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Provisional

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New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Loulichki/Mr. Bouchaara	(Morocco)
 <i>Members:</i>		
	Azerbaijan	Mr. Musayev
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	Colombia	Mr. Osorio
	France	Mr. Briens
	Germany	Mr. Wittig
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	India	Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri
	Pakistan	Mr. Masood Khan
	Portugal	Mr. Cabral
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Laher
	Togo	Mr. M'Beou
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Mrs. DiCarlo

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2012/907)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2012/907)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Ján Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Ioannis Vrailas, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2012/907, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

I now give the floor to Mr. Kubiš.

Mr. Kubiš: I will shortly mark my first full year of representing the United Nations in Afghanistan. It has been both a challenge and a privilege.

From Kabul, the international media's relentless depiction of Afghanistan almost solely as a place of conflict and terror is disconcerting. However, Afghanistan today is about so much more. In my travels around 22 provinces this past year, I have seen girls and boys getting an education unthinkable a decade ago, bustling and industrious towns and villages and Government institutions slowly becoming increasingly capable, with Afghans determined to take their destiny into their own hands. Any transition is, by definition, a delicate period. Certainty and sustained partnership with Afghanistan is what is required now, ensuring

that the Afghan people have the confidence to focus on building a better future.

The Chicago and Tokyo conferences provided a solid foundation. Sound and representative governance is central to the concept of transition and underpins sustainability. This includes a credible and widely accepted constitutional transfer of power with the 2014 presidential election. The Independent Election Commission has now named the date — 5 April 2014. The second part of the electoral indicator is the development of a credible and robust electoral architecture by early 2013.

Just as important as what is agreed is how it is agreed, with commitment to a transparent, inclusive and consultative process. Vital issues such as the electoral system, appointments to the management bodies, and a dispute resolution mechanism are currently the subjects of vigorous debate. I am closely following the progress of the two electoral laws, which will require compromise on all sides.

The Council of Minister's support for building a system of voter identification and eligibility based on two pillars — the issuance of electronic national identity cards and a series of fraud-mitigating measures — requires a coherent approach across Afghan institutions, with strong Afghan leadership in driving the implementation of the national identification programme. Such arrangements must respect and reinforce the different constitutional roles and responsibilities of the various institutions, including the constitutionally mandated authority of the Independent Election Commission in the compilation and finalization of the voter list. They must ensure the broadest possible enfranchisement of Afghan actors across the country and create conditions for the fullest possible participation of the Afghans, men and women on election day throughout the country.

Given the necessary realignment of electoral assistance, a United Nations needs assessment mission made an initial visit to Kabul in December. Following a second visit in early 2013, the team will advise United Nations leadership on appropriate parameters for support to Afghan-led and managed electoral processes.

In ensuring the legitimacy of institutions, anti-corruption efforts are also high on the agenda. I welcome the robust reporting of the Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee on the Kabul Bank crisis. A public inquiry is

a valuable step towards public accountability. Decisive Government action to strengthen the country's financial sector is now required to ensure that such events are never repeated.

Closely correlated with corruption is the corrosive effect of the narcotics industry. The increase in both cannabis and opium cultivation reported in this period must be a wake-up call, with the illicit economy being an active impediment to institutional development and sustainable growth. Greater attention to tackling this scourge – including on the part of international donors – is required across all lines of effort, including the use of such platforms as the counter-narcotics confidence-building measure of the Istanbul Process.

Finally, on the issue of ensuring a sound institutional framework, I note the protracted delay in making a number of senior appointments. This includes the constitutional requirement for a new Chief Justice. Meanwhile, civil society continues to be concerned at the extended process of appointments to Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission. As was made clear at Tokyo, the protection of human rights is vital to state legitimacy and a cornerstone of sustained international engagement. The gains made over the past decade — particularly in the rights of women and girls — must be reinforced and expanded.

Progress in implementation of the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women can be seen over the past three years, but application remains uneven. Only a small number of cases are ever reported. I am, however, encouraged by what appears to be increased confidence in approaching authorities, and by successful prosecutions. The human rights unit of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) conducted research in 16 provinces over the course of a year, and found that in 470 reported cases of violence against women, prosecutors filed indictments in 163, with convictions in 100.

The challenges women who take an active role in public life still face were starkly highlighted in this period. On 1 December, Anisa, a young woman in Kapisa who was an active volunteer in vaccination initiatives was killed. Ten days later, on Human Rights Day, the acting head of the Department of Women's Affairs of Laghman province was murdered, her predecessor having been killed a few months earlier.

Civilians overall are bearing the heaviest burden of the conflict and, as the Secretary-General's report

notes, it is the insurgency that is behind the majority of cases. The Taliban leadership has reacted strongly to our assessments on civilian casualties. We stand by our verification systems and international legal definitions of civilians. To account fully and most precisely for all incidents, regardless of their perpetrators, UNAMA has been investigating all claims, including those presented by the insurgency. We continue to be ready to cooperate with all parties in order to contribute to the reduction and prevention of civilian casualties and to provide as precise and correct reporting as possible.

I welcome increased attention to the professionalization of the police with a law enforcement role distinct from the military, in line with Tokyo commitments. The new Minister of the Interior has reiterated the importance of community police initiatives in building public confidence.

National accord, reconciliation, peace, good governance and justice are Afghanistan's greatest needs. The High Peace Council's work is enjoying renewed momentum following its positive visit to Pakistan, facilitated logistically by UNAMA. High-level engagement and concrete outcomes were highlighted in the joint statement. Consistent dialogue between the neighbours can now help build upon mutual understandings, facilitate peace and reconciliation efforts, and engage the insurgency.

In support of Afghan-led efforts, encouraged by the Afghan parties and in line with its mandate, UNAMA is ready to facilitate an inclusive infra-Afghan dialogue, eventually bringing the series of dialogue meetings to Afghanistan. On 8 and 9 December, initial consultative meetings were held amongst diverse Afghan stakeholders to help define the focus, agenda, participation and modalities of such a process. The first track-two inter-Afghan dialogue under the UNAMA umbrella is planned to take place in Turkmenistan in February 2013.

I welcome the adoption of resolution 2082 (2012), which defines a strong role for the Afghan Government and provides for increased flexibility in the mechanism to secure travel ban exemptions for those insurgents who are willing to contribute towards these aims. Exploratory dialogue requires contacts with recognized interlocutors, and that resolution establishes a less onerous means to ensure compliance.

Afghanistan is increasingly embedding itself in regional consultative processes, partnership

agreements and regional organizations. The Istanbul Process has moved into practical work on the agreed confidence-building measures. I look forward to the endorsement of implementation plans at the next senior officials' meeting, to be held in Baku in February.

Afghanistan now enjoys observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. In a new development, UNAMA has also institutionalized dialogue with the organization to help seek support for a stable Afghanistan within the region.

