



SC/9696

Complex situation in Afghanistan could be turning point, if managed well, Special Representative says in briefing to Security Council

Security Council
6154th Meeting (AM & PM)

Delegates Focus on Crucial Upcoming Elections As Growing Insurgency-Driven Civilian Casualties Raise Concern

Ahead of Afghanistan's defining presidential and provincial elections in August, Kai Eide, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, said today that, if managed well, the situation in that country -- the most complex it had been for years -- could become a turning point in efforts to bring end the conflict there.

Briefing the Security Council on the situation in Afghanistan, he said it was characterized by the emergence of three interlinked strategic shifts: increased emphasis on civilian efforts; a focus on subnational governance and service delivery; and the alignment of international efforts such as the aid-effectiveness agenda.

But, careful not to present "a rosy picture" of the situation, he said the ongoing conflict seriously undermined the prospects for progress. The number of security incidents had risen beyond the 1,000 mark for the first time in May, a 43 per cent increase over the same period in 2008. In fact, it had been the most intense fighting season so far experienced.

Efforts to ensure the Afghan people's continued support for the international community's military engagement must be strengthened, he said, emphasizing that the political costs of recent mistakes were simply disproportionate to military gains. However, the clear majority of civilian casualties were caused by the insurgency. They were not the result of tragic mistakes, but of deliberate policy.

In the context of the elections, he said ministers and heads of security institutions had given assurances of their determination to protect the integrity of their institutions. Candidates had been called upon to avoid inflammatory language and to conduct campaigns focused on their vision for Afghanistan's future. "We need a campaign, not only about who will lead the country, but where they will lead the country," he said.

He said that, with rising expectations and new opportunities emerging on the ground, there was a need for more resources to fulfil the donor-coordination mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA); to meet new opportunities in capacity- and institution-building; and to expand across the country, as requested in Security Council resolutions. Expectations were high for that multifaceted and ambitious mandate and, while grateful for the additional resources received last year, UNAMA now needed more.

Afghanistan's representative said his country had grown from a country devoid of society, Government and infrastructure to one with thousands of miles of roads, millions of children in school, and accessible health care for some 85 per cent of the population. At the same time, daunting challenges were yet to be adequately addressed, most importantly insecurity, which was increasing rather than ebbing, with civilians continuing disproportionately to bear the costs.

The Taliban had shown an increasing disregard for human life, intentionally targeting civilians, particularly women, children and humanitarian staff, and using populated areas to stage attacks on international forces, he said. As the international forces increased in strength during the summer months, and insecurity worsened in parts of the country ahead of the elections, everyone must be careful to avoid increasing the loss of civilian life. Afghanistan applauded recent steps taken by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United States to address those concerns, as well as the recently announced rules of engagement and improved guidelines for the use of air bombardment.

Afghanistan had the opportunity to make significant progress if it maintained its new momentum and focus over the coming months, he said. That would require broad and consistent international engagement. If the Government could ensure transparent and open elections, increase security for the Afghan population, improve coordination and aid effectiveness, strengthen institutions and constructively address the regional dimensions of the situation, "we can clear a space on which to build a strong, sustainable Afghanistan", he said.

The representative of the United States said her country's security policy goals in Afghanistan were clear. Among them were disrupting, defeating and dismantling Al-Qaida and building up the Government's capacity. The elections on 20 August were a critical milestone in the Government's efforts to expand governance. It offered the Government an opportunity to give its citizens a voice in the ongoing drive to strengthen democracy and good governance.

She said her country regretted deeply any injury or loss of life among innocent Afghans stemming from operations involving the United States or the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Any loss of innocent life was tragic and the United States would continue to conduct thorough joint investigations of such incidents jointly with the Afghan Government. The United States and international forces took extensive precautions to avoid loss of life among Afghan civilians and Afghan forces in its operations against terrorists.

She added that the United States Government had announced on 14 June that reducing civilian casualties would be a top priority in providing a secure environment in which to strengthen the Afghan Government and society. As it pursued those goals, however, it must be remembered that it was fighting an enemy that employed appalling tactics, including the use of children as human shields. Most casualties were caused by the insurgents and not by the international forces.

The delegate of the Russian Federation said he was seriously concerned about the ongoing loss of civilian life, and called for meticulous investigation of all such incidents and accelerated efforts to prevent them in future. Efforts by the Afghan authorities and the international military presence had yet to bring about "any truly serious improvements in the security sphere". Much remained to be done, including with respect to the international military presence, in light of the growing presence of the Taliban and Al-Qaida, which undermined the basis of the Afghan nation, its stability and reconstruction.

Emphasizing the need to "Afghanize" anti-terrorist operations, he said that, without the active involvement of the Afghans themselves, it would be impossible to eradicate extremism. Nor would it be possible to maintain certain positive trends, such as shifting the focus of reconstruction to the Afghan Government. The Russian Federation also categorically opposed any arrangements with Taliban, terrorist or extremist ringleaders as any attempts to establish dialogue with them would undermine the Council's sanctions regime.

Pakistan's representative said Afghanistan stood "at the crossroads of history". Having suffered decades of war and civil strife, its challenges were numerous and daunting. It was time to end that vicious cycle, but there was no magic wand to turn the devastation of decades into development overnight. The absence of a comprehensive strategy had prevented significant gains in peace consolidation and achievement of stability. "We must move from the hitherto fragmented and piecemeal approach to tackle these formidable challenges and mount an integrated response fully owned and led by the Afghan people with the support of the international community," he urged.

The parameters of a sustainable solution should also include a comprehensive regional approach, he said, adding that, apart from Afghanistan itself, no other country had a more vital stake in peace, security and prosperity in that country than his own. Pakistan had suffered directly from the ongoing instability in Afghanistan. Peace in that country was essential to the tranquillity and development of Pakistan's own border regions, and Pakistan was, therefore, firmly committed to helping the Afghan Government and the international coalition in restoring security and bringing stability to Afghanistan.

Most of the nearly 30 speakers in the debate agreed on the need to define the contours of a comprehensive strategy for Afghanistan. While the country had made progress in certain areas, no one doubted the considerable challenges remaining on most fronts -- particularly the political, security, governance and development spheres. The dramatic deterioration of the security situation was worrying, as the increase in civilian casualties fuelled public discontent against foreign forces. Speakers pointed to the slow and uneven pace of reconstruction and development efforts, the absence of State authority throughout the country, rampant corruption and economic hardship, which one delegate said was "shattering the people's confidence" in the Government's ability to lead.

Also speaking today were the representatives of Japan, United Kingdom, Uganda, Austria, Mexico, Croatia, Costa Rica, Libya, France, China, Viet Nam, Burkina Faso, Turkey, Canada, Czech Republic (on behalf of the European Union), Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, India, Italy, Australia, Germany and Iran.

Turkey's representative, whose delegation held the Council presidency in June, added a few farewell remarks, as

he would be retiring tomorrow. He said the last four-and-a-half years at the United Nations, and especially the last six months in the Council, had been among the most interesting and rewarding experiences of his 44-year diplomatic career. He thanked all colleagues for their kindness and support, unreserved cooperation and understanding.

The meeting began at 10:10 a.m. and suspended at 1:15 p.m. It resumed at 3:10 p.m. and ended at 4:20 p.m.

