

STATEMENT BY MR. NIRUPAM SEN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE, ON THE
SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN AT THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON MARCH 20, 2007

Your Excellency, Mr. President,

At the outset I convey the regrets of Ambassador Nirupam Sen, Permanent Representative of India, for his inability at the last minute to address this august body on behalf of India. I have the honour to read this statement on his behalf.

India joins other delegations in congratulating you on your outstanding stewardship of the Security Council for this month. We also thank Special Representative Koenigs and UNDOC Executive Director Costa, for their informative and lucid briefings. For India, given our historic and cultural ties with the Afghan people, today's topic is one of great importance, especially as the Security Council considers extending the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

Mr. President,

The ongoing effort to help Afghanistan emerge from war, strife and privation remains the responsibility of the international community, in particular, the States of the region. Hence, consolidation of the hard-won gains since the fall of the regressive Taliban regime must be a long-term strategic objective for all of us; not merely a tactical maneuver for the present.

At the outset, therefore, the latest report of the Secretary General on Afghanistan accords well with India's own assessment of the situation on the ground. However, sections of the report on the security situation make depressing reading, not the least of which is the frequent use of the term "insurgents"; to us, this is a euphemism that does not begin to describe extremists and terrorists of the most vicious sort. The report also throws Afghanistan's steady slide into violence into sharp relief. India has consistently held that one cannot negotiate with those who choose the path of terror. Three months ago, India had noted that it was not evident that efforts to find ways of negotiating peace in the more troubled provinces of

Afghanistan were succeeding. Sadly, the Secretary General's report and the increasing trend of suicide attacks by terrorists only reinforce this point. Tolerating the spiral of violence is not an option, and a strong, unified international voice condemning international terrorism is the need of the day. We must maintain a robust response to terror, while simultaneously focusing upon the most rapid possible expansion of capacity in Afghanistan to deliver effective governance, development and the dividends of peace. The reason for this prioritization is as simple as it is self-evident: development, good governance and other symbols of democracy are based primarily on peace and stability.

It is in this context that we welcome the completion of the expansion of ISAF, the current strategy of deploying more Provincial Reconstruction Teams, and the effort to expand the capacity and the size of the Afghan National Army and the Afghan Police. It is particularly creditable, as the report notes, that the Afghan Army is taking an active part in combat operations while it is under training, and simultaneously dealing with a situation of "improving" logistics support, administrative institutions and so on. Assistance for the national Budget, to enable a rapid expansion of capacity for the Police and the Army, remains inadequate, and this is a cause for concern. It must be part of the international community's long-term strategy to enable the Afghan state to support appropriately-equipped, well-funded, pan-Afghan institutions of State that exercise the State's monopoly over the use of force. Until there is predictability and irreversibility of this process, it is unlikely that efforts to disband illegally armed groups will be taken forward meaningfully. Until Afghan forces of law and order are not fully empowered, the nexus between drug trafficking and terror cannot be broken.

Mr. President,

This brings us to the question of development. Under normal circumstances, timetables for reconstruction do not need to be so tightly telescoped, and benefits can be spread thinly and as widely as possible. The situation in Afghanistan however, requires that development follows in the wake of security, and thus, it is occasionally less than even-handed. The example of drug trafficking is particularly relevant. At one level, firm action is required against drug lords and their mercenaries, as well as those who process the raw material. But having taken such action, the effort must be to rapidly follow-up by providing alternative sources of employment to farmers and other unwitting victims of the drug industry. In such circumstances, it is difficult to ensure a fully even-handed approach.

In this context, we note that there is often a tendency amongst donors to seek to resolve all possible problems in the recipient country at once. This is natural, and to an extent, understandable. However, one cannot be prescriptive in providing assistance, as this is often the surest way to alienate the recipients of our good intentions. It is our view that donors must let the Afghan government and people draw up their list of developmental priorities, and these may occasionally differ from

our own. Once basics such as food, medicine, shelter and education are provided for, in an atmosphere of relative security, it is natural that the recipients of assistance will want to build upon such gains incrementally.

We should also focus on the many achievements of Afghanistan in the past five years as a case of the glass being half-full, not bemoan the half that remains empty. The Afghan leadership would be the first to acknowledge the existence of corruption, the far-from-complete access of people to Afghan public service institutions and judiciary, its still-evolving political system. But there can be little doubt that given the widespread anarchy of past decades, ongoing campaigns of terror, drought and devastation, whatever has been achieved so far is nothing short of miraculous. The list of chores ahead of the Afghan State merits the widest and most sustained programme of assistance from all of us.

Mr. President,

This brings us to the role of regional and international assistance, and the need for closer and more effective coordination between international organizations and stakeholders in Afghanistan. In this context, I commend the efficacy of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board process, which has begun to coordinate the work of an array of international actors from the region and beyond. India is ready to continue to contribute to such an effort. In this context, it is essential to underline that despite the myriad challenges before us in Afghanistan, the countries of the region cannot but play a larger and more direct role in reintegrating Afghanistan into the region. Indeed, lasting development in Afghanistan will eventually be based on a revival of the age-old commercial, social, cultural and political ties that made Afghanistan the cross-roads of East and West Asia, South Asia and Central Asia.

India is attempting to support precisely such a transformation. India had the honour to join Afghanistan in hosting the Second Regional Economic Cooperation Conference in November 2006 in New Delhi, at which both Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Karzai were present. As the incoming Chair of SAARC, we are delighted to host Afghanistan at its first SAARC Summit in early April this year in New Delhi. We believe that this will strengthen regional cooperation, while also enabling SAARC to reach out to Central and West Asia. We also believe that Afghanistan's entry into SAARC will help SAARC address issues relating to transit and free flow of goods across borders, which will lead to greater economic development of Afghanistan and the region as a whole.

Bilaterally, India has continued to make strenuous efforts to support reconstruction in the widest possible spectrum of activities in Afghanistan. Our current commitments exceed US \$ 750 million, and cover the gamut of activities, from large projects such as road construction, power transmission lines, construction and refurbishment of dams, to more locally-relevant projects such as supplying and refurbishing hospitals,

schools, community organizations, cold storage plants and so on. We are also mindful of the need to support investment in capacity building, within Afghanistan, and through the provision of over 500 scholarships a year to study in India. It is also our endeavour to ensure that our assistance is widely spread among the regions of Afghanistan.

In conclusion, Mr President, India will endeavour to assist to the extent possible, in every activity that can buttress peace in Afghanistan. We see this as an investment in our region, and as a means of assisting a fraternal people. In all our efforts aimed towards reconstruction and development of Afghanistan, we have ensured close involvement of the Government of Afghanistan and the welfare of its people. With this as our common goal, I reiterate India's abiding commitment to support reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan.

I thank you, Mr. President.

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