On the security transition, the Afghan Government is seeking to assert a greater lead to smooth the many associated processes. I urge cooperation from Member States in that regard. Soon, the start of the fourth tranche of security transition will be announced by President Karzai. Afghan authorities and communities need to be better engaged on the closure of provincial reconstruction teams. So far, communication and coordination on assets- and tasks-transfer has varied enormously.

There have been some appeals to the United Nations to assume new functions and projects from other parts of the international community. However, the very core of transition is that the Afghan Government is in the lead. That must be the first port of call. Where requested by the Afghan Government, the United Nations will look to assist. I emphasize, however, that tasks and efforts must be part of agreed Afghan national priorities and strategies, and be in line with United Nations mandates and capacities.

Amid that focus on building the sustainable development systems for the future, immediate humanitarian needs must not be forgotten. Contributions for this year's consolidated humanitarian appeal—at 48 per cent of the requested \$448 million—were disappointing. I hope donors will strengthen their support in the coming year.

As I end my presentation, I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of Germany, under the leadership of Ambassador Wittig, for its support and contribution to the work of all of us as the penholder on the Afghanistan portfolio. I would also like to thank all the outgoing members of the Security Council for their support and hard work.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Kubiš for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Tanin (Afghanistan): First, let me congratulate you and your delegation, Sir, on the assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for December. My delegation assures you of our full support as you steer the activities of the Council to a successful conclusion. We are also thankful to our good friend Ambassador Singh Puri of India and his team for their excellent leadership of the Council during November.

We welcome the Secretary-General's report on Afghanistan (S/2012/907). I also wish to thank Special Representative Kubiš for honouring us with his presence here today. We are grateful to him for his insightful briefing and able leadership of the United Nations activities in the country.

Eleven years ago, following the fall of the Taliban regime, the Bonn Agreement was signed. It created a concrete road map that paved the way for a new era in Afghanistan's history. The Agreement was about an integrated national movement, aimed at establishing the foundations for peace, stability and democracy, with the help of the international community. An interim administration was established, led by President Hâmid Karzai. The inauguration ceremony, which took place on 22 December 2001, had an atmosphere filled with unprecedented enthusiasm. I was there and remember very clearly how the representatives of the Afghan people, coming from all walks of life, had come together to express their shared feelings about the difficult past and their hope for a better future.

Eleven years ago, we were weak. Conflict and consecutive foreign intervention had led us to become a failed State and a broken society; in fact, we were on the verge of collapse. It was impossible to change that situation alone. That is why the international community was placed at the centre of our efforts for peace and stability. In that historic decade, the international community and Afghanistan struggled together, worked together and joined hands for the noble objective of peace and a better future for the Afghan people. It was one of the most significant international engagements of our time, with more than 50 countries providing military and civilian support. Our shared achievements are monumental.

Early this morning I arrived from Kabul, a city that I found to be vibrant and full of life, in contrast to a city that appeared dead 11 years ago. The situation in the

country has substantially improved. It is a great source of pride and honour that millions of Afghan girls and boys are going to school, millions of people have access to health services and millions of people are emerging from poverty and destitution. But the most important success is that, 11 years later, the Government of Afghanistan, with the help of the international community, has started to take full responsibility for nation-building and for normalizing the situation. It is imperative that, during transition and beyond, we and the international community continue to be together.

As we approach 2014, when the international combat forces leave Afghanistan, the transition is gaining momentum. In the next two years, a successful security transition and, most important, an efficient political preparation will enable us to embark upon the decade of transformation, in which we will stabilize the situation in Afghanistan. The steady implementation of security transition is but one example of the many gains made thus far. With the first three stages of the five-stage transition process nearly complete, the overwhelming majority of Afghanistan's population now resides in areas where Afghan security forces have lead security responsibility. I am pleased to say that security has improved in areas where lead security responsibility has been transitioned to Afghan forces. The Afghan National Army and Police are operating with greater confidence and capability. The launch of stage four of the security transition will be officially announced in the coming days.

As the transition proceeds, we see it as imperative that the sustainability of Afghanistan's security forces remain a priority. The Chicago NATO Summit, last May, was a milestone in that regard. We appreciate the commitments pledged by NATO and other partners for long-term support to our army and police. We also look forward to the development of a new NATO mission in 2014, which will focus on training, advising and assisting Afghan national security forces.

Transition is not about security alone. To normalize and stabilize the situation in the country, we need to put in place a comprehensive political framework that will provide the country and the international community with a new agenda at the end of the military phase and at the beginning of a new, transformative period. Such a framework will comprise at least three main elements.

The first element is national consensus and national reconciliation. The Afghan people and political forces

are preparing for a new beginning in the country. The absolute majority of Afghans see their future as linked with the continuation of the democratic system that we have established over the past 10 years. There is a concern shared by all Afghan people: not to lose what we have achieved and not to go backwards, but to continue moving forward. Once again, as happened in Bonn 11 years ago, we see the prospect of an emerging unity of understanding between different political forces that can lead to unity of purpose and to a constructive national dialogue aimed at saving the future.

At the centre of that dialogue is our grand strategy of national reconciliation. The peace process gained momentum following the visit of the High Peace Council, led by His Excellency Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani, to Islamabad last month. The peace process road map, which was presented to the Government of Pakistan during the visit, provides a concise framework for effective action that focuses on the release of some Taliban detainees in Pakistan's custody, the establishment of direct contacts with influential Taliban leaders, the provision of safe passage for Taliban negotiators, and the sustaining of peace talks with the armed opposition groups, which include, but are not limited to, the Taliban.

Just two weeks ago, His Excellency Foreign Minister Rassoul paid a visit to Islamabad, where he held extensive discussions on bilateral cooperation and ways to achieve the goals set out in the peace process road map.

As the Afghan-led reconciliation process forges ahead, we will continue to rely on the support of the international community as a whole and the United Nations in particular. We look to the Council to help us expedite our efforts by meeting our delisting and travel-ban exemption requests for concerned individuals. We recognize and welcome with appreciation the fact that the successor resolution to resolution 1988 (2011) adequately incorporates the ideas and recommendations of the Afghan Government to help advance our peace and reconciliation efforts. Special thanks go to our colleagues at the United States Mission for their efforts in drafting the resolution and to the Council as a whole for the constructive spirit of compromise and cooperation during negotiations.

The second element involves elections. In April 2014, Afghanistan will choose its new leadership, just a few months before NATO combat forces leave

the country. With the elections and the end of the military phase of international support, a new chapter in Afghanistan is unfolding, one characterized by sovereignty, self-reliance and the normalization of the situation. The preparations under way are Afghan-led and Afghan-managed. The international community is assisting us in these important elections. The Afghan Independent Election Commission, with the support of the Government of Afghanistan, has responsibly begun preparations for the elections by announcing the elections calendar and by focusing on all aspects of the preparation process — political, technical and financial — well in advance.