Background

Before the Council was the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (document S/2009/323). The report was issued pursuant to resolution 1868 (2009) of 23 March, which requested a report on developments in that country every three months.

The report states that the first six months of 2009 have witnessed the beginnings of three interlinked strategic shifts in Afghanistan. The first shift involves an increased emphasis on civilian efforts, which is a manifestation on the ground of what has been agreed in conference halls: that military means alone will not lead to success. The second shift is a new focus on subnational governance and service delivery, predicated on the recognition that insecurity feeds on weak governance and popular disillusionment. The final strategic shift is the alignment of international efforts behind well-conceived Government programmes in key sectors -- in other words, the essence of the aid-effectiveness agenda.

According to the report, if the positive trends it describes are sustained, there is a possibility for a major improvement in the situation. However, these encouraging developments coincide with a difficult overall political and security situation. The election campaign period has now begun and will absorb political energy and attention. Furthermore, Afghanistan is currently in what may well be its most intense fighting season since 2001. Thus, it will be challenging to maintain the positive momentum gained in several critical sectors. If that momentum is lost, the country will lose valuable time at best, and experience new disappointments and setbacks at worst, leading to further disillusionment among the public and the international community.

In the report, the Secretary-General appeals to all members of the international community to "put their full weight behind the positive developments in order to maintain momentum through the complex period ahead". That means giving urgent and strong support to the effective national programmes being presented in key sectors. The coming period will see an increase in the number of international forces in the country, which are required not only to contribute to security for the elections, but also to accelerate the strengthening of the Afghan National Army.

Additional international forces will mean a more intense fight against the insurgency, the report notes, stressing the critical need for this fight to be conducted in a way that weakens the terrorist threat and boosts popular support. The Secretary-General is profoundly concerned about the risk posed by an increase in civilian casualties and by a type of military conduct that alienates the population from the international community. "More than ever, we need the solid and continued support of the Afghan people for the presence of the international community in Afghanistan, both civilian and military." Also of critical importance is the need for the international civilian and military presence to maintain its broad multinational character.

For the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to fulfil the central role assigned to it by the Council, it must be given adequate resources to address the strategic shifts, the report states. The Mission has eight regional offices and 12 provincial offices, including two new offices opened in May, and budgetary resources for three additional offices scheduled to be opened soon. To have a presence in each province, UNAMA needs additional resources, including for security when necessary, to establish 11 more offices. It has a strengthened role in aid coordination, aimed at catalysing Afghan and international partners so that donor decisions are made on the basis of technically sound and Afghan-owned sectoral strategies. While the Mission has made extraordinary efforts to use the additional resources made available as efficiently and expeditiously as possible, it is clear that increased resources are necessary.

Recalling that resolution 1868 (2009) asks the Mission to develop benchmarks, the focused attention on preparations for elections and on the Conference in The Hague has made that task impossible to complete. The Secretary-General, therefore, proposes to include a finalized set of benchmarks in his next report in September. It is envisaged that the benchmarks would focus on broad areas reflecting the goals of the agreed national strategies and drawing on UNAMA's mandate. These include institution-building, security, economic and social development, as well as cross-cutting issues that heavily influence progress in other areas. It is envisaged that the benchmarks will be results-based and not tied to target dates. Although UNAMA has the capacity to monitor progress in some areas, responsibility to make such progress rests with Afghan and/or international counterparts.

Briefing

KAI EIDE, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, said the present situation in that country was certainly the most complex experienced for many years, but if managed well, it could become a turning point in efforts to bring the conflict to an end. The situation was complex because so many processes and perspectives had to be kept in mind: the need to ensure a credible election process, the result of which could be accepted by the people; the need to stimulate promising developments in several sectors despite the "noise" of the election campaign and the intense fighting season; and the need to look beyond the elections and shape a more focused agenda for the next five years. That agenda would have to include a credible peace process as an integral part of the overall strategy. In all those processes, Afghanistan's institutions and people would have to take the lead, with the international community providing support.

The August election was about more than choosing Afghanistan's leaders; it was about strengthening peoples' confidence in the democratic process and strengthening Afghan institutions, he said. It was not only about who would lead, but about the legitimacy of that leadership. All candidates had been urged to campaign with dignity and fairness, and all Government institutions and officials had been called upon to maintain impartiality. Ministers and heads of security institutions had given assurances of their determination to protect the integrity of their institutions. Candidates had been called upon to avoid inflammatory language and to conduct campaigns focused on their vision for Afghanistan's future. "We need a campaign, not only about who will lead the country, but where they will lead the country," he said.

He said he had called on the international community to avoid any interference, or appearance of interference, in the election process. Nobody's interests were served by disputed election results. Non-interference, a dignified policy-oriented debate and total international impartiality were all critical to the level playing field that everyone sought to establish. Another element was the ability of candidates to conduct their campaigns. There was a totally new momentum in the areas of strengthening security institutions, reforming agriculture and the private sector, improving revenue collection and internal Government coordination, and in developing comprehensive civilian capacity-building programmes.

However, Mr. Eide said his fear was that the noise from the election campaign and the fighting season would absorb so much energy and attention that it would overshadow those positive trends, affecting the momentum. "If we do not succeed in maintaining this momentum, then I am afraid we will witness new stagnation and more disillusionment among the public." The positive trends were mainly the result of more competent ministries, but also of the international community's strong and long-term commitment. "We must remain firm in that long-term commitment, on which continued progress will depend. However, progress also depends on a short-term ability to respond to new opportunities," he stressed.

Turning to the international community's involvement, he said there were some new and promising trends. In particular, the review of United States development policies was producing important results. The readiness to support the new national agriculture programme and the Government's plans for civilian capacity-building and for revenue collection was welcome, as was a trend to support Afghan plans and priorities more generously than before. That could represent a major shift and lead to greater aid effectiveness and better donor coordination. The shift in United States counter-narcotics policies, combined with the new Afghan programme for the development of alternative livelihoods, could also have a significant impact on efforts to combat poppy production.

However, the inequitable distribution of resources continued, making it easier for the insurgency to destabilize previously stable provinces and districts, he noted. There was still a serious lack of reporting on how and where development resources were spent, which complicated planning and coordination. Hopefully, the ongoing gap assessment in key sectors would lead donors to provide more information about their spending and to a redistribution that would provide greater resources for under-funded provinces. More effective and coordinated development efforts would make it possible to meet the concerns of the Afghan people and their legitimate demands for greater economic and social justice. That would also enhance the people's confidence in their own Government and in the international community.

Efforts to ensure the Afghan people's continued support for the international community's military engagement must also be strengthened, he said, noting that the political costs of recent mistakes were simply disproportionate in military gains. However, the clear majority of civilian casualties were caused by the insurgency. They were not the result of tragic mistakes, but of deliberate policy. "I am not saying all this in order to present a rosy picture of the overall situation in Afghanistan," he said, stressing that the ongoing conflict seriously undermined the prospects for progress. The number of security incidents had risen beyond the 1,000 mark for the first time in May, having increased by 43 per cent over the first four months of 2009 compared to the same period in 2008. There were more incidents in parts of the country which had, up to now, been stable. That was the most intense fighting season so far experienced.

