

Agenda Items 20(f) and 43: Emergency International Assistance for Peace, Normalcy and Reconstruction of War-Stricken Afghanistan and the Situation in Afghanistan and its Implications for International Peace and Security

Statement by Mr. Satyabrata Pal, Acting Permanent Representative

on December 20, 2001

Mr. President,

For some years now, the General Assembly has gone through the motions on this agenda item, knowing that our words would fall on deaf ears in Kabul and Kandahar, from where the Taliban rode Afghanistan like an incubus. This year, though, we meet when it seems that the Afghans might be coming to the end of their long night and their longer nightmare. But if the hope that glimmers now is not to be a false dawn, the international community, represented here, must accept that it has a duty to help Afghanistan back to peace, progress and prosperity.

At Bonn last month, the Afghans took the first but momentous step towards rebuilding their country. Two days from now, they take the next when the Interim Administration assumes charge, and the pace will then quicken. Journey's end will be a political system that would be broad-based and multi-ethnic, and in which all groups would be equitably represented, through free and fair elections. This will be a difficult journey; it will need courage and resolve to persevere, but, fortunately, in all of Afghanistan's privations, these have never been in short supply.

The Afghans are trying to walk out of the valley of the shadow of death, and the international community must walk with them. But we should give them the help they need and ask for, not what we think is best for them. The Afghans have had enough of fatwas wished upon them by people who thought they had all the answers; fatwas should not be replaced by fiat. So what should the international community do? Some broad principles would be worth bearing in mind:

- We should listen carefully to what the Afghans want, and respond to their needs.**
- The best solutions will be home-grown, rooted in Afghan realities. Anything imposed will either be rejected or it will wither.**
- We must use and foster local talent and capabilities. In Afghanistan, even more than elsewhere, the only enduring solutions will be those that build on and develop local capacities.**

- **Afghan women must have an important role to play and a say in Afghan recovery; after the years of neglect they suffered under the Taliban, they will need special attention.**
- **There is no magic wand. Afghan recovery will take a very long time, and the international community must stay the course.**
- **International support should be guided by a sense of duty and fellowship, not by the pursuit of narrow self-interest. It should be committed to the unity, sovereignty, territorial unity and independence of Afghanistan.**
- **There must be no interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan; what Afghans need from their friends is intelligent service, not the attention of intelligence services.**

Mr. President,

Basing ourselves on these principles, India is ready to do what it can. We have pledged a million tonnes of wheat for Afghans in need, and are in touch with governments and UN agencies, including the World Food Programme, to have this quickly delivered. In October, we sent two consignments of medical relief supplies to Dushanbe for Afghan refugees; tents, quilts, blankets, tea and food are on the way.

As soon as Kabul was liberated, we flew in a team of doctors with five tonnes of medicines to re-start the Indira Gandhi Hospital for Women and Children. We are working to set up mobile hospitals and dispensaries, medical and healthcare programmes for women and children, and camps to fit artificial limbs. We have sent medical relief supplies and services to other parts of Afghanistan, including Mazar-e-Sharif, and similar assistance is being planned for Herat. We would be prepared to assist the de-mining effort. The Prime Minister has announced a line of credit of \$100 million for the reconstruction of the infrastructure and economy.

Before 1979, Afghanistan was the largest partner in India's technical and economic cooperation programme. Areas covered included dam construction, agriculture, horticulture, hospitals and archaeology. We are ready to offer training and technical assistance, appropriate to the needs of Afghanistan, in a broad range of sectors.

After these decades of war, Afghanistan's needs are so enormous that they can only be met by a coordinated international response. It would be a pity if we duplicated efforts, or if

assistance from various sources worked at cross-purposes. To avoid this, and to make sure that what we do is best for Afghanistan, we should have, preferably under the aegis of the UN, an inclusive and transparent mechanism that, at the very least, collates and disseminates information on Afghan needs and the international response.

We are pleased that the Group of 21 has been revived; we have participated in its meetings and believe it has a most useful role to play. We have also associated ourselves with the international efforts to help Afghanistan. We were at Bonn, of course, and we have taken part in the meetings in Washington and Islamabad on Afghanistan's reconstruction, held last month; a team from India is in Brussels now for the follow-up meeting that takes place there today and tomorrow. We will continue to remain engaged.

It goes without saying that emergency relief, long-term recovery, and even Afghanistan's political evolution will depend very much on its being able to set aside the culture of the gun. This is again very much in the self-interest of all Afghans and primarily their responsibility to bear. In its resolution 1383 of 6 December 2001, the Security Council demonstrated its confidence in the Afghan groups by calling upon them to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian workers. The Interim Administration and the structures to follow will want peace in their land. The international community should do everything it can to strengthen their authority, and help them rapidly establish an Afghan force; it should do nothing that would undermine the authority of the Interim Administration or that would make it appear powerless in the eyes of its citizens. That would invite further grief.

As the Interim Administration takes office in Kabul, we, and all of Afghanistan's friends, wish it every success. We would also like to offer a word of caution. All of us, and particularly those of us in Afghanistan's neighbourhood, want to see it stable, democratic and moderate, ruled by governments that are elected by Afghans, represent their collective interests, protect their fundamental rights, and promote economic and social development. Afghans will get this only if the alien and repressive creed that the Taliban represented is not allowed to creep back into governance. The Taliban claimed to represent the Pushtuns, but the foreign codes of behaviour they forced on Afghans were as opposed to Pushtunwali, the code of the Pushtuns, as it is possible to be.

The Taliban are in disarray, they may have fled to their bolt-holes, but obituaries on them would be premature. The hatreds they nurtured, the sponsors who set them up, and the ambitions that drove them have not gone away. They must not be allowed to creep back into governance, wearing other masks or new allegiances. The Taliban by any other name is and must be anathema.

Before I conclude, Mr. President, allow me to offer two words of thanks, both richly deserved. The first is to Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, who worked so hard to make the Bonn Agreement possible; we are delighted that he will now coordinate the UN's work as it follows up on the Agreement. The second is to Germany, which hosted the intra-Afghan talks, and which has for years shown its commitment to Afghanistan in its piloting of this annual resolution, which we have joined as co-sponsors.