

**Statement by Amb. Manjeev Singh Puri, Deputy Permanent Representative of India to the UN at the Security Council Debate on UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in New York on June 20, 2013**

Thank you, Mr. President,

Let me begin with thanking you for scheduling today's debate on the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I thank Ambassador Zahir Tanin, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his statement. We also thank the UN Secretary General for his latest report and are appreciative of the briefing by Mr. Jan Kubis, UNSG's Special Representative for Afghanistan.

Mr. President,

The security situation in Afghanistan remains fragile as demonstrated by a number of high profile terrorist attacks over the last two months. We condemn these attacks in the strongest possible terms and convey our condolences to the Government and people of Afghanistan.

The sharp increase in the variety, spread and intensity of attacks by the Taliban and their backers shows that the ANSF continues to require substantial assistance from the international community in addressing the security and terrorist challenge faced by Afghanistan. Concerted action is needed to isolate and root out the syndicate of terrorism, which includes elements of the Taliban, Al-Qaida, Lashkar-e-Taiba and other terrorist and extremist groups. It is, therefore, important that the transition plan is based on the ground situation rather than a pre-determined timeframe.

The efforts of the international community in Afghanistan should remain focused on security, development, governance, and regional and international cooperation which is aligned with the overall objective of the Afghan government. This alone will enable the Afghan government to eventually assume full responsibility and take charge of Afghanistan's destiny without outside interference.

We welcome that the third Ministerial Conference of the Istanbul Process held in Almaty in April 2013 renewed the international community's commitment to these objectives. India was represented by the External Affairs Minister H.E Salman Khurshid, who endorsed India's support for the Implementation Plan. India also fully supports the "Heart of Asia" process, which offers an invaluable opportunity to evolve a joint approach on issues of mutual concern through its pillar of political consultations. The process also offers us the opportunity to fulfill the promise of regional cooperation that was identified at Istanbul, Kabul and Delhi and further elaborated in the deliberations in the Implementation plan of the Trade, Commerce and Investment Opportunities CBM that India is leading.

Mr. President,

Afghanistan is a traditional friend and partner of India. The two countries have had a long shared history going back over millennia. The two countries are natural strategic partners by virtue of geography and a common vision of peace and cooperation in the region. Accordingly, India has taken a number of initiatives in pursuance of our Strategic Partnership Agreement with Afghanistan.

India's commitment to partner with Afghanistan as it takes charge of its destiny was reiterated during the visit of President Karzai to India in May 2013. During the visit, both sides reviewed the status of ongoing Indian-assisted development projects in and for Afghanistan, which amount to more than US\$ 2.5 billion. We have also pledged continued development support for Afghanistan post 2014 under the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework.

Turning to the regional aspect, Mr. President, Afghanistan's stability and economic development depend a lot on its neighbours and the region as a whole. We must expand, rather than hinder, trade, transit and transport ties, including overland transit and trade. That is the best way of bringing the regional dimension into play in a positive manner. Growing economic inter-dependence will also help in weaning disaffected youth away from insurgency and militancy and in creating a zone of co-prosperity in the region. We support the wishes of the Government of Afghanistan to take the lead in this direction.

Mr. President,

The holding of presidential and provincial council elections, currently scheduled for 5 April 2014, will be an important step forward in strengthening the democratic framework in Afghanistan. It is also important that the ongoing transition must remain Afghan-led and Afghan-owned, must be multi-faceted and should ensure the protection and promotion of the human rights of all Afghans, and lead to the strengthening of the Afghan state and its institutions.

In conclusion, Mr. President, let me state that in the arduous journey for lasting peace, prosperity and stability in Afghanistan, the Afghan government needs a long-term commitment of the international community to confront the challenges that lie ahead. We appreciate the good work done by UNAMA in this regard. India will continue to stand by Afghanistan as a historically close and friendly neighbour through the ongoing transitions.

Thank you.

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