It was also clear that the fight against widespread corruption was still only in its early stages, he continued. Institutions were still weak, not only in human capacity, but in physical infrastructure, especially at the subnational level. Six provinces still lacked offices for their governors. Only half the district governors had an office building, and 288 lacked a vehicle. That impacted tremendously on their ability to administer the country and deliver services. "We must also have a perspective that goes beyond the elections," he said, recalling the clear priorities set in Paris and at The Hague conference.

Emphasizing the importance of a common post-election strategy, he said there was a need for a vision that would provide a clearer direction and guide efforts in support of a new Government; a development strategy that would make it possible to move forward in a more disciplined and coordinated way, and allow for greater Afghan ownership; and a security strategy that would accelerate the build-up of Afghan security forces and their role in ensuring stability. Finally, there was a need for a political strategy that would include a credible and inclusive peace process, respect the rights of all Afghans, and bring the various parts of society together. A credible and successful peace process could only take place with a Government that enjoyed the people's support and had confidence in itself. The same was true of the international presence.

Turning to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), he said expectations were high for its multifaceted and ambitious mandate, adding that, while he was grateful for the additional resources received last year, the situation had evolved, even during the six months since the adoption of the 2009 budget. With rising expectations and new opportunities emerging on the ground, there was a need for more resources to fulfil the donor-coordination mandate; to meet new opportunities in capacity- and institution-building; and to expand across the country, as requested in Security Council resolutions.

While UNAMA did not itself bring financial resources, he said, a country-wide presence of the Mission could serve as a magnet for other civilian organizations and gradually draw development and governance efforts "out of the military context and into the civilian context where they belong". That could help facilitate an all-inclusive political process through an improved civilian outreach programme. He, therefore, appealed to the Council to support the Mission in its urgent need for additional resources.

In the mandate given UNAMA in March, the Council had asked it to develop benchmarks for its activities, he recalled. That work was under way and would be finalized in time for the Secretary-General's next report in September. It was not an easy task, since the Mission's efforts formed an integral part of the efforts of so many others. It was also difficult to establish the timelines and means to measure progress in political processes, especially in a context as unpredictable and complex as Afghanistan's. Nevertheless, consultations with partners were under way, and he was confident that UNAMA would be able to present the Council with a set of meaningful benchmarks by September.

Statements

ZAHIR TANIN (Afghanistan), noting that his country was nearing a "new beginning", recalled that five years ago, Afghanistan had held its first elections after decades of bloody power struggles. Despite continuing terrorist activities by the Taliban and Al-Qaida, the country had made enormous progress since 2001, and its people were ready to go to the polls a second time. "This, in itself, is a huge success, and it reflects the enduring Afghan support for the stabilization process and the value of partnership between Afghanistan and the international community."

The elections were less than three months away and between now and August, Afghanistan and the wider international community must act to ensure the transparency and fairness of the electoral process, he said. There was a lot at stake and the Afghan people knew that the ballot was the only feasible way to build on the positive progress of the past. To do so, the elections must be credible and legitimate. The results should unite the Afghan people, strengthen Afghan institutions and provide momentum for ongoing stabilization efforts.

Turning to specifics about the campaign, he said the rules of the game had been defined by law. The Government and relevant bodies were working to ensure that the candidates received security, transportation and access to the media. For the actual elections, the essential priority was to ensure security so that people from all over the country would be able to vote. To that end, the Afghan Army and national police would provide the main security at some 7,000 polling stations throughout the country, supported by a strengthened international force. In addition, the Independent Electoral Commission, the Electoral Complaints Commission and the Media Commission would be responsible for providing information, logistics and oversight, guaranteeing access to media for candidates and responding to the concerns of the public.

He stressed that, while the elections had deservedly been at the centre of attention for months, the international community must remember that the vote was part of a larger effort to promote change and ensure stability far into the future. The coming months should reinvigorate the partnership between the Afghan Government and the

international community. "We should use the elections to add momentum to the strategic shifts that began this year and unify our approach, around [...] the need to strengthen Afghan institutions and make them sustainable, and the need to be increasingly responsive to the growing expectations of the Afghan people, who want to see a tangible improvement in their lives."

With some welcome strategic reviews by the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), he said, the past months had provided a timely opportunity to review achievements and rethink strategies in different areas. Afghanistan had grown from a country devoid of society, Government and infrastructure to one with thousands of miles of roads, millions of children in school, and accessible health care for some 85 per cent of the population. At the same time, daunting challenges remained to be adequately addressed, most importantly insecurity, which was increasing rather than ebbing, with civilians continuing disproportionately to bear the costs.

The Taliban had shown an increasing disregard for human life, intentionally targeting civilians, particularly women, children and humanitarian staff, and using populated areas to stage attacks on international forces, he said. As the international force increased in strength during the summer months, and insecurity worsened in parts of the country ahead of the elections, everyone must be careful to avoid increasing the loss of civilian life. Afghanistan applauded recent steps taken by NATO and the United States to address those concerns, as well as the recently announced rules of engagement and improved guidelines for the use of air bombardment.

Efforts to meet development goals remained fragmented, he said, adding that poverty had increased and unemployment was a major problem. Governance and the rule of law remained weak and, alongside corruption, required sustained attention from both the Government and the international community. Humanitarian and development aid should be better coordinated and more accountable. Resources must be funnelled towards building Government capacity because it needed lasting expansion of its presence rather than the temporary expansion of the foreign presence. The "civilian surge" would be the backbone of the national effort to address many of those challenges, bolstering support for national development priorities and programmes in key sectors. It would also help improve service delivery in provincial areas.

While the international community and the United Nations had an essential role to play in the coming months and years, Afghanistan also needed stronger cooperation with its neighbours, he said. "As has been widely recognized, this conflict is not limited to the borders of Afghanistan, but involves the entire region, and endangers people all over the world," he stressed. Afghanistan's enemies were not local, but regional. They found sanctuary and support outside the country and a comprehensive regional approach would be needed to combat them. The Government had recently begun moving towards a more positive regional interaction with Pakistan and Turkey.

Afghanistan had the opportunity to make significant progress if it maintained its new momentum and focus over the coming months, he said. That would require broad and consistent international engagement. If the Government could ensure transparent and open elections, increase security for the Afghan population, improve coordination and aid effectiveness, strengthen institutions and constructively address the regional dimensions of the situation "we can clear a space on which to build a strong, sustainable Afghanistan".

NORIHIRO OKUDA (Japan) said while everyone was aware of the significance of the upcoming elections, a huge responsibility lay on the shoulders of the Afghan people, who were responsible for the preparations for, and conduct of, those elections. The international community shared that responsibility and Japan welcomed the statements on the elections issued by the International Support Group. For the elections to be credible, all candidates should be able to campaign on a level playing field and all eligible voters allowed to exercise that right.

Security was the biggest challenge, and Japan supported the steps to be taken by the Afghan Government and its international partners to ensure a secure electoral process. Japan had pledged its support for the recently proposed plan for an interim increase in police personnel, and its disbursement of more than \$300 million included assistance equivalent to the salary of the entire police force for half a year. Needless to say, the United Nations played a significant role in the electoral process through technical and other assistance, and Japan was particularly supportive of the Special Representative's efforts to help ensure a fair campaign.

