Statement by H.E. Mr. Zahir Tanin, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations

Please allow me to begin by congratulating you, Madam, and your delegation on assuming the presidency of the Council for the month of January. I thank you for convening today's important meeting on post-conflict peacebuilding and institution-building. Our thanks also go to the Secretary-General for his remarks. I would also like to thank His Excellency Deputy Prime Minister José Luis Guterres, who spoke on behalf of the Group of Seven Plus, of which Afghanistan is a member.

Institution-building is one of the essential components in establishing a peaceful and sustainable future in any post-conflict situation. The requirements for successful institution-building in post-conflict settings include recognizing unique contexts; steady provision of resources; growth of human capital; national, regional and international cooperation; and strategic patience through the transition period. In Afghanistan, we have learned first hand the importance of each of these requirements.

In the ubiquitous debate on the current situation in Afghanistan, it is easy to overlook the 30 years of conflict that Afghanistan has overcome in order to reach a point at which, today, we can discuss institution-building and post-conflict peacebuilding. Let us not underestimate the time it takes to surpass the challenges of history. An environment such as Afghanistan's, which has faced complex conflict, power struggles and ongoing violence for decades, cannot be changed overnight. As we engage in each and every discussion about the training of the Afghan army and police, the timeline for military engagement or international partnerships, we must keep this context in mind.

In 2001, Afghanistan was considered to be the most failed State in the world. The fall of the Taliban left a weakly governed State with no professional police or army to quell the ongoing fighting around the country. In 2001, Afghanistan lacked State institutions and had a budget of merely $27 million. After having hundreds of thousands of military and non-military Government employees in the early 1990s, educated and skilled workers fled the country and its Government was left with fewer than 2,000 employees with higher educations. Many Government institutions were non-functional because basic staffing and resourcing needs were not met.

Given the magnitude of destruction, stabilization efforts in Afghanistan have produced impressive results. Despite its uphill climb since the time of Taliban rule, Afghanistan has experienced political transformation and development over the past decade, achieved through the support of the international community. The political process for the continued growth of the country is in place. Nearly 7 million refugees have returned. Women's roles in politics have steadily increased. Civil society has emerged triumphant in a more unified and organized manner. There are many areas in the country where we are witnessing governance for the first time in decades. Progress in the area of infrastructure development, including building and paving roads and increased access to water, education and health care, has been among the most rapid of any post-conflict nation in decades. Women and girls now have equal access to education.

Security institutions have developed, supporting the emergence of Afghan national ownership. The last year has shown that it is possible to increase the Afghan National Army substantially and simultaneously to see its planning and combat abilities improve. Local administrations have increased their involvement in security efforts, particularly through the engagement of the Afghan people, especially elders, in defence programmes in villages.

As a measure to end violence and achieve lasting peace, we in Afghanistan have prioritized reintegration and reconciliation. We continue to encourage members of the armed opposition to put down their weapons, choose the path of peace and join efforts for stabilization and rehabilitation in the country. Progress continues towards implementing the recommendations of our National Consultative Peace Jirga, which constitutes the core of our reconciliation efforts. Now that we have come halfway, it is the Taliban's turn to fulfil its responsibility. If the Taliban wants to join peace talks, it must end violence and terrorist attacks, including suicide bombings, the planting of improvised explosive devices, kidnappings and targeted assassinations, and sever ties with Al-Qaida and other terrorist groups.

We must also anticipate the challenges we will face going forward. The biggest issue — not just for Afghanistan, but for any post-conflict country — is the sustainability of peace. The functionality of institutions is necessary; a country must have the resources, human capital and capacity to stop the threat of insurgency if it is to avoid relapsing into conflict. Capacity-building is essential if State institutions are to operate effectively. Empowering State institutions means enabling a national Government to provide services for its citizens.

In any post-conflict setting, sustained international engagement in the institution-building stages beyond military involvement is necessary for peacebuilding efforts to endure. In Afghanistan, an additional component of the stabilization process is effective regional cooperation. Progress is at risk of unravelling if these partnerships do not remain strong.

Democratization in post-conflict countries is a multidimensional challenge. We have learned from our experience that the democratization process requires sustained security, as well as political and development support. However, as has been emphasized time and again, democracy grows from within and external actors can only support it. The international community and key national stakeholders must work collaboratively with integrative strategies to provide effective support for democratization.

In the coming years, national ownership and leadership with continued international partnerships will be key for Afghanistan. The adoption of the Kabul process involves greater Afghan responsibility for security, development and governance in the country. The significant increase in the amount of international funding channelled through the Afghan Government reflects renewed support for national ownership. The Afghan Government is committed to assuming full responsibility for security efforts with the support of the international community by the end of 2014. It is a gradual and conditions-based process that relies upon support for the building of the Afghan security forces' size, strength and operational capability.

Building peace by developing institutions can help address the causes of conflict. However, it is necessary to end violence in order to create an environment in which institutions can flourish. Progress can be destroyed when conflict flares up. We must not forget the lessons we have learned in Afghanistan. A school or clinic built in six months can be destroyed in only six minutes by the Taliban or other extremists. Furthermore, the importance of effective international partnerships during post-conflict situations cannot be overestimated. In this regard, adequate resourcing and capacity-building are preconditions for ensuring lasting peace.