

Security Council Open Debate on UNAMA, March 19th 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Mr. Kolga, Permanent Mission of Estonia to the United Nations.

I would first like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting. By the same token, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and the presentation of his report (S/2013/133). I would also like to thank Special Representative Ján Kubiš for the hard work that he and his Mission have delivered on the ground in Afghanistan. I would also like to thank Ambassador Tanin for his comprehensive remarks today. My delegation also aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

Afghanistan has made great progress in recent years, and it is important that that momentum not be lost as it goes through one of the most pivotal periods in the country's history. It is vital that the international community remain strongly engaged in endorsing Afghanistan's efforts during the transition phase, as well as after 2014. I can assure the Council that Estonia will stay committed to supporting Afghanistan after the completion of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission.

Estonia has been a long-term partner of Afghanistan. There is no other country in the world where our engagement is as strong as in Afghanistan. Estonia is one of the highest per capita contributors to the ISAF mission. Our troops are in Helmand province together with British troops. The contingent is expected to be withdrawn in mid-2014. By keeping our company in Afghanistan until the end of the election period, we aim to make a contribution to safeguarding the future of Afghanistan. We are also looking at financially supporting the post-2014 mission and the sustainability of the Afghan National Security Forces. Estonia is also contributing to the European Union Police Mission and the NATO training mission.

We do not believe that there can be a sustainable solution in Afghanistan that involves only a military contribution. In order to target the causes of the problems that Afghanistan is facing, we must continue our efforts with development cooperation after 2014.

Estonia's development assistance is focused on four sectors, namely, security, education, health care and the rule of law. In addition to supporting the central Government through our annual contributions to the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, we are carrying out bilateral projects to help Afghanistan with our knowledge and experience. For instance, Kabul University is currently establishing a master's programme in information technology with the support of Tallinn University, and we continue to invite Afghan civil servants to training courses in Tallinn.

I would also like to draw attention to the human rights situation. There have been gains in the protection of human rights in Afghanistan, although action is needed to improve the situation.

In our development projects, Estonia pays extra attention to promoting women's rights and the well-being of children, as they are the most vulnerable groups. We believe that traditions or beliefs should never be used as a pretext for gender inequality and non-recognition of women's rights. At the recent session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Estonian Foreign Minister, Mr. Urmas Paet, strongly condemned all kinds of violence against women and girls. We hope that the adoption of the agreed conclusions of the Commission will give further impetus to combating violence against women and girls in Afghanistan. Estonia calls for the effective and swift implementation of the action plan for the prevention of underage recruitment and its annexes on killing and maiming and sexual violence against children.

There are still many challenges ahead on Afghanistan's path to becoming a stable, secure, democratic

and prosperous country, namely, the transition of security and civilian responsibility, the reconciliation process, the elections next year and last but not least, the economic transition.

We are pleased to note that the transition of security to Afghan forces is on track and that the Afghan Government has announced that the Afghan forces are set to take over responsibility for the security of nearly 90 per cent of the country's population.

The implementation of the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework is fundamental for long-term stability and future successes in Afghanistan, and we recognize the significant progress made in the process.

Free, transparent and fair elections in 2014 and 2015 are paramount in improving the legitimacy of the political transition and in consolidating democracy in Afghanistan. We underline the urgency of adopting a legal and institutional framework with an adequate system of checks and balances for the proper conduct of elections. With the help of coalition forces, a secure environment for the elections should be provided. We emphasize the importance of establishing an effective electoral administration and fraud-prevention mechanisms. The United Nations role remains essential in preparations for the elections through technical and financial assistance.

The reconciliation process in the country should of course be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. However, in our view, the strong support from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to the High Peace Council in building confidence and trust has been indispensable.

With regard to Afghan economic development and transition, we encourage the Government to implement necessary reforms, give all the necessary support to the private sector, ensure a secure and stable business environment and improve measures for fighting corruption. Investing in people's education and skills is also important to further economic growth.

Strengthening regional cooperation with neighbouring South and Central Asian countries is key for achieving a durable security environment in Afghanistan. In addition, close regional cooperation creates opportunities for economic development. Therefore, Estonia supports the Istanbul Process and the implementation of confidence-building measures.

The United Nations and UNAMA have been taking an important lead in civil-military coordination, international development aid cooperation, the protection of human rights, the monitoring of the humanitarian situation, counter-narcotics efforts, and, as mentioned, in facilitating the reconciliation process and assistance for elections. For that reason, it is hard to underestimate the role that the United Nations and its bodies have played in Afghanistan. After the departure of the foreign military forces, that role is only likely to increase.

As the United Nations commitment and assistance are substantial in the transition period in Afghanistan, we fully support the extension of UNAMA's mandate for another year.