PHILIP PARHAM (United Kingdom) said the growth of UNAMA's role was key to Afghanistan's development well beyond Kabul. Although serious challenges remained, the situation was moving forward in agriculture and political reform, and preparations for the elections were on track. Welcoming the progress made on donor coordination, he said the United Kingdom had long argued for consolidated support to the Government in close alignment with its national development strategy. On counter-narcotics, support for the Government's strategy must continue as national poppy production had decreased significantly and significant investment was going into seeking alternative livelihoods.

Recalling that his country had released an updated policy on Afghanistan and Pakistan in April, he said that it set

out three objectives: preventing Al-Qaida's return to Afghanistan and reducing extremism; helping the country become an effective and credible State; and providing long-term sustainable support for its national development strategy. UNAMA had a central role to play in all those areas. Extremism and insurgency would not be defeated unless the daily lives of ordinary Afghans were improved. The presidential elections were less than two months away and the security situation meant that organizing them would be difficult. But given that the Afghan people would be organizing the expression of their own will for the first time in 30 years, it was essential to ensure a credible, inclusive and secure process.

Welcoming the arrival of new troops, especially in the south, he said they would improve security and help train and strengthen the country's own security forces. Indeed, that was the key to lasting success. The protection of non-combatants from military action must continue as each and every innocent life lost was a tragedy. Protecting the population was also at the core of the NATO mission, and antithetical to that of the Taliban. The United Kingdom fully supported UNAMA's use of the increased resources to deliver more effectively and widely. Attention should be paid matching the demands of the Mission with the resources to deliver them. Benchmarks were a vital tool, and the United Kingdom was content to allow more time for them.

RUHAKANA RUGUNDA (Uganda) welcomed UNAMA's continued role in support of the Afghan Government and people, saying that, while Uganda had noted security improvements in some parts of the country, it was nevertheless concerned about the rise of attacks, including against civilians, in others. That meant the focus would have to remain on that important issue in the near future. With the upcoming elections, the Government would have to ensure the ballot was open and participatory. The process must also ensure the participation of women and people in all provinces, lest the results spark disillusionment. Uganda welcomed the coming "civilian surge" as a means to strengthen Afghan institutions and society.

Calling on donors and partners to continue to scale-up efforts in support of rehabilitation in the country, he said stability would benefit not only Afghanistan but also the wider region. Stability would also promote development and help to open regional dialogue. All countries in the region should work together to foster development and peace. The next few months would be critical for Afghanistan's future development, and the positive momentum that had been built despite the difficulties must be maintained. The international community must focus its support on bolstering civilian-led projects that would reinforce national efforts. The Government must build on the momentum engendered so as to ensure stability and prosperity. It must continue to work closely with UNAMA to those ends.

THOMAS MAYR-HARTING (Austria) said that, while preparations for the 20 August vote deserved priority attention, it was also essential to prepare carefully for the possibility of a second round of presidential elections in the fall. Providing security in the coming months, especially during the elections, would be a great challenge, he said, echoing concerns about the deteriorating security situation, including the high toll of civilian casualties, which threatened to overshadow many positive achievements.

While recognizing the complexity of the fight against the insurgency, it was critical to avoid a situation where more troops led to more casualties or behaviour that offended the population, he said, adding that his country was examining a possible contribution to European Union or United Nations programmes focused on police and rule-of-law training activities. Austria was also a strong supporter of demining activities, and had made a financial contribution to allow the deployment of three mine clearance teams, which together were projected to clear high-priority mine-contaminated land in the central and northern regions.

Afghan ownership was critically important in the civilian field, he said, welcoming the Government's comprehensive plan to implement the "civilian surge" as a follow-up to the conference in The Hague. Investment in capacity-building, in the creation of sustainable jobs and the lasting expansion of the Government presence, was essential to sustainable progress for the benefit of the Afghan people and the region as a whole.

Regional cooperation and coordination was crucial in the fight against illicit drug trafficking, he said. Indeed, the recent World Drug Report highlighted the decline in world opium poppy cultivation in 2008, which had largely been a result of the decrease in Afghanistan's cultivation area. Austria was currently supporting three projects of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) aimed at strengthening Afghanistan-Iran border control, capacity-building in criminal justice, and fighting corruption.

CLAUDE HELLER (Mexico) said he was concerned about the serious setbacks in the security situation, notably the increase in the number of incidents and the widespread violence in the capital, its neighbouring provinces and the south. That had produced a volatile climate for all, without distinction. Guaranteeing security was a main challenge, in the short- and medium-term. Protecting the integrity of the most vulnerable populations required special attention, in accordance with international law principles. The security of humanitarian staff was also essential.

Reiterating his country's condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, and vigorously condemning attacks against civilians, humanitarian and United Nations staff, he commended the progress made in expanding the national Armed Forces and national police. However, those efforts must be stepped up urgently to generate the capacity necessary to guarantee minimum security for civilians. Mexico supported efforts by the national and international security forces to prevent "collateral" casualties.

He also welcomed the announcement by the United States of an increase in the number of troops within the framework of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), with the aim of strengthening Afghanistan's own security capabilities and improving the protection of civilians. Although ISAF retained the central security role, it was important to respect UNAMA's approach in the areas of development and reconstruction. All necessary measures should be adopted to prevent the recruitment of children by armed groups and to support their reintegration into society.

Commending Government and international efforts in demining operations and removal of other explosive remnants of war, he said that, despite the insecurity and prevailing violence, national priorities should be fostered through a comprehensive approach aimed at strengthening institution-building, promoting economic and social development, respect for human rights, and strengthened rule of law. Efforts to fight organized crime should also be stepped up. Mexico looked forward to secure, credible, free and fair elections in August.

RANKO VILOVIĆ (Croatia) said his country was pleased with Afghanistan's efforts ahead of the upcoming presidential elections -- the crucial political moment of the year that would have a lasting impact on Afghanistan's future -- especially incentives to help create the conditions for a free and fair vote. Croatia welcomed the creation of the Complaints Commission and the intention of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to send election monitors. The number of women registering to vote, especially at the provincial level, was also welcome. Despite such progress, however, Croatia was concerned about the increase in security incidents, especially the rise in attacks against civilians. Addressing that problem required more than military measures and must include careful and targeted national reconciliation efforts.

There had been positive movement on development issues, such as agricultural growth, health care and higher education, he said, welcoming the launch of a mechanism set up to increase aid effectiveness and further coordination of donor efforts. Croatia also supported the upcoming "civilian surge" aimed at building national capacity and institutions. The surge must be Afghan-led and primarily focused at the subnational level. The regional dimension of the problems in Afghanistan could not be overestimated, he said, noting that Afghanistan's socio-economic growth would be inconceivable without cooperation with its regional neighbours. While much more needed to be done, Croatia welcomed steps to normalize relations between Afghanistan and several of its neighbours, including Pakistan.

KONSTANTIN DOLGOV (Russian Federation) said that, despite some positive strides in Afghanistan, the situation still demonstrated very destabilizing trends. Efforts by the Afghan authorities and the international military presence had yet to bring about "any truly serious improvements in the security sphere". Unfortunately, so far, the positive steps that had been made were not irreversible. Much remained to be done, including with respect to the international military presence, in light of the growing presence of the Taliban and Al-Qaida, which undermined the basis of the Afghan nation, its stability and reconstruction.

