



STATEMENT BY MR. KAMALESH SHARMA, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE ON THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON MARCH 26, 2002

Mr. President,

We welcome you to the Council and convey our deep appreciation of the contribution of Ambassador Ole Peter Kolby and his team to the work of the Council. Today's meeting is timely, and under your presidency, most appropriate, as Norway has provided valuable assistance to Afghanistan. We should also like to congratulate Mexico for last month's Presidency, and for bringing greater transparency to the work of the Council by holding open briefings by the Secretariat on issues of importance, including Afghanistan.

Mr. President, we convey our heartfelt condolences and sympathy to the people of Afghanistan and the Interim Administration for the terrible loss of life and devastation in the tragic earthquake which befell that country yesterday.

Mr. President,

On 22 December 2001, when the Interim Administration of Chairman Karzai took charge, the challenges confronting Afghanistan were many. And each was daunting and formidable by itself: among them, to provide security without a national army or police to a people who have not known peace for decades; in a landscape of ruin, to provide some bare minimum services and public administration that any society expects from its government; to provide humanitarian assistance to poverty stricken areas devastated by war and drought; to reconstruct a country utterly shattered by decades-long conflict; to heal the deep wounds of the past, promote national reconciliation and restore kinship.

The Interim Administration has just completed a hundred days. Yet so much has been expected of it, and, quite remarkably, so much has been accomplished by it in so little time, with such little resources. It is a vindication of the faith reposed by the international community in the Interim Administration and in the overwhelming yearning of the Afghans to break from their recent past and move towards a future full of promise and hope. It is a manifestation of the indomitable spirit for which the Afghans are justly known. However, no one is in doubt that the Interim Administration has only just taken the first steps in a long and arduous, but fulfilling and rewarding, journey.

Mr. President,

The Taliban and the Al Qaeda, the twin tormentors of Afghanistan, are down but not out. As recent events in Afghanistan have amply demonstrated, these forces of darkness are still there, hidden in the caves and the crevices, lying low and waiting for an opportunity to strike back. Collectively, the international community had paid a very heavy price for allowing these malevolent forces to seize and dominate Afghanistan. These forces can have no place in Afghanistan or anywhere else. These have to be extirpated from the roots, in the interest of not just Afghanistan but also the countries in its neighbourhood, as well as of the international community. This is a collective imperative and obligation from which we can not turn away, no matter how long it takes or how demanding it may become.

Mr. President,

As clearly brought out by the Secretary General in his report (S/2000/278) the security situation, particularly outside of Kabul, remains a cause of concern. While the Interim Administration is resolutely trying to gradually reestablish a sense of security, it lacks the resources, particularly a trained and well-equipped police and military force. Until such time that the Interim Administration acquires these resources, it requires, and has requested for, international assistance. In January, in this very Chamber, Chairman Karzai had appealed to the Council to expand and extend the mandate of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). While we recognize that this is a decision first and foremost of the members participating in ISAF, the Council should bring to bear its persuasion on them, as must the international community as a whole, that this is a calling from which they cannot, and should not, turn away.

It is encouraging to note the steps being taken by the Interim Administration, in collaboration with the international community, to train a national army for Afghanistan and a modern police force. The importance of strengthening the capacity of the Interim Administration to build an indigenous, professionally-trained security apparatus cannot be over-emphasised. In fact, it is also intrinsic to the exit strategy for the international security presence in Afghanistan.

Mr. President,

The timely nomination of the Special Independent Commission for the convening the Emergency Loya Jirga, and the work it has carried out in the last fifty days, including its consultations with a cross-section of Afghan population not just in major towns but elsewhere as well, bodes well for a representative gathering which reflects the will and the wishes of the Afghan people. We appreciate and commend the work done so far by the Commission. However, a word of caution: fears have been expressed that the Taliban and its backers are attempting to subvert the process by insinuating themselves into it. We hope that the Commission will be alert to this and will ensure that the Taliban and its sympathisers, in any guise, will have no place in the Emergency Loya Jirga.

