths rose. Insurgent tactics of suicide attacks and the use of victim-activated pressure plate IEDs account for the majority of this toll. This is unacceptable and contradicts even the publicly declared ban on land mines by anti-government forces.

Improvements in the condition of Afghan detention centres and a reduction in torture and mistreatment of detainees have been another concrete outcome of our efforts. Both ISAF and Afghan authorities have undertaken measures to address abusive practices in Afghan detention facilities. It is important to build on gains made to date.

In spite of legal and constitutional protections for women, violence against women and girls remains pervasive in Afghanistan. Improvements require enforcement of laws that criminalize and penalize violence and harmful practices against women and girls, notably the law on Elimination of Violence against Women. UNAMA will continue working to improve protection and promote rights of Afghan women, including their participation in public life, peace and reconciliation processes and equal opportunities in education and employment. Similarly we will continue in our work for the benefit of Afghan children.

Mr. President,

Past months have seen some potentially positive developments in support of peace and reconciliation. To turn this potential into a successful process the efforts must first of all be fully Afghan-led, but also comprehensive and genuinely inclusive and involve representatives of all relevant forces and segments of the Afghan society. At the same time peace should not be reached at the expense of the basic achievement of the past decade, as confirmed by the Kabul communiqué and the Bonn conference. In moving towards a peace process, reducing civilian deaths and injuries should be of the highest priority.

A much repeated request has been for UNAMA to continue to support the High Peace Council and to generally make use of its good offices and services in support of peace and reconciliation. Many called for a UN role in those nascent processes. There were different ideas on what form and shape this could take and when.

Support for Afghanistan in the region has gained momentum, as documented among others by the recent trilateral summit between the leaders of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan in Islamabad or other similar efforts. They, among others, have spoken in favour of Afghan-led peace process.

I have been particularly impressed with Afghan leadership of the regionally-owned Istanbul Process and of how the process progresses. I also welcome commitment of the supporting countries. The work currently focuses on seven specific confidence building measures and on preparations of the Kabul ministerial meeting in June. It will be preceded by an important RECCA meeting in Dushanbe next week.

My recent visits to Pakistan, Turkmenistan, India and Iran provided invaluable opportunity for exchange of views on their support for Afghanistan and UNAMA. We spoke about opportunities, but I also heard words of strong concerns. I would like to thank for these invaluable meetings and for the hospitality.

Mr. President,

One of my top priorities is ensuring greater coherence of UN efforts in all areas, both programmatic, operational and policy, and to ensure that our activities are outcome-oriented, transparent and cost effective. My Deputy SRSG Michael Keating is working with the entire UN system to ensure full UN alignment behind the national development strategy and the NPPs, which will serve as the basis for the UN's programmatic and operational coherence. As Humanitarian Coordinator, he is working with OCHA to promote and provide practical support for effective response to humanitarian needs, whether as a result of chronic vulnerability, disasters or conflict. The decades lasting problem of refugees and IDPs should be addressed on the basis of sustainable solutions that link humanitarian efforts with development.

From the outset of my work in Kabul, I have been clear that the Mission and the 28 UN agencies, funds and programmes present in Afghanistan must work in support of the increasing capacity of Afghan authorities, institutions and systems to meet the needs of the Afghan people. This will guide also my work in the future.

Thank you for the attention.