He said he remained seriously concerned about the ongoing loss of civilian life and advocated meticulous investigation of all such incidents, as well as accelerated efforts to prevent them in future. The Russian Federation recognized efforts by ISAF and coalition forces to prevent the loss of civilian life during military operations, but unfortunately they had not been sufficiently effective so far. There was a need to "Afghanize" the special anti-terrorist operations, for without the active involvement of Afghans themselves, it would not be possible to eradicate extremism. Nor would it be possible to maintain certain positive trends, such as shifting the focus of reconstruction to the Afghan Government. Any gains would be lost and the work of the Afghans and international community could be set back for years. The goal was to prevent that and go forward, for which the United Nations coordinating role was crucial.

While supporting national reconciliation, it should not occur at the expense of long-term stability or contravene Security Council decisions, which must be implemented in full, he said. The Russian Federation was categorically opposed to any arrangements with Taliban, terrorist or extremist ringleaders. Any attempts to establish dialogue with them would undermine the Council's sanctions regime. In the meantime, the Russian Federation, while not downplaying the importance of the presidential elections, wished to draw particular attention to the post-election period. The primary aim today was to involve the largest possible number of Afghans in the electoral process, in a political settlement and in reconstruction. The international presence to counter drug threats also still fell short. The drug trade formed the financial underpinning of terrorists inside and outside Afghanistan, and Russia actively supported combating that scourge at various levels.

JAIRO HERNÁNDEZ-MILIAN (Costa Rica) welcomed UNAMA's efforts to help Afghanistan achieve security and development goals and promote the rule of law, which would help in the fight against impunity and corruption. Costa Rica also welcomed the broad Afghan-led efforts to promote human and socio-economic development in the country, especially those mechanisms aiming to ensure the proper transfer of funds and to track donor resources. It also welcomed stepped-up efforts to promote regional cooperation.

At the same time, he expressed concern about the increase in attacks against civilians, humanitarian staff and education facilities. On the upcoming elections, he said the international community and the Government must be aware that some might wish to use them to sow instability and distrust. Overall, the Government must promote political and economic development efforts alongside military activities. Coordinating those objectives would be difficult, and Costa Rica encouraged UNAMA to continue to support the Government as it pressed ahead with efforts to transform Afghanistan into a stable and prosperous nation that addressed the needs of its people.

IBRAHIM DABBASHI (Libya), noting that the number of violent incidents in Afghanistan had risen beyond the 1,000 mark in May, said international pledges towards the country's national development strategy were receding, and expressed grave concern that "the day will come when the international community will turn its back once again on Afghanistan". The use of force alone would not achieve security and stability. The proposal calling for an increase in the number of civilian experts in support of the Government and capacity-building was a step in the right direction and must be implemented as soon as possible.

At the same time, there was a pressing need to foster UNAMA's role by supporting its wider presence and more effective contribution, he continued, stressing also the need to make the requisite resources available. The efforts of United Nations agencies in development and reconstruction projects deserved full support, with a view to the withdrawal of foreign troops. That was the only way to achieve national reconciliation. Hopefully, the international community would continue to finance reconstruction projects, such as the rebuilding of roads.

Despite the recurrent tragic incidents perpetrated by international troops against civilians, and despite the repeated appeals not to repeat them, the killing of civilians continued "in a deeply disconcerting manner", he said. One incident had led to the killing of 140 civilians, according to Government sources. The recurrence of such tragic incidents prompted Libya to question the presence of arrangements intended to avoid them. There was an urgent need to conduct fair and impartial investigations of those incidents and to try those responsible.

JEAN-MAURICE RIPERT (France) said the August elections should be an opportunity for the Afghan people to express fully and freely their choice of leadership. The ballot should be transparent and credible, and all candidates must be able to campaign freely and with access to the media. While the Afghan Government was in the lead, the United Nations had a key assistance role to play and the Council would count on UNAMA to provide support during and after the elections.

He went on to say that renewed efforts to reform the national police force were under way and the French Government was devoting some of its forces in a training role as that effort went forward. Benchmarks would be an important tool for the international community to follow implementation of the commitments made at the various donors' conferences held on behalf of Afghanistan. At the same time, France was concerned about the human rights situation and urged the Government to strengthen efforts to protect and promote the rights of women. France was also concerned about attacks against civilians by the Taliban and other extremist groups.

On the regional effort, he said that, while there had been significant progress, a more comprehensive approach was needed, especially to improve relations with Pakistan. Afghanistan could count on the support of France to provide assistance in that regard. Stability was another priority for Afghanistan, its regional neighbours and the wider international community. France was committed to stability and supported a comprehensive approach. The country had scaled up its political and civilian commitment to Afghanistan, which could rely on its tireless commitment as it worked with the United Nations.

SUSAN RICE (United States) said that President Barack Obama had made Afghanistan a top national security priority and her country's goals were clear. They included disrupting, defeating and dismantling Al-Qaida and building up the Government's capacity. The presidential and provincial elections on 20 August would be a critical milestones in the Government's efforts to expand governance. They offered the Government an opportunity to give its citizens a voice in the ongoing drive to strengthen democracy and good governance. The international community and the United Nations were working hard with the National Electoral Commission to ensure the success of those efforts.

Everyone must make the elections a top priority in the weeks ahead, she emphasized, pointing out that her country had given \$120 million to the donor fund for the elections, and calling on all other donors to deliver rapidly on their pledges. The United States neither supported nor opposed any particular presidential or provincial candidate; it supported the right of the Afghan people to choose their own leaders. It also welcomed the

establishment of a political rights monitoring programme to guard freedom of expression, association and movement, and to ensure impartiality. The Government should enforce fully its decree of non-intervention in the electoral process.

She encouraged Afghan women to participate in the political process, both as candidates and voters, noting that the United States was working towards empowering women and ending gender discrimination in the country. Yesterday, the United States had launched a \$127 million grants programme for that purpose. UNAMA would only be as effective as its resources and presence throughout Afghanistan would allow. Indeed, UNAMA must be at the heart of international efforts, but the Afghan Government must take ownership of all processes, such as extending basic infrastructure and creating alternative livelihoods to poppy production through increased bilateral and regional trade in Afghan products, for example. Similarly, infrastructure must be rebuilt in remote areas, as that was where 76 per cent of Afghans lived.

The United States deeply regretted any injury or loss of life among innocent Afghans stemming from operations involving the United States or ISAF forces, she said, adding that any loss of innocent life was tragic. It would continue to conduct thorough joint investigations of such incidents with the Afghan Government. United States and international forces took extensive precautions to avoid loss of life among Afghan civilians and Afghan forces during its operations against terrorists. Reducing civilian casualties would be a top priority in providing a secure environment in which Afghan society and the Afghan Government could be strengthened, but as it pursued those goals, it must be remembered that the enemy employed appalling tactics that included the use of children as human shields. Most casualties were caused by the insurgents and not by the international forces.

