



STATEMENT BY MR. NIRUPAM SEN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE, ON AGENDA
ITEM 16: THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN AT THE 61ST SESSION OF THE UN
GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON NOVEMBER 28, 2006

Madame President,

I thank you for scheduling today's discussion on "The Situation in Afghanistan", which represents a valuable opportunity to discuss this vitally important issue at the most representative organ of the United Nations, the General Assembly. We would also wish to place on record our appreciation for the constructive efforts and meticulous diligence of the German delegation in producing a more compact, concise and user-friendly Resolution for adoption this year. We are happy to encourage its adoption by consensus.

Madame President,

The importance of today's discussion on Afghanistan stems from the centrality of the partnership between the Afghan people and the international community in ensuring lasting security, long-term employment-led development and humanitarian relief in the country. This is, after all, the essence of the International Compact on Afghanistan. In discussing this crucial issue today, we also recognize the interconnected nature of the world's responsibility in Afghanistan, given its location at the strategic crossroads that link West Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and East Asia.

Madame Chairperson,

I do not propose to elaborate at length on well-known facts about the situation in Afghanistan, not only because today's draft resolution speaks for itself, but also because the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan provides a detailed reflection of the facts on the ground. I would however like to draw attention to the recently-concluded Second Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, which India had the honour to jointly host together with our brothers from Afghanistan in New Delhi ten days ago. Our remarks today will be in keeping with the future-oriented vision that is outlined in the documents that have emerged from that important Conference.

The first point that I would like to touch upon is that in our collective efforts to assist the Afghan people in their effort to put the last decades of strife and privation behind them we need to focus on some of the positive achievements of the last few years. It is almost five years since the Taliban regime was removed from power, and in this brief period, we must recognize that the pace of democratic change in Afghanistan is remarkable by any standards. Today, most of the accepted milestones of modern democracy are visible in Afghanistan. The report of a well known think tank has correctly concluded that, if handled rightly, “the National Assembly has the potential to play a vital role in stabilising Afghanistan, entrenching pluralism, institutionalising political competition and giving voice to the country’s diverse population”. These landmark achievements have been attained in the face of adversity and despite serious challenges. This is not to deny the need for further efforts, or to suggest that we may now indulge in the luxury of complacency: far from it. We do recognize, as does today’s resolution, the need for further efforts to give representation to all segments of Afghan society, including women. However, we would like to pay tribute to the courage and perseverance of the people and the foresight of the leadership of Afghanistan for their achievements so far. Equally, we commend the Afghan people for determinedly pursuing the complex task of building a modern state on the shattered fragments of decades of war and strife.

Secondly, and crucially, we believe that much more needs to be done to reverse the deteriorating security situation. This urgency is reflected both in the Secretary General’s report and in today’s resolution, but language alone cannot capture the criticality of this effort. While we commend the efforts thus far, intensified regional and international efforts to deal with the problem of a resurgent Taliban, an Al Qaida insurrection and their nexus with drug traffickers is essential. Sadly, all of us know of this only too well, from the attacks on security forces to the tragic killing of humanitarian workers. The cost of tolerating such an insurrection is infinitely higher—for each and every one of us—than any costs we might collectively bear in putting it down firmly and finally.

Making deals with the Taliban will bring neither peace nor security: the people support democratisation and therefore a long-term solution to the problems of the Afghan people is to be found in a judicious mixture of using force against extremist elements, and providing credible and sustained development opportunities to build upon the growing constituency for peace and development, not only in Afghanistan, but across the region. Inaugurating the Second Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh described violence in southern and south-eastern Afghanistan, which undermines the security of Afghanistan and the development effort, as a challenge which is “a collective responsibility”. The swamp of terrorist insurgency cannot be drained till the stream feeding the swamp dries up or is at least reduced to a trickle. An important regional and international duty that devolves upon all of us to firmly and decisively act to

eliminate not only the agencies of terror themselves, but to stop their backers, prevent incitement of terror and interdict the sources that provide terrorist groups arms and finances. This, I might add, is a responsibility that we have all undertaken to bear, not only in the World Summit Outcome Document, but also in the last General Assembly session in the annexure of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

I would also like to point out that the New Delhi Declaration of the Second Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan notes that a "strategy for development for Afghanistan which is based on cooperation with regional countries creates significant possibilities for reducing poverty and for achieving the Afghanistan Compact benchmarks and Millennium Development Goals in the entire region". Towards this end, it outlines a number of useful suggestions for the countries of the region to coordinate policies for exploiting shared resources like water, agriculture and energy; to develop capacity-building programmes; to expand trade and transport linkages; to design and build appropriate and practical regional projects; and even to develop policies to counter narcotics cultivation and drug smuggling.

The Asian Development Bank has already been asked to undertake a study on regional integration strategies, and will share key findings at the next RECC. The Second RECC also led to decisions from the participating regional states to put in place a number of practical programmes that would give substance to the regional process of assisting Afghanistan, apart from giving this objective a higher level of the necessary political commitment. In such measures lie the key to unlocking the vast latent potential of the land and people of Afghanistan.

Madame President,

India's support for a sovereign, stable, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan is consistent and well-known. We see a resurgent, stable, sovereign and peaceful Afghanistan as an essential element in the growing webs of regional cooperation that are binding our world, but also a process that reclaims for the people of Afghanistan their rightful place in our collective future. Afghanistan's entry into the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation at its last Summit in Dhaka was a manifestation of this process. We believe that Afghanistan can and must be provided with the means to re-establish itself as the crossroads of Asia, and as one of the future transport hubs and energy bridges of our region.

In conclusion, let me also reiterate India's own unwavering commitment to assist with the reconstruction of Afghanistan. We have extended financial assistance totalling over US \$ 600 million to fund infrastructure projects and to strengthen the National Budget process. Our involvement in project assistance spans the gamut of activity from basic infrastructure such as roads, power, dams, and telecom to

community-based small-scale projects, which have a short gestation period and provide a direct, rapid and visible impact on community life.

However, we also realize the need to transcend funding and have been working to provide the Afghan people with the tools to help themselves through training programmes and appropriate technologies, both in India and in Afghanistan. Tragic and heinous attacks on our nationals involved in humanitarian assistance programmes will not deter us from this effort. As the Prime Minister of India said in New Delhi last week, "India will do whatever it is called upon to do to strengthen democracy and promote development in Afghanistan." Prime Minister Singh described this as a "solemn commitment to a neighbour, to a trusted friend, to a great people". India remains firmly committed to helping the Afghan people rebuild their nation and create new opportunities for the future.

Thank you, Madame President.

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