

LAWRENCE CANNON, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada, said Afghanistan's elections were an important milestone in the nation's ongoing democratic transition. Across the country, Afghans were mobilizing in the millions to organize those elections, secure them, campaign for them, and vote in them. Canada had committed \$35 million over three years to support the 2009-2010 elections, including a \$25 million contribution to the multi-donor "UNDP ELECT" programme. It was paying particular attention to maximizing women's participation. Canadian officials in Kabul and Kandahar were working around the clock to support the process. Canada called on the Government to take the necessary measures to ensure the credibility of the process, and welcomed efforts to ensure a level playing field for all candidates.

In Kandahar, he said, Canadian forces personnel and civilian police were mentoring the Afghan national security forces to provide security throughout the election process, and ISAF had indicated that it stood ready to provide "third-line" security. Strengthening the rule of law would be a long, hard road. The choices and decisions made this year were important steps. The security sought by Afghans amounted to the simple ability to move freely, for children -- including girls -- to go to school; for farmers to take their products to market; for families to visit their relatives in neighbouring villages; and for campaigning in support of a candidate's platform, or casting a ballot in a remote district. Canada would continue to support legitimate Afghan aspirations in that regard. The elections were an Afghan undertaking: elections by the Afghan people for the Afghan people.

UNAMA had begun to address critical human resource, budgetary and other challenges, he said, noting that it was clearly stronger this year than last. However, there was more that could be done. For example, while border management would always depend on the regional context, similar interests of security and prosperity for Afghanistan, Pakistan and the broader region underpinned collective interests. "We need to continue to be responsive to evolving Afghan and Pakistani needs. Moreover, we need to be prepared to meaningfully deliver in a way that resonates locally," he said. Canada continued to improve the delivery of its assistance to Afghanistan. As it deployed new resources, it viewed the United Nations role in Kandahar, and throughout the country, as fundamental. It similarly looked forward to the results of UNAMA's efforts to articulate benchmarks. Afghanistan's future was ultimately in the hands of Afghans -- where it should be, and Canada remained committed to supporting the Afghan people as they continued to move forward.