LIU ZHENMIN (China) said his delegation appreciated efforts by UNAMA, under difficult conditions, to help ensure peace, stability and security in Afghanistan. China was pleased to see that, despite some challenges, the process leading up to the elections had thus far been peaceful and plans to hold the ballot were proceeding apace. Ensuring free, fair and credible elections would lay an important foundation for political stability and enhanced reconstruction efforts. Noting the serious and ongoing security challenges, China urged the Government to continue to enhance the capacity of national forces so they could assume responsibility for national security, an effort that should be supported by the international community.

Overall, socio-economic development was the key to peace and stability, he said. To that end, China welcomed plans under way in areas such as health care, agriculture and other positive social programmes that would raise living standards and help address the root causes of the challenges facing Afghanistan. Having been through so many trials and tribulations, the Afghan people looked forward to sustained peace, development and stability. That required sustained efforts by the Government and support by the international community. As a friendly neighbour, China would stand by Afghanistan and help support broader international initiatives to ensure lasting peace.

BUI THE GIANG (Viet Nam) said against a backdrop of positive developments in many fields over the last three months, including governance, the fight against corruption, enhancement of administrative accountability, and capacity-building, his country remained worried by the continuing deterioration in the security situation and the rising violence in Afghanistan. Insurgent activity in previously stable areas, intensified intimidation, abductions and assassinations, as well as the continuing deliberate targeting of public officials, civilian contractors, religious scholars, aid workers, and particularly United Nations personnel, were all major sources of concern.

With less than two months before the elections, international assistance in maintaining the positive momentum was critical, he said. In that regard, Viet Nam welcomed the renewed international commitment to Afghanistan's peacebuilding process, as demonstrated by international donors at the conference The Hague in March, as well as the consensus on a more focused strategy to challenges in that country, which included well-funded and effective civilian capacity- and institution-building programmes. More efficient mechanisms should be developed to enhance donor coordination, aid effectiveness and coherence in the allocation and use of available resources.

MICHEL KAFANDO (Burkina Faso) said his delegation was reassured that preparations for the upcoming elections were proceeding apace. Success in Afghanistan would depend largely on the support of the civilian population for the objectives of the international community. To that end, it could be important to set up a communication and information structure to inform the people about those efforts. It was also necessary for UNAMA to expand its presence in the country, in line with relevant Council resolutions.

It was clear that Afghanistan was at a crossroads, and that the international community must work in cooperation with the Government to ensure that positive momentum yielded positive results, he said. Donor coordination and aid effectiveness remained crucial to lasting improvements in the lives of the Afghan people, and to that end, Burkina Faso welcomed the creation of the peer review mechanism to ensure consistent allocation of resources and compel donors to perfect their interventions.

He also welcomed other improvements, including positive signs of the Government's willingness to tackle the "gangrene" of corruption, which threatened to wipe out positive achievements on the development front. Regional political and economic cooperation and dialogue were crucial to combat terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime. Burkina Faso urged the international community and the region to support the efforts of the Afghan population to foster ownership of the many plans and programmes under way, in order to ensure that, ultimately, they would take control of their own future.

Council President BAKI İLKIN (Turkey), speaking in his national capacity, expressed hope that the upcoming elections in Afghanistan would constitute a milestone in the transformation of that country into a stable and democratic State, and praised the essential role that UNAMA was playing in the country's social, political and economic life. Turkey wanted the Mission to continue playing that role unabated in the critical period ahead.

He said that, in light of the Secretary-General's comprehensive report, his country looked forward to the agreed benchmarks being formulated and which would be reflected in his next report, as such an exercise would result in further improving the work of the United Nations in Afghanistan, while also guiding Member States in their contributions. The benchmarks should be concise and achievable, reflecting the challenges and opportunities on the ground.

Even more importantly, he said, the benchmarks should address all those dimensions in a holistic balanced and realistic manner, given the need for a comprehensive strategy, including security, governance, rule of law, human rights, and social and economic development. Only through such a broad-based and forward-looking strategy could the international community's common objectives in Afghanistan be achieved. Likewise, continuing and enhanced regional cooperation was a prerequisite to achieving goals in Afghanistan. Turkey's repeated position was that failure was not an option in Afghanistan, given the stakes involved.

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.

MARTIN PALOUŠ (Czech Republic), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said the work of UNAMA had contributed to the recent significant progress achieved in Afghanistan. At the same time, daunting challenges remained, and the European Union strongly encouraged the Afghan Government to sustain positive efforts to ensure further improvements, with the assistance provided by the multinational forces on the ground. The period ahead would be complex, and the European Union reiterate its unwavering dedication and engagement, which would be important, especially during the run-up to and following presidential and provincial elections.

The August vote would be a "major stepping stone" to further political development, and it was important that the election ensure the political legitimacy of the next Government and provide it with a strong mandate, he said. It

was important that the current Government exercise its authority with impartiality and integrity by ensuring a level playing field for all candidates. It would be vital that sound mechanisms be put in place to avoid large-scale irregularities at the time of the vote. The European Union had decided to deploy an electoral observation mission, and UNAMA would clearly have an important role to play in that regard.

He said that, due to the elections, the enhanced international presence in Afghanistan should focus on safeguarding a stable security situation, and thereby, make the vote possible. At the same time, maintaining security during the elections was a shared responsibility between the national security forces and the international community. On other issues, the European Union actively supported the improvements in the area of good governance, the rule of law and the fight against corruption. Building Afghan capacity and ownership in the police and civil sectors remained at the core of the European Union's engagement in Afghanistan.

Urging the Afghan Government to give the utmost priority to achieving significant progress in those areas, especially at the subnational level, he said that security and stability in Afghanistan was closely linked to the overall situation in the region. The European Union, therefore, strongly supported the development of a coordinated approach at the regional level and enhanced cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbours, especially Pakistan. The European Union particularly acknowledged the key role played by Pakistan for the stability in the region, and welcomed further progress achieved in the bilateral dialogue between the two countries.

PIET DE KLERK (Netherlands) said many speakers had rightfully emphasized the importance of fair elections and the need to ensure a level playing field for all candidates. While that was indeed critical, it was also important to remember that the August elections would be the first organized by the Afghan authorities themselves. That was no small development and was in fact an important sign that the spirit of democracy was gradually finding a place in Afghan society, he said, congratulating the country for making such headway.

He said it was important for UNAMA and the international community to begin thinking about the period after the elections. There would be merit in discussing some sort of agreement between the international community and the new Government, following its formation. Such a move would enable all stakeholders to express their expectations going forward. The Netherlands called for a focus on good governance and human rights, values not only cherished by the international community but, more importantly, by the Afghan population. Further, more emphasis on achieving clear targets regarding the rule of law would help establish the credibility of a new Afghan Government that would be trusted by the people.

The Netherlands attached particular importance to the growing consensus regarding the importance of civilian assistance, he said. To that end, international civilian efforts should be geared towards supporting and consolidating Afghan civil capabilities, in line with the priorities set by the Afghan people. For its part, the international community could consider pooling its civilian-assistance capacities. Regarding the Netherlands' involvement in Afghanistan, the Dutch-led provincial reconstruction team in Uruzgan was growing, and operated under civilian leadership. Investments in civilian-military cooperation were paying off.