Our diligent planning may help to bring more certainty to the Afghan people about the political transition. The draft electoral law is now under consideration by parliament. As noted by the Secretary-General in his report, elections will be the cornerstone of the political transition. Elections have the potential to become a new venue for national consensus and unity, a reflection of our shared vision of a stable and peaceful country. It will be an opportunity to put to the test our unfaltering efforts for human rights, including the rights of women.

The third element is international and regional cooperation. The key aspects of the outcomes of the Chicago and Tokyo conferences were about not only security but also political guarantees for the future. The international community and Afghans came together to build partnerships and to ensure success in achieving our shared goals. The International Security Assistance Force and General Assembly resolutions on Afghanistan reiterated the global consensus on supporting the transition and assisting Afghanistan in the long haul. We hope that this affirmation of international support will remain.

As part of our long-term partnership with the international community, we have entered into a number of bilateral and strategic partnership agreements. We are discussing with the United States the details of our security cooperation, in line with our strategic partnership. Similar discussions are ongoing with our NATO partners on the scope and shape of a new training, advisory and assistance mission. Early next month, President Karzai will visit the United States, at the invitation of President Obama. We look forward to that visit, which will go a long way towards addressing key issues in the context of our long-term partnership.

At the same time, we see visible progress in our relations with our neighbors and in expanding the scope of and strengthening regional cooperation. Relations with Pakistan have taken a new form characterized by confidence-building. In recent months, contacts at high levels have helped us concentrate on concrete areas of cooperation, including counterterrorism efforts and the strengthening of the peace process.

We are also placing special focus on relations with other partners in the region. Regional cooperation is a crucial element of Afghanistan's future peace and security, and it is taking a new shape as the Istanbul Process swiftly moves forward. The Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference, held in Kabul in June, marked the beginning of the implementation phase of the process. The conference emphasized the three key issues of political consultation, confidence-building and the role of regional organizations in making progress towards a peaceful and prosperous region that is characterized by increased confidence and joint cooperation. Seven confidence-building measures were identified covering a wide array of fields, and a number of action plans have been developed for the implementation of confidence-building measures. We look forward to the next Ministerial Meeting of the Istanbul Process, to be held in Astana, Kazakhstan, this coming April.

Afghans see the transition as an opportunity for an end to war and a means to ensure that stability and prosperity are realized. The transition is also about continuing our partnership with the international community and fulfilling our commitment to a safer, more secure and prosperous future for the Afghan people. The Bonn and Tokyo conferences were milestones in that regard, mapping out and defining the nature of the long-term partnership between Afghanistan and the international community for the way forward. On the basis of the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, we will work to address the remaining challenges through a more results-oriented cooperation and with a special focus on ensuring that mutual expectations are met.

Let me conclude by saying that we have come a long way in our joint endeavour. Eleven years later, Afghanistan is on its path to a new era, reasserting its status as a fully stable, prosperous and self-reliant country, able to meet the needs of Afghan citizens in all sectors. Afghanistan's full realization of ownership and leadership is a shared goal of Afghanistan and its

international partners, one which we must work towards jointly during this decade of transformation.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank my good friend Ambassador Wittig and his team at the German Mission for the able manner in which he has led the Council's work on Afghanistan over the past two years. It was my responsibility to say that, as we are nearing the end of the month, when the non-permanent membership of Germany will also end.

Mr. Wittig (Germany): Let me, at the outset, thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Kubiš for his comprehensive briefing. Let me also, shortly before leaving the Council, pay tribute to him personally and to the whole staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for their commitment and for the dedicated work that they are doing, in sometimes very difficult circumstances.

I align myself with the European Union statement to be delivered later in this debate.

This debate comes at the end of a crucial year for Afghanistan. Over the past 12 months, the Government of Afghanistan and the international community have engaged in a series of conferences held in Bonn, Chicago, Kabul and Tokyo. They reaffirmed their mutual commitments to long-term security, stability and development in Afghanistan throughout the transformation decade. The challenge ahead is the swift and comprehensive implementation of the decisions taken at those conferences. I would like to touch upon three issues that are key in that regard.

The first is elections. Conducting free, fair, transparent and inclusive presidential and provincial council elections in 2014 is pivotal in ensuring the legitimacy of the political transition. In that context, we welcome the Afghan Government's announcement that it will hold those elections simultaneously on 5 April 2014. Challenges remain, however, regarding voter registration and the legal framework. We encourage all relevant Afghan institutions to continue their efforts to prepare the elections in an effectively coordinated manner, working towards the common goal of conducting credible elections. UNAMA can assume a beneficial role in supporting the Government of Afghanistan in its preparations. We therefore welcome the decision taken by the Afghan authorities to request UNAMA's support for the 2014-2015 elections.

Secondly, we welcome the leading role of the Government of Afghanistan in enabling and establishing

the structural framework for the implementation of the decisions taken at the Tokyo Conference. The political and technical steering committees, working under the umbrella of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, will be instrumental in further improving the effectiveness of development cooperation. Germany looks forward to assuming its responsibilities as a member of those committees, which have already held their first meetings.

Thirdly, a stable security environment, as we all know, is of paramount importance in achieving Afghans' goal of further developing into a democratic and economically thriving country. We therefore welcome the continuing and considerable reduction in security incidents in Afghanistan. Germany remains committed to supporting Afghanistan in its efforts to achieve stability, economic growth and development.

The United Nations will continue to play a crucial role during the transformation decade to come. There are many essential and challenging tasks for UNAMA: to support preparations for the upcoming elections, to protect and promote gains in the human rights situation, particularly women's rights, and to support the Afghan Government in ensuring effective coordination between donors and the Government. Germany will therefore continue to lend its full support to UNAMA in implementing its mandate.

I would like to conclude by taking this opportunity to cordially thank our Afghan colleagues, Ambassador Tanin and his team, for their trust and friendship over the past two years, during which my country had the honour to be a member of the Council and to hold the pen for this important dossier. Germany will continue to support Afghanistan and its people on the road towards Afghan-led security, stability and development.

Mr. Masood Khan (Pakistan): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ján Kubiš for his briefing and for his able leadership of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). Pakistan has always supported and facilitated the work UNAMA. We are also encouraged by the positive feedback about Afghanistan given by Mr. Kubiš even as the Afghanistan Government tackles difficult problems. We welcome His Excellency Mr. Zahir Tanin, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, in our midst, and we appreciate his very important statement today.

UNAMA needs the support of all States Members of the United Nations to ensure predictable funding

for its challenging mandate. Budgetary cuts faced by the Mission should not compromise its core functions. With a renewed mandate since March, UNAMA has continued to align itself with the transition process. The role of UNAMA should evolve on the basis of the situation on the ground, emerging realities and, above all, the aspirations of the people of Afghanistan.

