



STATEMENT BY MR. NIRUPAM SEN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE, ON THE  
SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN AND UNAMA AT THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON  
MARCH 19, 2009

Mr. President,

Thank you for scheduling today's debate on Afghanistan and the UN Assistance Mission in that country. This is of immediate and abiding interest for India. We also welcome the latest report of the Secretary-General, while thanking SRSG Kai Eide for his comprehensive briefing.

Mr President,

The latest report paints a bleak picture of the situation in Afghanistan. We accept these facts; we cannot but recognize that the Afghan people continue to be confronted by the twin challenges of deteriorating security and by a sense that the peace dividend is reducing. At the same time, the international community is simultaneously challenged by a renewed security challenge from the Taliban and the Al Qaeda, and by increasingly-vocal questions over the utility of our collective effort.

And yet the report also holds out elements of hope. We see steady progress in the UN's effort to ensure greater coordination and cohesion in our aid and assistance programmes. It also praises efforts to reform the Interior Ministry and the police, the work of the various Economic Ministries, and the steady gains in reducing poppy production. It also notes as a sign of progress the fact that the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan will organize the forthcoming elections. Further, the fact that elections are being contested hotly is a good augury. We are hopeful that the elections will be free, fair and transparent, and that the Afghan people will exercise their rights in such a manner. At the same time, we in the international community must ensure that during the run-up to the elections, the gains secured collectively in Afghanistan are built up, not eroded in any manner. We also strongly condemn the terrorist attack today on representatives of the Afghan people.

While the report—in our view—correctly identifies these positive developments as a window of opportunity to consolidate progress, there is a need to address misgivings over our collective purpose. Let us be clear: the world cannot afford to abandon Afghanistan again. Despite the strains, this Mission remains vital, not only to the aspirations of the long-suffering Afghan people, but for the security and stability of the region and beyond. Doubts, hesitation and divergences in our approach to the

Taliban and Al Qaeda weaken our collective will. They also invigorate our foe. Therefore, apart from continued application of force wherever terrorist groups are active, we must work together to deny them safe havens, financing and political and material sustenance, whether within Afghanistan or across its borders. The application of force wherever terrorists gather must harmonize with the larger political objective, and UNAMA must play an important role in this essentially political task

Since messaging is important, it is also essential to have greater clarity regarding the ideas being discussed in the public domain. Reconciliation is one of these. The UNSG's latest report subjects this discussion to important caveats. Not the least of these is the idea that reconciliation must be an Afghan-led process, within the parameters of the Constitution of the land. Further, it must be pursued from a position of political and military strength. To this, I would add that the process needs to be undertaken with strategic clarity and with unity of purpose. In the absence of consensus amongst concerned international parties over the key questions of reconciliation: with whom and how--such a process runs the risk of opening up divisions amongst us, rather than amongst the elements with whom we seek to reconcile. Furthermore, we must get beyond attempts to distinguish between "good" and "bad" Taliban: such efforts are unworkable.

Mr President,

From this standpoint, it is helpful that the international effort is moving towards a more cohesive and integrated approach. We fully endorse the notion that coordination must be based on genuine Afghan leadership, and on recognition of the fact that there is no purely military solution. It is precisely for this reason that India strongly supports efforts to build Afghan capacity. It is not only appropriate but essential to invest in such capacity. Without this, we run the risk of placing responsibility without ensuring that our partners have the means to shoulder it.

In this context, India welcomes the continuation of the useful role provided to UNAMA vide UN Security Council Resolution 1806 last year. We see this as a logical corollary of the Afghan National Development Strategy, adopted formally last year, which is a guide map for the international assistance effort in Afghanistan. UNAMA and the Government of Afghanistan have made commendable progress together since UNAMA received this new mandate, and it is essential to build upon these first promising signs resolutely. This effort needs to be supported with greater resources for the UN mission, and greater commitment to alleviating the humanitarian challenge in Afghanistan, especially, given the impact of rising food prices and adverse climatic events. India is working to mitigate the humanitarian impact, including through our recent decision to send a quarter of a million tonnes of wheat to Afghanistan, although most regrettably, we continue to face political difficulties in overland transport and transit to Afghanistan.

Mr President,

Taking these points as reference, I should like to underscore India's firm and unshakeable commitment to the international effort in Afghanistan. For India, the stabilization of Afghanistan is integrally connected with our security. It is for this

reason that while we are outraged by attacks upon our people and symbols of our friendship with Afghanistan, we cannot be deterred by these criminal acts. Not only has our commitment to Afghanistan crossed US \$ 1.2 billion, we have attempted to the best of our ability to expand the range and variety of our projects. Thus Indian assistance spans the gamut of operations from infrastructure projects such as the Zaranj-Delaram highway, to institutions such as the Parliament Building in Kabul. We have also simultaneously targeted local projects that will provide a peace dividend in the shortest possible period of time, ranging from cold storage plants to equipment for schools and hospitals. Through these efforts, we maintain capacity-building as a core element of our work in Afghanistan. It is in support of this core task that India has agreed to increase the current allocation of 500 seats each in capacity building and scholarship programmes.

Turning to the regional aspect, Mr President, we need greater efforts to embed the stabilization of Afghanistan within regional processes, for this country to regain its key role as the crossroads of South, West and Central Asia. This includes regional economic processes, such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Such efforts are in the collective interest of the entire the region: hindering this not only affects Afghanistan, but equally each of us in the region. We therefore need efforts to expand, rather than hinder, trade, transit and transport ties. That is, in our view, the best way of bringing the regional dimension into the discourse on Afghanistan.

Mr President,

In conclusion, India believes that challenges in Afghanistan need to be seen in their totality. We must analyze where we are today from the perspective of the past eight years. Every step forward has been hard-won, but each step is a measure of distance away from the destruction of the past. It is for this reason that we must continue to emphasize the progress achieved, rather than bemoan the challenges remaining. It is also for this reason that we should set our sights on realistic and achievable goals, not expectations that are unrealistic in the local context. If we are truly committed to an Afghan-led process of prioritization of tasks, we should concentrate on where Afghanistan has come from, rather than where we would individually like it to be.

I thank you Mr President.

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