MONA JUUL (Norway) said she was encouraged by recent positive developments, including the expanded role of the Afghan security forces, the advances in designated priority areas such as agriculture, and the gradual alignment and improved coordination of international contributions. Norway was also pleased with preparations for the upcoming elections.

She noted the emergence of three interlinked strategic shifts in Afghanistan: increased emphasis on civilian efforts; a focus on subnational governance and service delivery; and the alignment of international efforts, such as the aid-effectiveness agenda. At the same time, Norway was concerned about some alarming setbacks, particularly the deteriorating security situation in some areas and the increase in civilian casualties compared to the same period in 2008. Given the political progress on the ground, and with a view to the August elections, it was crucial to ensure that military conduct -- expected to increase in the coming months -- did not alienate the Afghan population from the international community.

The question of a regional approach to the stabilization of Afghanistan was of increasing importance, she said, adding that the situation was a challenge to all countries in the region. It was paramount, therefore, for all of Afghanistan's neighbours -- as well as other major countries -- to engage in a constructive political dialogue and partnership in order to combat organized crime, drug trafficking and terrorism, and to promote trade and economic integration into the region. Concerning UNAMA's budget, the demand for its services had grown faster than its resources, and Norway was ready to engage constructively with the Council and the international community on the matter.

JIM MCLAY (New Zealand) said that, while his nation was small and far away from Afghanistan, it had a long-standing commitment to ensuring that country's sustainability as an independent nation, free from

subversion and terror. Among its other efforts, New Zealand led the provincial reconstruction team in Bamyan province, and supported ISAF and UNAMA in police training and mentoring in that province. It contributed to other priority areas of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, such as rural development programmes, education and health services, and capacity development for provincial governance structures.

Concerned about the increasing levels of violence in Afghanistan in the run-up to elections in August, he said the country also continued to face deep-seated problems in the areas of governance, human rights, development, administration of justice and illicit drug control. The security situation, especially in the south and east, seriously hampered development and limited the reach of the Afghan Government as well as its ability to improve the lives of the people in those areas and elsewhere. With all that in mind, strengthening Afghan military and police capability was one of the international community's key commitments.

Finally, he stressed that development in Afghanistan must be underpinned by a sound, credible and effective Government. New Zealand welcomed the progress made towards the 20 August elections and was encouraged by the large numbers of women candidates. New Zealand also welcomed the additional security being provided so that the people could express their democratic rights without fear of violence.

FARUKH AMIL (Pakistan) said that, while Afghanistan had made progress on certain frontiers, considerable challenges remained on the political, security, governance, humanitarian and development fronts. The overall deterioration in the security situation was a matter of concern. Development and reconstruction efforts were slow and uneven. The absence of State authority beyond some major cities, lack of good governance, rampant corruption and economic hardships were shattering the people's confidence about the Government's ability to provide protection and better conditions of life. An increase in civilian casualties was further fuelling public grievances against foreign forces. That was a major impediment to winning Afghan hearts and minds.

"Afghanistan is standing at the crossroads of history," he said, adding that the country's challenges were numerous and daunting. For decades, Afghanistan had suffered the ravages of war and civil strife. Its people had been the victims of instability, violence, terrorism, factional fighting, illegal arms, narcotics production and trafficking, and organized crime, with disastrous effects on the economy, infrastructure and society. The time had come to end that vicious cycle. But there was no magic wand to turn the devastation of decades into development overnight. The absence of a comprehensive strategy had prevented significant gains in peace consolidation and stability. "We must move from the hitherto fragmented and piecemeal approach to tackle these formidable challenges and should mount an integrated response fully owned and led by the Afghan people with the support of the international community," he urged.

Partnerships with regional States, as well as the international community, remained key to sustainable peace and development, he continued, citing some aspects requiring particular attention. The challenges facing Afghanistan were of internal origin and, therefore, required internal solutions. Military force alone could not deliver, and the resulting civilian casualties had been a major cause of alienation. It would be worthwhile to focus less on military operations and more on protecting populations and security. A civilian development surge was needed, as were massive investment in reconstruction, development and social welfare programmes, improved governance and placing a premium on strengthening State institutions and capacity-building. Providing better living conditions and making peace dividends visible would greatly help to win over the Afghan people.

He said the problems of terrorism and violent extremism must not be dealt with in isolation. The rise in militancy directly linked to the unchecked growth of narcotics, and there was a dire need to address that problem. Short-term measures should be complemented by comprehensive, durable and long-term solutions based on alternative livelihoods and development. Any strategy, no matter how innovative and dynamic, was doomed to failure without the support of all elements of Afghan society. The renewal of the democratic mandate in the forthcoming elections was an ideal opportunity to promote political and socio-economic inclusion, as well as national reconciliation.

The parameters of a sustainable solution should also include a comprehensive regional approach, he said, adding that, apart from Afghanistan itself, no other country had a more vital stake in peace, security and prosperity in that country than Pakistan, which suffered directly from the ongoing instability in Afghanistan. Peace in Afghanistan was essential for tranquillity and development of Pakistan's own border regions. Therefore, Pakistan was firmly committed to helping the Afghan Government and the international coalition restore security and bring stability to Afghanistan. Pakistan had been host to the world's largest refugee population, with all its consequences.

He said that his country's security forces and people continued to render tremendous sacrifices, reviewing its participation in various projects and conferences. Pakistan welcomed the reinvigoration of the United States' focus on promoting broad-based cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan and in the wider region. The

meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the three countries in February, followed by a trilateral summit in May, had greatly helped define the future contours of a comprehensive strategy for Afghanistan.

HARDEEP SINGH PURI (India) said the Secretary-General's report was a clear riposte to those who questioned the international community's collective effort in Afghanistan. The international community must remain steadfast and fully support the "civilian surge" and the expansion of Afghan national capacities. That would require, among other things, strongly supporting the priorities identified by the Afghans themselves, such as agriculture, energy, private sector development and capacity-building. "We must also support expansion of the UN presence [...] financially and administratively," he said.

While recognizing calls to ensure that the August elections were free and fair, he also urged the international community to recognize that vibrant political debate was itself a hopeful sign. Energetic debates did not always imply the unravelling of a political process, he said, cautioning that too much outside advice often had the reverse effect, undermining rather than helping domestic institutions. The moment had come for the international community to recognize and support growing Afghan capacities. Indeed, too much time had been spent berating Afghan actors for various failings instead of placing setbacks in proper focus; building a modern Government after decades of war, displacement and privation was never going to be easy. The international community must stop missing the forest for the trees, he declared.

At the same time, he acknowledged that the security situation in Afghanistan remained "deeply worrying" and the prospect of a difficult six months ahead was not hard to imagine. Asymmetric warfare and complex terrorist attacks were being mounted and the wellsprings that sustained that terror showed no signs of being drained. The international community must consider how best to help address those threats. In that context, India reiterated its reservations regarding the use in United Nations reports of certain terms to describe terrorist attacks. Such operations were not mounted by "anti-Government elements" or "insurgents", he added.

On reconciliation, he said that, while successive reports of the Secretary-General underscored that it should be an Afghan-led process, the international community must consider "if we are at this juncture yet". Reconciliation required strategic clarity, unity of purpose and due recognition of the nature of the reconciling parties. Without consensus among the relevant parties on key issues, "we may well be dividing ourselves, not those who seek to peel away from terrorist groups". With that in mind, he called for a shift from the unworkable divisions between "good" and "bad" Taliban. "We have to be equally mindful that, in pursuing these distinctions, we are projecting impressions of weakness, desperation or defeatist mentality," he said.