The future role of the United Nations in Afghanistan is going to be very important, especially in the wake of the drawdown and withdrawal of international forces in 2014. We urge the continued engagement of the United Nations in five critical areas: support to Government institutions, facilitation of the peace and reconciliation process, counter-narcotics, the return and rehabilitation of refugees, and the coordination of humanitarian aid, particularly food aid.

Pakistan reiterates the need to maintain the current political and financial interest in the transition process with a view to setting Afghanistan on a sustainable course. In that regard, the Tokyo Conference and the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework provide a useful mechanism of shared responsibility. Long-term international support and private-sector investment in Afghanistan are extremely important. Donor fatigue and fiscal constraints in the international economic climate should not squeeze funding in critical areas of assistance for Afghanistan.

We have always highlighted the value of dialogue and reconciliation in addressing the question of Afghan security and in changing the underlying dynamics of conflict in Afghanistan. The Afghan-led peace and reconciliation process is the essence of such a dialogue. It rightly seeks to address the root causes of security and tackles the fundamental nature of conflict in Afghanistan.

Pakistan supports an Afghan-led peace process. We fully support the efforts of the Afghan High Peace Council under the able leadership of Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani. His recent visit to Islamabad was productive and successful. Pakistan will continue to contribute to the peace process. Efforts in that regard should be sustained and should be based on solid commitments and tangible steps by all stakeholders. We hope that the unanimous adoption of resolution 2082 (2012) will energize the peace process. The sustainability of our efforts will be ensured if all stakeholders share the goals of reconciliation. Afghanistan's international partners

have a crucial role to play in facilitating convergences and reducing divergences.

The challenges in Afghanistan need a comprehensive regional approach. We will always emphasize the importance of regional unity in dealing with the challenges of security and development in Afghanistan. Pakistan is engaged in a number of important regional initiatives on Afghanistan that aim at greater regional connectivity to promote economic and commercial cooperation, as well as to root out the scourges of illicit narcotics, terrorism and extremism.

Last week, the trilateral summit of Afghanistan, Turkey and Pakistan reaffirmed our vision of regional cooperation through high-level dialogue, security cooperation and economic development partnership. President Asif Ali Zardari participated in the Summit and held important meetings with President Hamid Karzai and President Abdullah Gül. The three Presidents shared and promoted a common vision of peace and progress in Afghanistan, and they said that all three leaders, in particular those of Afghanistan and Pakistan, would work towards the stability of the entire region.

Last month, Pakistan organized a regional ministerial conference on counter-narcotics, which was attended by 13 countries. The conference declaration seeks to establish a regional contact group on counter-narcotics as part of a comprehensive regional approach. It charts a concrete road map based on agreed timelines.

Pakistan's bilateral relations with Afghanistan are driven by a sense of shared destiny. Our cooperation spans the entire spectrum of political, economic, educational and cultural relations. There is continuous dialogue and a regular exchange of visits, including at the highest levels. Our documented bilateral trade has reached \$2.5 billion, and the target set by our leadership is to double it by 2015. Our bilateral assistance to Afghanistan is the highest we have with any other country. Parliamentary exchanges between the two countries are strengthening mutual understanding and goodwill.

In the area of security, Pakistan has always sought closer engagement with Afghanistan and its international partners on real issues that lie beyond polemics. The interdiction of illegal cross-border movement is vital to counter-terrorism, drug trafficking and commercial smuggling. That is a joint responsibility, which needs to be discharged more

vigorously. Pakistan has established over 1,000 posts along our border with Afghanistan. More than 140,000 Pakistani troops are deployed on our side of the border, at considerable financial cost. That needs to be matched on the other side of the international border.

Our ongoing intelligence and military cooperation with Afghan and international counterparts is growing. The Tripartite Commission, which includes representatives of Afghanistan, Pakistan and the International Security Assistance Force, is a viable mechanism for such cooperation.

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is often eclipsed by the glare of security and political challenges. That is unfortunate, as the country continues to suffer from natural calamities, food insecurity and the impact of conflict. As reported by the Secretary-General, humanitarian funding in Afghanistan has suffered a shortfall of 50 per cent, from \$900 million in 2011 to \$484 million this year. That is worrisome for Afghanistan and its immediate neighbours. We urge the donor community to meet these shortfalls and limit the impact on the most vulnerable segments of the population.

By hosting more than 3 million Afghan refugees, Pakistan is easing the humanitarian burden on Afghanistan at considerable economic and social cost to itself. After 10 years of internationally assisted State-building efforts in Afghanistan, more refugees should be repatriated to the country. Creating pull factors in Afghanistan is part of the solution strategy for Afghan refugees agreed to in Geneva this year. We look forward to its smooth implementation.

I take this opportunity to thank Ambassador Peter Witting of Germany and his delegation for their guidance of the Council's work on Afghanistan in the past two years. Since this our last scheduled public meeting for the year, I also express our sincere appreciation and thanks to the delegations of Colombia, Germany, India, Portugal and South Africa for their valuable contributions as non-permanent members. It has been a privilege to share the Security Council table with those delegations in 2012.

Mr. Cabral (Portugal): I would like to start by thanking Special Representative Ján Kubiš for his briefing and for his excellent work and able leadership, and also to welcome Ambassador Tanin to the Council and thank him for his important contribution. Both statements offer a clear and comprehensive picture of

the Afghanistan of today, the achievements attained and the challenges still facing the country.

I will limit myself to some points that Portugal deems of particular importance and, in doing so, I would like to say that Portugal shares the views reflected in the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union later on.

Portugal believes that the transition process plays a central role in the present and future of Afghanistan's security and stability. By progressively assuming full responsibility for security, the Afghan authorities are overcoming significant challenges and cementing their role within the territory and vis-à-vis the Afghan population. National leadership and ownership in the areas of security, governance and development will allow Afghanistan to assume the role that history and geography have framed for it and to which the Afghan people aspire for their country — a land bridge between East and West, Central and South Asia, in peace with its neighbours and a factor for peace, security and prosperity for the entire region.

The international community has a clear stake in the success of the path the Afghan people have chosen for their country. International commitment, materialized in the International Security Assistance Force, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and the activity of a significant number of United Nations agencies, funds, programmes, as well as through bilateral cooperation and non-governmental organizations, provides the tangible evidence that Afghanistan will not be left on its own when the military presence redeploys and assumes a different configuration and role. That activity must be free and unfettered, and the security of its agents must be guaranteed and actively safeguarded.