Mr. President,

The meeting in Tokyo in January this year brought significant, though not sufficient, commitments for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan. But to create the circumstances in which the billions of dollars pledged could be productively utilized, millions are required now. The Secretary General has eloquently brought out the Interim Administration's dire need of financial resources to pay the salaries to the civil servants without which neither the Interim Administration can extend and maintain its authority over the entire country, nor can it deliver basic services to the Afghan people, such as education and health care. It is, therefore, of paramount importance that the international community extend its unflinching help. The sense of hope that has been kindled in Afghanistan should not be allowed to be extinguished by a tardy or delayed response. Innovative approaches to cut through bureaucratic procedures are the need of the day.

Afghanistan's rehabilitation and reconstruction will take time, will need considerable resources and will need patience. But once peace and security have been restored in Afghanistan, which we hope would

soon be the case, the arc lights of media would no longer find it newsworthy. However, the international community must steadily stay the course and not turn its back on Afghanistan. On its part, India is committed to extending assistance to Afghanistan over the long term covering not just immediately required humanitarian assistance in the form of a million tons of wheat and much needed medical aid but also in sectors including police training, education, housing, human resource development, public transport, information technology and industrial development. India has already extended a line of credit of 100 million dollars. During Chairman Karzai's visit to India on 26 and 27 February, bilateral cooperation was discussed in detail. Our Prime Minister also announced a grant of 10 million dollars for immediate utilization by the Afghan government. We are ready to do more.

For its developmental efforts to be productive and lasting, the international community must match generosity with wisdom. It is, therefore, important to listen carefully to what the Afghans need and respect their priorities and preferences, as no one knows better than the Afghans what is good for them and how best to do it. Temptation to foist solutions or structures not suitable or responsive to the local environment should be resisted as these will neither serve the cause of the donors nor of the Afghans. In determining what will work, sustainability should be the touchstone. We, therefore, strongly recommend that the least developed country perspective should not be lost sight of. We believe that emphasis on South-South cooperation in meeting the developmental needs of Afghanistan should be an integral part of the international community's strategy.

Mr. President,

Women in Afghanistan had been particularly traumatized by the Taliban and its brand of misogyny and obscurantism. Their role in rebuilding Afghanistan is central. We appreciate and fully support the efforts to increase the role and participation of women in the decision-making structures of the Interim Administration. A continued commitment to this norm will not just help in overcoming the harsh and inhuman practices of the Taliban against women, but will be a significant contribution towards building the bulwark for a more tolerant, participative, democratic and forward-looking society.

Mr. President,

Afghanistan has suffered for long at the hands of the Taliban, foisted upon it from outside. The international community must work

together to prevent such interference in the future, or from Afghanistan becoming a playground for the pursuit of narrow national interests, or for re-enacting the Great Game with a new cast. The need, therefore, is of greater ownership, openness and transparency in the actions of the international community in Afghanistan. Outdated structures, which failed to prevent conflict in Afghanistan in the past, are unlikely to promote peace in the future. To persist with these may prove to be a costly triumph of hope over experience. The role of the Group of 21, which brings together, in a cooperative framework, a large number of countries that have the ability to contribute towards peace and prosperity in Afghanistan, should be strengthened.

Mr. President,

The United Nations has made a significant contribution in assisting the Interim Administration in addressing the enormous challenges ahead of it. We, therefore, support the Secretary General's proposal to establish the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan with a light international 'footprint' to continue the UN's engagement in Afghanistan.

Mr. President,

Ambassador Brahimi richly deserves our deep appreciation and recognition for his outstanding contribution, first in fostering the Bonn Agreement and then in so ably assisting the work of the Interim Administration. We wish him all success in his demanding endeavours and assure him of our full support.

Mr. President,

Before concluding, I would like to reiterate our prime concern. By all evidence, the Interim Administration is doing all it can to bring peace and prosperity to Afghanistan. Is the international community matching this endeavour with the timely assistance it needs and deserves ?

BACK TO TABLE OF CONTENTS