

STATEMENT BY MR. NIRUPAM SEN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE, ON THE
SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN AT SECURITY COUNCIL ON JULY 09, 2008

Mr. President,

Let me begin by expressing my delegation's pleasure at seeing your delegation assume the Presidency of the Security Council for this month. I also express India's appreciation to you, Mr. President, for scheduling today's debate on this important topic. Let me also welcome the presence of His Excellency Dr Rangin Spanta, Foreign Minister of Afghanistan and H.E Mr. Makhdoom Shah Mohammed Qureshi, Foreign Minister of Pakistan, and thank them for their statements, as well as their expressions of concern and sympathy over the terrorist attack at our Embassy in Kabul, their clear condemnation of which has been echoed by Members of this Council today. Last but not least, I also thank Special Representative Kai Eide, and USG John Holmes for their briefings today.

Mr President,

I am distressed to have to begin my statement by acknowledging the condolences of this Council over the barbaric attack upon our Embassy in Kabul two days ago. Not only were scores of innocent Afghan lives lost, we also lost four Indian colleagues working with a fraternal people in their hour of need. Those who perpetrated this act, and those who train and protect terrorists and enable them to commit horrific acts of violence, are no better than the basest criminals. It is for this reason that security within Afghanistan, and coordinated efforts to stop terrorists from operating with impunity beyond Afghanistan's borders must be the paramount priority of our collective efforts in Afghanistan. For those who commit these acts, and for those responsible for the greater villainy of sheltering and enabling terrorists, our response remains firm and unyielding, as our Prime Minister said: "We have lost Indians who were helping their Afghan brothers rebuild their lives and country. That endeavour must continue with renewed commitment". While mourning their loss, we believe we can best honour our fallen colleagues by redoubling our commitment to working with Afghanistan to secure stability and development in that country and consequently, in the region.

Mr. President,

Our discussion today takes place in the context of the recently-convened Paris Conference in Support of Afghanistan. Having participated in this Conference at the political level, India welcomes its outcome, and the proposed Presidential Statement of this Council in support of that outcome. We share the sense in this room of the need for the international community to provide not just the resources—important as they are—but also the much-needed political space to UNAMA to enable it to exercise its mandate to assist the national Government coordinate international assistance for Afghanistan.

In this context, I should also underline that as a regional partner and a country with strong historic and cultural links with Afghanistan, India sees merit in the approach adopted by SRSG Eide, as reflected in the report before us. The mandate provided to UNAMA by this Council through resolution 1806 provides ample scope for the UN to play a central role in the international community. Streamlining our collective efforts through UNAMA, in support of the newly-adopted Afghan National Development Strategy, and through the national Budget, will underscore that international assistance is in line with priorities set by Afghanistan. What is however crucial is that such coordination must be effected in a manner that is coherent and focused. We need to avoid the temptation of trying to resolve all of Afghanistan's problems at once, just as we need to avoid the pitfalls of setting unrealistic benchmarks and objectives that are desirable for us, but less so for the very people we seek to help. While the international community collectively repeats commitments underscoring the importance of such a demand-driven approach, greater efforts are required on the ground to realize such commitments. Without an Afghan-led process of discussing and finalizing the prioritization of tasks, our collective efforts run the very real risk of losing legitimacy.

Events on the ground make it clear that any listing of challenges before the Afghan people must begin with security. We cannot afford to slacken our resolve or our efforts in combating the forces of terrorism, extremism and crime, wherever and in whatever forms these groups may take. Most importantly, this must be a collective effort: we cannot succeed if we send mixed signals through bargains for temporary and local peace, while the rest of us contend with the consequences of such deals. The rising trend of attacks, abductions and suicide bombings is also a sign that terrorist groups are emboldened by displays of wavering confidence that such bargains imply, and therefore hope to weaken our collective resolve. We cannot have partial compromises with such forces and yet nurture hopes of prevailing in Afghanistan. We remain convinced that there needs to be a much closer alignment between the consistent application of force wherever terrorist groups are present, and the political objectives of our efforts in Afghanistan, in which UNAMA must play an important role.

Results cannot be achieved “on the ground” without adequate attention to both security and developmental components. However, to achieve sustainable success over the long-term on both fronts, the common denominator is capacity-building. Thus far, our collective effort in this vital aspect has been episodic and inadequate. We need to do better expeditiously. The report identifies some of the key areas in which such capacity building efforts are vital, and we concur in particular with the notion that strengthening of the national police and public administration have to be taken up as a priority. Limited results in this regard will be reflected by an equally paltry list for us to show for our efforts in any of the benchmarks for progress that we may have set ourselves, be they in the field of counter-narcotics or efficient utilization of budgetary resources. It is for this reason that India has made capacity-building a priority element in all our efforts in Afghanistan, even in the infrastructure projects we are executing in Afghanistan, all of which include strong capacity-building components in them.

To achieve these and other core objectives in Afghanistan, we have collectively agreed to empower the UN, through its Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, to facilitate greater coherence amongst us, and between us and our hosts. However, we cannot achieve results unless we enable UNAMA to do its job, by providing it the material and human resources to execute its mandate in Afghanistan. Not only does the UN need these resources on an exceptional basis for Afghanistan, it needs these exceptionally soon. The time for us to empower UNAMA is now.

Mr. President,

India will remain fully committed to implementing the inter-related security, political and developmental challenges facing Afghanistan. We remain unflinching in our commitment to reconstruction, development and capacity-building in Afghanistan. As one of Afghanistan’s largest development partners, India remains willing to support UNAMA in improving donor cohesion, in support of Afghan-defined priorities.

In conclusion, Mr President, let me also reiterate our abiding belief and commitment to our shared objective: assisting Afghanistan complete its re-emergence as a modern democratic country, confident in its unique culture and pluralistic identities, at peace with itself and secure in its neighbourhood, firmly on the path to sustainable economic development and liberated from the burdens of the recent history of strife and privation. It is for this reason that we fully endorse the effort to empower the UN to bring us together in a more coherent partnership, to enable Afghanistan to secure the better future that lies within its reach.

I thank you, Mr. President.

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