The implementation of the multiple frameworks currently under discussion or already in place will require essential conditions, which must be guaranteed in the first place by the Afghan authorities. To that end, the United Nations and bilateral and multilateral international stakeholders, such as the European Union, NATO and others, must strive to do their best in coordinating their action in order to maximize the already scarce resources.

The recent developments in efforts at the regional level, such as the visit of the High Peace Council to Pakistan, are also noteworthy as a clear example of Afghan-led reconciliation efforts engaging also the

immediate neighbours. Portugal commends such efforts and expresses its best wishes for success. As the Secretary-General notes in his report,

“Long-term consistent engagement is vital to building a shared understanding and, ultimately, mutual solutions” (*S/2012/907, para 56*).

Finally, I turn to the issue of human rights and the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, areas in which significant steps have been taken, but where a great deal must still be accomplished. I begin by echoing the statement issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights condemning in the strongest terms the latest murder of a leading women’s rights activist in Afghanistan. Najia Seddiqi, the head of the women’s affairs department in Laghman province, was shot dead on 10 December. She is the second female head of that department in Laghman to be killed in just four months. We urge the Afghan authorities to leave no stone unturned in finding her killers, in order to show that people responsible for crimes, in particular those that specifically target women in Afghanistan, will be brought to justice.

That tragic loss is another sign that the enemies of the constitutional order embraced by the Afghan people see women’s rights and women’s political participation as a clear threat to their political aims, and target those who are brave enough to publicly promote and protect human rights. Their struggle is our struggle. There can be no compromise in matters of principles and shared values.

I conclude by reiterating my country’s support for the work of UNAMA and the Special Representative. Over the past two years, Portugal has witnessed the beginning and consolidation of the transition and the holding of summits, such as those in Istanbul, Bonn, Chicago and Tokyo, that have created or brought new energy to mutually reinforcing forms of international cooperation with Afghanistan. We are pleased to also count the 2010 Lisbon Summit among those summits where critical decisions for Afghanistan’s future were taken. It is our sincere belief and hope that we will be able to see Afghanistan’s continued stabilization and growth according to the will of the Afghans themselves and to the steadfast support of Afghanistan’s numerous friends and allies.

Mrs. DiCarlo (United States of America): We welcome Special Representative Kubiš back to the Council and we thank him for his briefing today. We

express our deep appreciation to him, the staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the United Nations country team for their continued service to the Afghan people. We also thank Ambassador Tanin for sharing his views. As always, we value his close cooperation with the Security Council. We would also like to thank Ambassador Witting for his leadership of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) and for the Afghanistan-related resolutions adopted by the Council over the past two years.

Today I will address Afghanistan’s continued transition, recent developments in the Afghan-led peace process and the need to begin robust planning efforts for the United Nations role in Afghanistan post-2014.

Afghanistan continues to take the necessary steps towards a security and political transition in 2014. The security transition progresses as planned, with over 75 per cent of the Afghan population, including every provincial capital, now living in Afghan-led secured regions. As pledged in Chicago this year, the international community is committed to sustained assistance for Afghanistan’s security. In Tokyo we committed to development support for Afghanistan in the context of the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework. Those actions demonstrate the international community’s unwavering commitment to the Afghan people, through transition and into the transformation decade. President Obama reaffirmed the United States’ commitment in May when he signed our strategic partnership agreement.

With the Afghan elections in 2014 approaching, we welcome the efforts under way by Afghan authorities to hold inclusive, transparent and credible elections. Those elections, as confirmed at the Tokyo Conference, will help to build a political system that reflects a pluralistic society and remains firmly founded in the Afghan Constitution. We appreciate the role that Afghan civil society is playing in the preparations and, of course, the United Nations work in support of the electoral process.

Recent regional economic development efforts have also shown encouraging signs, such as the economic focus and confidence-building measures of the Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan. We welcome the next ministerial meeting, to be held in Astana in April 2013.

As Afghanistan looks forward to security and political transitions in 2014, an inclusive political

dialogue among Afghans is the surest path to long-term peace and stability. When President Obama visited Afghanistan, in May, he discussed the importance of pursuing an Afghan-led reconciliation process. In Bonn in 2011 and in Tokyo in 2012, the international community again affirmed its support for a peace and reconciliation process.

We are encouraged by the briefing of Afghan High Peace Council Chair Rabbani to this Council in the 1988 Committee last month. Afghans are sitting down with other Afghans to determine the future of their country. It is vital that all voices be heard. We welcome the forum held in Kabul this month, at which Afghan leaders and parliamentarians joined with women representatives of the provincial peace councils and the High Peace Council to discuss strategies for integrating the views of women in the reconciliation process. We also look forward to UNAMA's plans for a complementary track-two national dialogue.

We appreciate the role that regional actors can play. Their support will be critical to peace and stability in Afghanistan. The visit by Chair Rabbani to Islamabad in November and the resulting joint statement was a powerful message to the region. We welcome Pakistan's engagement and its call to bring the Taliban to the table in peace negotiations.

The Security Council aided in that process by supporting and promoting Afghan-led reconciliation through the 1988 Committee. We again demonstrated our commitment this week by reaffirming the Committee's mandate to enact sanctions against those individuals associated with the Taliban who constituted a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, and to encourage sanctioned individuals to reconcile. Those who refuse to meaningfully participate in reconciliation should know that the Security Council will continue to develop the necessary measures to inhibit their ability to execute violent attacks in Afghanistan. At this point, it is up to the Taliban to fulfil its obligations and decide to move forward.

With the security and political transitions under way, we believe it is time to begin discussions about the United Nations role, including the roles of UNAMA and the United Nations agencies, after 2014. United Nations support has been indispensable and will remain so going forward. We look forward to the United Nations consulting with Afghanistan, the Council, regional partners and Member States in its planning an

integrated vision for long-term support to the Afghan people.

The future of Afghanistan is indeed for Afghans to determine. Afghans themselves will need to have the difficult conversations about how to build an inclusive society that reflects their own needs and wants. The United States will continue to support them, and welcomes the valuable contributions of the United Nations in those efforts.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri (India): I join others in thanking you, Mr. President, for scheduling today's debate on the situation in Afghanistan. I thank Ambassador Zahir Tanin, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, for his statement. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his most recent report (S/2012/907), and we are particularly appreciative of the briefing by Mr. Ján Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan.

As the year 2012 draws down, today's debate provides us an opportunity for a stock-taking of the collective efforts of the international community in Afghanistan. An overview would indicate that the international community in Afghanistan has achieved important milestones this year on the long road towards peace, progress and security in the country.

At major international conferences in Bonn, Chicago and Tokyo and at regional-level conferences in Istanbul and Kabul, the international community renewed its commitment to peace, security and development in Afghanistan. The realization of commitments flowing from the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan is essential for Afghanistan's fiscal sustainability and its quest for self-reliance. Regional cooperation has also received new momentum under the Istanbul Heart of Asia process and other regional processes. The Delhi Investment Summit on Afghanistan, held on 28 June and hosted by India, was an important endeavour in focusing regional and international attention on investing in Afghanistan and its potential to provide economic development and stability to Afghanistan during the transition period.