GIULIO TERZI DI SANT'AGATA (Italy) said the efforts of the United Nations remained essential to building Afghan ownership of and capacity in security, agriculture, infrastructure, governance and the rule of law. The deployment of additional troops should be accompanied by a resolute "civilian surge". Enhancing UNAMA's presence at the provincial level was critical to maximizing the benefits of collective international efforts. Italy supported the Secretary-General's call for additional resources for UNAMA's 2010 budget. Italy was set to host the upcoming G-8 Summit next month and would continue to support and promote Afghan empowerment in all areas, including institution-building, economic development, cultural dialogue and security.

He went on to say that the United Nations and ISAF should ensure credible, secure and inclusive presidential elections. That had been the main message of the G-8 Ministerial meeting on Afghanistan held in Trieste last week. The discussion at that meeting on drug trafficking and border management underlined the limitations of past approaches. It also shed new light on the potential of the UNODC draft regional programme on the opportunities provided by the climate of mutual trust in the region -- through enhanced border cooperation, intelligence exchanges, and joint Pakistani-Afghan action in the framework of the Dubai initiative.

He said participants in the Trieste meeting had also focused on regional stabilization, with specific attention to the situation of internally displaced persons in Pakistan. Their lack of security would become even more serious when the monsoon season began to impact life in the camps, and it would become easier for the Taliban to exploit their poverty and discontent. That situation called for immediate action. Support should be provided to the Pakistan Government to deal with the current humanitarian emergency and during the upcoming reconstruction phase. The G-8 should meet again on that matter in the margins of the General Assembly's general debate.

ANDREW GOLEDZINOWSKI (Australia) said the entire international community understood the importance of creating a secure environment in Afghanistan in which development and economic opportunities could grow. That was why Australia planned to increase its force levels by some 40 per cent and to help build the strength and capacity of the Afghan Army in Uruzgan. It would also contribute some \$200 million to the Afghan Army Trust Fund.

While it was clear that security must remain a priority, the international community must not lose its focus on development in the civilian arena, he emphasized. To that end, Afghan authorities and the international

community must work together to ensure the upcoming presidential elections were secure, credible and inclusive. They must also work to ensure the playing field was level for all candidates. Successful elections would be important in strengthening democracy.

He said his country's ongoing civilian and military commitment would provide supplementary assistance during the elections, including the short-term deployment of a small infantry company for up to eight months. Australia would also contribute some \$8 million in development assistance to support the vote, and planned to propose the dispatch of a small team of civilian observers. Despite ongoing civilian challenges, progress was being made in Afghanistan. Average per capita gross domestic product had nearly doubled since 2002 and the country had enjoyed impressive gains in basic education, with a six-fold jump in enrolment, including some 35 per cent among girls. "The international community must continue to unite to build on this," he said.

THOMAS MATISSE (Germany) said the electoral process as a crucial step in consolidating democratic development in Afghanistan. Security for the elections remained a critical concern, and for that reason, Germany had increased the number of its troops on the ground. Afghan ownership and good governance remained key to the success of the international community's efforts in support of the country's development and Germany encouraged the Afghan Government to fight corruption and the narcotics trade with increased dedication. The recent initiatives in the fields of agriculture and private-sector development were welcome, and the Government should follow up on them. Germany would continue to support reconstruction and development, and 2009 was seeing yet another increase in German contributions.

He said UNAMA must continue to play the leading role in coordinating all civilian efforts of the international community. As a major contributor to the United Nations budget, Germany openly supported the considerable increase in the Mission's 2009 budget and looked forward to tangible results. In order for UNAMA to carry out its enhanced mandate, a further increase was warranted. Against that background, Germany welcomed the increase in Mission personnel on the ground.

The Secretary-General's proposal to include a finalized set of benchmarks in his next report to the Council was also welcome, as they could contribute to measuring progress in implementing UNAMA's mandate and priorities, he said. Despite all remaining challenges, it had been possible to improve living conditions in Afghanistan, build schools for boys and girls, hospitals and bridges, and more. That success had only been possible thanks to all the women and men from around the world who were willing to serve in Afghanistan.

MOHAMMAD KHAZAEI (Iran) said the Secretary-General's report portrayed a mixed picture of Afghanistan, highlighting continuing progress in important areas such as the expansion of the Afghan security forces. It also indicated that the agricultural and private sectors continued to blossom, while there had also been general improvement in capacity-building. The Afghan Government deserved the international community's collective admiration for the steadfastness it had shown in its efforts to create a stable and prosperous country.

However, the report also highlighted several areas of concern in the security sector, which continued to deteriorate, he said. Indeed, the number of incidents and the level of violence had increased in comparison to the same period in 2008, and the twin menaces of poppy cultivation and drug trafficking continued to pose threats not only to Afghanistan but the wider region and the world. Addressing insecurity in Afghanistan required adequate attention to the needs and views of the Afghan people and Government.

It was important to lay the ground to ensure the Afghan authorities took ownership of their own security and development, he said, adding that the people had made it clear that they would not accept the indefinite presence of foreign forces. If the proposed increase in their number was carried out on the basis of past approaches, the security situation might not improve. Iran concurred with the view that capacity-building and using regional potential for Afghanistan's reconstruction would contribute greatly to improving the overall situation there.

The upcoming presidential elections would be among the most important political developments in that country this year, he said, voicing his country's confidence that Afghans would turn that opportunity into another milestone on their path towards stability and prosperity. However, the cultivation, production and trafficking of narcotic drugs was a daunting challenge, and the international community's efforts to tackle the drug trade left much to be desired. "This is a threat for all of us and, therefore, requires a collective resolute and serious response in all its aspects," he said, stressing that his country had been and continued to be unwavering in its war against heavily armed drug traffickers originating from Afghanistan.

Finally, he stressed that his country had displayed its sincere desire to help its "brothers and sisters" in Afghanistan through the concrete steps it had taken in various reconstruction activities. Further, Iran had endured huge costs for the past 30 years, hosting 3 million Afghan refugees. It earnestly hoped that conditions would facilitate their voluntary repatriation in a more timely and promising manner. "We believe that no approach regarding Afghanistan will be complete unless and until it encompasses a solution for the return of Afghan


refugees too," he declared.

Mr. TANIN, taking the floor again, said the enduring spirit of partnership and cooperation was crucial as his country pressed ahead with its efforts to ensure sustained peace and stability. He thanked Ambassador Ilkin, who had unstintingly supported Afghanistan during his diplomatic career and especially during his tenure on the Security Council.

Mr. EIDE agreed with those who had spoken of the need to look beyond the election period to ensure that the momentum in Afghanistan would be maintained. He hoped that a forward-looking approach would ensure continuity and unity of purpose within the international community. As for donor assistance, he said the heightened expectations of what could be done with such resources sometimes scared him. At the same time, he hoped that going forward, international stakeholders could learn from the past and recognize that it was more difficult to tailor or adjust interventions when the plan for their disbursement "had been written in stone".

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