

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR HARDEEP SINGH PURI, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE,  
DEBATE ON UNAMA, AT THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL, ON MARCH 20, 2012

Mr. President.

At the outset, I would like to thank you for scheduling today's debate on the situation in Afghanistan. I thank Ambassador Zahir Tanin, PR of Afghanistan for his statement. I would also like to thank Mr. Ján Kubiš, UNSG's Special Representative for his briefing and to the Secretary General for his latest report on Afghanistan.

2. Mr. President, It is now more than a decade since the international community came together to assist Afghanistan with the shared goal of eliminating terrorism and the safe havens and sanctuaries from where it is emanating, right from the source and to set the country firmly on the path to security, recovery, reconstruction and development. The progress made since then cannot be underestimated. However, the journey is far from over and much more needs to be done.

3. The last few months have witnessed important high-level regional and international engagements on Afghanistan. The Istanbul Conference provided a new impetus to regional cooperation. The outcome of the Bonn Conference, as embodied in the Bonn Conference Conclusions, was an expression of the international community's determination and political commitment to sustained long-term engagement with Afghanistan. The upcoming Conferences in 2012, including the NATO Chicago Summit in May on security, the follow-up Ministerial Conference in Kabul in June on regional cooperation, and the Tokyo Conference in July on development, will be instrumental in working out clearly defined and tangible commitments in the critical areas of security, governance, trade promotion, investment, development and regional cooperation. Afghanistan today confronts major challenges in these areas and will need considerable assistance for a long time, even beyond the transition period, to address these challenges.

4. First and foremost, concerns on the security front continue to remain paramount. The security gains achieved during the last decade are still tenuous and fragile. Terrorist violence shows no signs of receding and civilian casualties attributed to anti-government elements have continued to rise over the last five years, hitting a peak in 2011. Terrorism continues to find sustenance and support from a dangerous osmosis of ideologies, ambitions, training and operations among the syndicate of terrorism in the region with suicide terrorism as its main technique, and targets not limited to Afghanistan. We need concerted action to isolate and root out this syndicate of terrorism which includes elements of the Al Qaida, Taliban, Laskar-e-Taiba and other terrorist and extremist groups operating mainly from outside Afghanistan's borders.

5. Afghanistan needs assistance and support to build its capacity to tackle the critical challenges of terrorism, including suicide terrorism, the religious extremism that fuels it, and the drug trafficking that sustains it. We must ensure that Afghanistan's security is ensured through non-interference in its internal affairs. As Afghanistan

moves ahead with the transition process, we must take into account the conditions on the ground and the capacity of Afghanistan's security forces to preserve sovereignty, independence and territorial unity and integrity of their nation. We support all efforts for strengthening of the Afghan National Security Forces and this must go hand-in-hand with strengthening of their training and equipping, financing and development of their capabilities beyond the transition period.

6. Mr President, India fully supports an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned inclusive and transparent process of reconciliation as opposed to an internationally-led process, accompanied by an inclusive political process and intra-Afghan dialogue that should include renunciation of violence, cutting of ties to terrorist groups, abiding by the Afghan constitution with its protections for human rights, including the rights of women. It is important that any political settlement does not jeopardize the hard won gains of the last ten years and is acceptable to all constituents of the Afghan nation. It is also important that the ongoing transition must remain Afghan-led and Afghan-owned, must be multi-faceted and should ensure the protection and promotion of the human rights of all Afghans and lead to the strengthening of the Afghan state and its institutions.

7. With the gradual drawing down of international forces from their combat role, there are already signs of a transition recession. We need to find ways and means to ensure that Afghanistan does not feel abandoned by a withdrawal of assistance, at least in terms of quantity, if not quality, of international assistance required, post-2014. Afghanistan needs a comprehensive strategy for its domestic/national development that takes into account its Least Developed Country status, its land-locked situation, three decades of conflict and a continued existential threat to its future from terrorism. Such a strategy should include security cooperation, official development assistance, capacity-building and education, trade access, and foreign investment commensurate with its needs. I am happy to state that India is contributing in each of these areas. This is also the approach that we advocate for the Chicago, Kabul and Tokyo Conferences. We also need greater coherence, coordination and further streamlining of the international community's development-related efforts, including aligning of assistance with the Afghan national priorities.

8. In this context, we are appreciative of the comprehensive review of the UNAMA's mandated activities and the UN's support in Afghanistan and the UNDP's intent to channel 80% of its assistance through on-budget support. India appreciates and supports the work of UNAMA.

9. Mr. President, India has age-old historical, cultural, civilizational and economic ties with our neighbour, Afghanistan. During the last decade, our relationship has been renewed and consolidated by our partnership in the rebuilding and reconstruction of Afghanistan. India has pledged up to US \$ 2 billion in development and humanitarian assistance. India signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement with Afghanistan last October, looking at 2014 and beyond. The Agreement creates an institutional framework for our multi-faceted relationship, in the fields of political

and security cooperation, trade and economic cooperation, capacity-building and education, and social, cultural, civil society and people-to-people relations. In November, 2011, we eliminated base line customs duties on virtually all imports from Afghanistan, and in December, a consortium of 7 Indian public and private sector companies were awarded the bid for 3 blocks of the Hajigak iron ore reserves.

10. We are happy to note the enhanced focus on regional cooperation. Today our investments in Afghanistan require a framework of regional collaboration for their success. SAARC, of which Afghanistan is a full member, is an important vehicle for regional economic cooperation within the South Asian region. Cooperation linking our region with Central Asia through Afghanistan could be a critical confidence building measure.

11. We firmly believe that Afghanistan's growth strategy has to be built upon its comparative advantage of abundant natural resources and its strategic geographical location. These would have to be the building blocks of our vision for Afghanistan as a hub linking Middle East and West Asia with Central and South Asia through trade and transit routes, railways and highways, energy pipelines and electricity networks, economic projects and cross-investments. This cooperation should not be only between governments, but have civil society and business as stakeholders. In this context, we are prepared to make long-term investments in Afghanistan as we have done with Hajigak.

12. In conclusion, Mr. President, India believes in a strong, independent, sovereign, stable, united, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan at lasting peace with itself and its neighbours. We look forward to a future for Afghanistan where the Afghan people can live in peace and security and decide their future themselves, without outside interference, coercion and intimidation. We must continue to work together with renewed vigour and unity of purpose towards strengthening efforts of the Afghan government in seeking solutions that are inclusive and led by the Afghan people themselves. It is with this spirit that India will continue to remain engaged with the international community's efforts in Afghanistan.

Thank you.

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