Afghanistan looks forward to holding simultaneous presidential and provincial elections in April 2014, which will be another important step in the consolidation of democracy in Afghanistan.

Amid those salient developments, Afghanistan continues to face an existential threat from terrorism.

The infrastructure of terror is still intact in the region and draws upon ideological, financial and logistical support from beyond its borders. The syndicate of terrorism, which includes elements of the Al-Qaida, the Taliban, Lashkar-e-Toiba and other terrorist and extremist groups, is active in the region and is far from being isolated. While the security situation continues to remain fragile, the International Security Assistance Force drawdown has proceeded apace. That has accentuated the uncertainties, with a risk of creating a security vacuum coupled with an economic downturn in Afghanistan, which could undermine the hard-fought gains we have achieved together during the past decade. The security transition must ensure lasting peace and security for all sections of Afghan society.

We renewed the mandate of the sanctions regimes created under resolution 1988 (2011) and resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) just two days ago (see S/PV.6890). In the functioning of the sanctions regimes, it is important to ensure that the fight against terrorism is not be diluted. The linkages between Al-Qaida and the Taliban are real and cannot be wished away. The recently adopted Security Council resolutions (resolutions 2082 (2012) and 2083 (2012)) clearly recognize that aspect and have tasked the Monitoring Team to report periodically on the matter.

As Afghanistan takes forward the task of national reconciliation in accordance with the criteria set forth in the Kabul communiqué, we fully support the efforts for regional confidence-building as a critical component of international efforts to support the country. Regional cooperation and connectivity are critical for Afghanistan's political and economic progress. We are fully cognizant that the economic viability of Afghanistan depends upon its fuller integration into the neighbourhood so that it can regain its historical role as a land bridge between South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East and Eurasia. Conscious of that imperative need, India has taken the lead in two commercial confidence-building measures under the Istanbul Process.

Afghanistan and India have had a long shared history going back over millennia. The two countries are natural strategic partners by virtue of geography and a common vision of peace and cooperation in the region. President Karzai's visit to India last month offered us an opportunity to review the entire gamut of the bilateral relationship and to discuss regional and international issues of mutual interest. During

the visit, the Prime Minister of India, Mr. Manmohan Singh, reiterated India's support of Afghanistan during the crucial period of transition to the end of 2014 and thereafter. The implementation of the strategic partnership agreement of October 2011 between the two countries has already been set in motion with the convening of the first meeting of the Partnership Council on 1 May.

During the past decade, India pledged up to \$2 billion in development and humanitarian assistance. We have managed to carry out some of the most economical and cost-effective projects in Afghanistan. The \$500 million in assistance announced by the Prime Minister of India in May 2011 is being spent from 2012 to 2015. The projects under consideration will be aligned with the projects suggested under the national priority programme of the Government of Afghanistan. The pace and nature of the utilization of the present and future Indian assistance will be determined by the preference, comfort level and absorptive capacity of the Afghan Government.

India remains unwavering in its commitment to assisting the people of Afghanistan in their endeavour to build a peaceful, stable, democratic and prosperous nation. We support the good work being done by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. As we enter the new year, we must create an enabling environment wherein the Afghan people can live in peace and security and decide their future themselves without outside interference, coercion or intimidation. We need to impart added momentum to our effort to strengthen the Afghan Government's capacity for security, governance and economic development. The international community must continue to work, with renewed vigour and unity of purpose, towards strengthening the efforts of the Afghan Government in seeking solutions that are inclusive and are led by the Afghan people themselves.

Mr. Osorio (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should first like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Ján Kubiš, for the comprehensive report that he gave us today on the situation in Afghanistan, as well as to congratulate him for his work and his dedication during the first year of his activities there. I would also like to welcome Ambassador Zahir Tanin, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, and to thank him for explaining to the Council his perspective on his

country's development over the past few years and the way in which his Government and his people have managed to overcome a critical phase and find the path to peace. I also wish to register to my great pleasure in acknowledging the contribution of Germany in the country — physically, economically and by supplying troops — as well as that of our colleague in the Council, Ambassador Peter Wittig, in guiding the management and focus of our actions.

The policies and measures adopted by the Government of Afghanistan to make headway in implementing the principles and mutual commitments in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, including the adoption of action plans to meet the indicators and the finalization of the aid management policy, demonstrate its determination to work for a stable, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan. That progress constitutes additional steps towards meeting the commitments taken on by Afghanistan in the Tokyo Conference in the five identified priority areas. Those commitments pertain to democracy and fair elections; governance, the rule of law and human rights; the integrity of public finances and commercial banking; budget execution and governance; and inclusive and sustained growth.

The determination of a timetable for the simultaneous holding of the presidential and provincial elections in April 2014 and tackling the plan of operations presented by the Independent Election Commission are grounds for optimism on the process. The holding of inclusive and transparent elections will be a clear indicator of the progress of the Afghan State with regard to democratic consolidation. The Organization must be ready to respond to the requests made by Afghanistan and provide all the necessary technical assistance in electoral matters.

On security and the protection of the civilian population, we must voice our concern at the increase in the number of civilian victims over the past three months. Given that the transition process is progressing according to the agreed timetable, with a view to Afghans having complete responsibility and leadership in 2014, it is vital to continue to increase the capacity and professionalism of the Afghan security and police forces. That must include institutionalizing the mechanisms for accountability and combating impunity, as well as strengthening measures for the protection of civilians, respect for human rights and ensuring the command and control structure. In that connection, the

contribution of the International Security Assistance Force and the NATO training mission is still essential.

With regard to the political process and the process of reconciliation, it is important that the parties show clearly that they are committed to dialogue and reconciliation so as to avoid instability and fragmentation. We are aware of the difficulties to be overcome. But we are also optimistic, given the signs of interest in dialogue shown by various sectors of the insurgency. We highlight as well the positive balance in the implementation of the programme of peace and reconciliation. The large number of reintegrated persons and the decreased number of incidents allow for confidence in the sustainability of the programme.

In that context, we welcome the Council's adoption on Monday of resolution 2082 (2012), which strengthens the cooperation and dialogue between the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) and the Government of Afghanistan. In addition to reaffirming the special role of Afghanistan in the listing and delisting process, the procedure set out in the resolution to authorize exemptions from the travel ban on persons on the list, so as to allow them to take part in meetings as part of the peace process, shows the Security Council's commitment to Afghan ownership of the reconciliation dialogue process and facilitates decisions and actions of the Committee having a direct and timely beneficial effect on the process.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General should continue giving priority to supporting the Afghan-led peace and reconciliation process and lend help with Afghan institutional capacity-building, to fulfil their responsibilities in priority areas such as governability, economic development and regional cooperation. We hope that the reductions projected for 2013 will not significantly affect the operational capacity of the Mission and that it will continue to be able to fulfil the essential tasks of its mandate.

The United Nations should continue to play a central role in coordinating international assistance to ensure that it is in accordance with Afghan priorities and so as to avoid duplication of effort. As to the worrying humanitarian situation, it is imperative that all parties respect humanitarian principles and allow aid to reach those people most in need. That must be an essential requirement for participation in the reconciliation

process. Cognizant of the devastating need for aid in the areas of health, sanitation, education and food security, we join the call by the humanitarian team in the country for donors to earmark at least 10 per cent of official development assistance to funding humanitarian aid needs.

Achieving stability in Afghanistan is the fundamental goal. It is therefore essential to foster a State architecture that guarantees governability and economic development at the local and national levels and also provide access to justice, because those are critical elements for a lasting and definitive transition. Consensus about deepening and expanding relations between Afghanistan and the international community should contribute to building the State and its capacity to fulfil its primary responsibility to meet the Afghan people's needs. That relationship should translate into tangible political, social and development results.

Lastly, I want to state that we agree with the Secretary-General that the seriousness with which the Afghan Government has moved ahead in meeting its commitments made at the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan calls out for the international community to make similar progress in meeting its commitments, such that Afghanistan stabilizes into a fully functioning sustainable State that is capable of providing basic services to its people without depending upon foreign assistance.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2012/907), Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ján Kubiš for his briefing and for his leadership of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and Ambassador Zahir Tanin for his comments and contribution this afternoon. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Ambassador Wittig for his chairmanship of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) and for his guidance to the Council on the Afghanistan dossier.

I will focus my statement today on four key areas — the 2014 elections, the peace and reconciliation process, human rights and the role of the United Nations in Afghanistan.

First, with regard to the elections, as the Secretary-General's report suggests, the 2014 elections are central to the success of the Afghan political transition. They will bring many challenges, but we should not

underestimate their importance. The United Kingdom looks forward to credible and inclusive elections that deliver a peaceful transition of power to a Government chosen by the people of Afghanistan. The Afghan people will demand nothing less, and the international community should strongly support that objective. The timetable for elections remains ambitious. The United Nations has an important role to play in supporting the electoral process, providing expertise and facilitating open dialogue. We fully support the analysis outlined in the Secretary-General's report on the issue.

Turning now to the peace and reconciliation process, a political settlement in Afghanistan remains a top priority for the international community, including the United Kingdom. The offer to the Taliban and other armed groups remains the same. It is for them to sever ties to Al-Qaida and other terrorist networks and participate in peaceful dialogue with the Afghan Government. The time for dialogue is now. We welcome UNAMA's work to date in support of that peace process.

Last year, when the Council split the former regime established by resolution 1267 (1999), it sent a clear message. Resolution 2082 (2012), adopted on Monday, built on that and introduced a highly flexible travel-ban exemption procedure and greater consultation with the Afghan Government. It further reinforced the Council's commitment to ensuring that sanctions work in support of the peace process, and never as a brake on it.

The United Kingdom will continue to do all that we can to support the efforts of Afghanistan and Pakistan in strengthening their bilateral relations. In the past few months both nations have stepped up their engagement and taken practical steps towards a genuine partnership in the pursuit of peace. The United Kingdom has convened three trilateral meetings in the past six months and will continue to offer a forum for open dialogue.

Thirdly, on the subject of improving human rights in Afghanistan, we welcome the Afghan Government's continuing commitment to protecting the human rights of the Afghan people, as enshrined in the Constitution, but there is still much work to be done. The United Kingdom is deeply concerned by reports of serious violence against women and harmful traditional practices, as reflected in the Secretary-General's latest report. We urge the Government of Afghanistan to continue its important work to ensure the full implementation of the law on the elimination of violence against women.

The United Kingdom also noted with concern the figures on civilian casualties in the Secretary-General's latest report. We note that the overwhelming and increasing majority of such incidents are caused by the insurgency. The United Kingdom condemns all such acts.

Finally, I want to address the long-term role of the United Nations in Afghanistan. UNAMA is doing an important job. The renewal of its mandate next March will provide a further opportunity for the Council to focus on the next steps in Afghanistan. We will work to ensure that UNAMA continues to have a clear set of priorities and deliverables and that it has adequate resources to allow it to deliver.

We note that the transition of security responsibilities continues to make progress. With the third tranche now in place, 75 per cent of the population live in areas where the Afghan national forces have the security lead. In line with that progress, the British Prime Minister announced today that British force levels will be reduced from 9,000 to around 5,200 by the end of 2013. That drawdown is in line with planning by the International Security Assistance Force and the NATO strategy agreed in Chicago this year. But even as the drawdown progresses, our commitment to supporting the Afghan Government remains steadfast. The United Kingdom will deliver on all the commitments it has made in Chicago and Tokyo to Afghanistan's long-term security and development. We will continue to work in partnership with the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations to meet our shared objective of a stable, inclusive and prosperous Afghanistan.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Ján Kubiš, for his substantive briefing and for his work as the Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We listened closely to the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Tanin. Indeed, Afghanistan is entering a crucial phase in its development, one that calls for new efforts, based on what has been achieved, from the people and Government of Afghanistan and calls as well for increased support on the part of the entire international community. The April 2014 elections will be an important milestone that will require meticulous and comprehensive preparation, including with the support of UNAMA.

At the same time, the security situation in the country remains challenging. Heavy civilian casualties continue to be incurred in armed hostilities. Unfortunately, the international military presence is responsible for some of these. Additional measures must be taken to minimize civilian casualties.

Much remains to be done in enhancing the preparedness of the Afghan National Army and Police. Failing that, it will be extremely difficult to ensure Government control throughout the country's territory. We note the problem of the feasibility of an accelerated, time-bound transfer of responsibilities from the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Would it not be more appropriate to first report to the Security Council on the implementation of the mandate it has issued? In that context, we cannot conceal our concern about the possible spill-over of extremism into the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States that are neighbours of Afghanistan.

Furthermore, we have questions with respect to the intention to maintain a foreign military presence in Afghanistan after 2014. Will that not have a destabilizing impact on the situation in the region? Will it not become a factor for disturbance to the local population, be exploited to consolidate the armed opposition and give rise to further extremism? We need the maximum possible transparency in that regard.

We have repeatedly emphasized that we see the future of Afghanistan as a sovereign, self-sufficient and prosperous State. We are convinced that the restoration of its neutral status would serve to strengthen regional stability and cooperation and help to establish an atmosphere of trust and good-neighbourliness in relations between Afghanistan and its neighbours.

The regional dimension is extremely important with respect to the situation in Afghanistan. We stress the useful efforts for stabilization and economic development being taken by the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (CSO) and the Dushanbe Four, comprised of Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan. We welcome the decision taken at the June summit of CSO leaders in Beijing to accord Afghanistan observer status in that organization. Particular support should be provided to the position, first articulated at the Kabul regional conference, concerning enhanced regional cooperation, including by implementing the agreed confidence-building measures, as well as efforts to

develop strategies for the sustainable development of Afghanistan after 2014.

Urgent problems persist with respect to the illegal drug traffic in Afghanistan. Effective measures must be undertaken to physically destroy drug crops and laboratories, curb the supply of precursors to Afghanistan, and include drug lords on the Security Council's sanctions list. We believe that drug production in that country threatens international peace and stability, and in that context the activities of the CSTO — including the counter-narcotics Operation Canal — are especially important in countering the Afghan drug threat.

The proposals that have been put forward repeatedly by the CSTO and the CSO to ISAF and NATO with respect to counter-narcotics cooperation and coordination in the Afghan context remain valid. Putting an end to illegal drug trafficking would above all be a major contribution to the fight against international terrorism, which is reliably sustained and financed by the drug traffic.

The process of national reconciliation could have a considerable impact on easing the situation in Afghanistan. We anticipate that the activities of the High Peace Council will lend additional impetus to that process and help to strengthen national unity in Afghanistan. We are not opposed to contacts with opposition groups that are prepared to adhere to the three well-known principles of recognition of the Afghan Constitution, ending violence and breaking ties with Al-Qaida and other terrorist organizations. We have seen an increase of such contacts recently, and we believe that it is unacceptable for the peace dialogue to include those who feature on Security Council sanctions lists.

Ongoing, effective support for the Council's sanctions regime is of the utmost priority as an important tool for countering terrorism. The idea of dividing the sanctions list pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999) between Al-Qaida and Taliban was reflected in resolutions adopted two years ago, and guides the international community towards adopting more flexible and targeted approaches. It is important in that respect that the practice of using sanctions against individuals and entities involved in terrorist activities continue to be based on a case-by-case approach and on compliance with relevant procedures, which would not

allow for simplified or more collective exemptions of persons on the list.

ISAF must play an ancillary role in national reconciliation and its actions must be agreed by the Government of Afghanistan. We advocate strengthening the central coordinating role of the United Nations in international civilian efforts in the context of the Afghan settlement. UNAMA will need to remain the coordinator of international efforts to assist in the stabilization of Afghanistan.

Mr. Wang Min (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ján Kubiš for his briefing. I also welcome Ambassador Tanin of Afghanistan and thank him for his statement.

China has always and unequivocally supported peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan, as well as the early achievement of the goal of Afghanistan being governed by its own people. Efforts to promote national reconciliation should continue to abide by the principle of Afghan leadership and ownership, and strike an appropriate balance in such areas as the political process, economic development, security, stability and national reconciliation. China appreciates the achievements of the Afghan Government and people in various nation-building endeavours.

Recent international conferences on this question have reaffirmed the international community's commitment to Afghanistan. In that regard, I wish to emphasize the following four points.

First, the 2014 elections will be a critical element of the political process. Afghanistan is actively preparing for the elections. China welcomes the fact that the Afghan Government has already defined an electoral time frame. The international community should respect Afghan sovereignty and political independence in the elections. The United Nations has rich electoral experience, and China welcomes the electoral assistance of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), at the request of the Afghan Government.

Secondly, efforts to achieve lasting security and stability in Afghanistan still face challenges. The security situation in some provinces is not stable, and there has been an increase in civilian casualties. China welcomes Afghanistan's efforts to build the capacities of its security forces and to gradually assume responsibility for maintaining State stability and

security. In the prevailing circumstances, the handover of security responsibilities should be progressive and orderly so as to maintain overall stability.

Thirdly, national reconciliation is an important component of peace and reconstruction processes in Afghanistan. China supports the ongoing implementation of the Kabul communiqué and the promotion of an Afghan-led reconciliation process. Mr. Rabbani, Chair of the High Peace Council, recently visited Pakistan. The two sides achieved an important consensus, which China welcomes. The Security Council recently adopted resolution 2082 (2012), adjusting relevant sanctions measures. We hope that this step will contribute to the promotion of reconciliation.

Fourthly, it is only by ensuring the prosperity and development of Afghanistan that the foundation for lasting security and stability can be laid. China supports the efforts of the Afghan Government to build the economy, increase employment and improve living standards. We hope that the international community will honour its aid commitments to Afghanistan and support the development priorities independently identified by the Government. It is critical to alleviate food shortages in some parts of the country.

The promotion of peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan requires the joint efforts of that country and the international community. China supports the United Nations lead role in coordinating international efforts to address that matter. We hope that UNAMA will continue to strengthen its coordination and cooperation with the Afghan Government. China supports the positive role played by the countries of the region and regional organizations in Afghanistan's peace and reconstruction processes. Regional cooperative initiatives should respect Afghan sovereignty, prioritize the legitimate concerns of the countries of the region, and advance steadily through full consultations.

Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful to the Secretary-General for his report on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2012/907). We also welcome Mr. Ján Kubiš and thank him for his valuable briefing. We are also grateful for the statement by Ambassador Zahir Tanin. We would like to highlight four issues in the report of the Secretary-General.

The first issue pertains to the electoral process, which will overlap with the end of the Afghan transition period. We welcome the issuance of a detailed calendar for carrying out the presidential and provincial

council elections. Nevertheless, the report refers to shortcomings in establishing a legal and technical framework to prepare for the April 2014 electoral process. We encourage the Afghan Government to continue to attach priority to the preparatory process. In our experience, democratic governance and the holding of elections, in line with the Constitution, are prerequisites for long-term stability.

The second point has to do with the issue of Afghan-led national reconciliation under Afghan ownership. A few weeks ago, we had an opportunity to hold an informal interactive dialogue with Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani, Chair of the High Peace Council. In that dialogue, we heard first-hand of the progress in the national process, including a successful visit to Islamabad. Another pertinent point in that connection has to do with resolution 2082 (2012), which was adopted last Monday and by which the Council renewed and strengthened the sanctions regime under resolution 1988 (2011). We are convinced that the improvements made to the sanctions regime will effectively contribute to the national reconciliation process.

The third point involves the security situation. We are pleased that, when it comes to security, to date the transition has made the expected and hoped for progress. It is encouraging to note the ongoing progress being made in the transfer of responsibility for security. That has now reached 75 per cent, with the remaining tranches to be announced at the beginning of 2013. There continue to be threats and challenges that jeopardize the security situation. We note with concern the attack that took place early this month against the chief of Afghanistan's intelligence service.

As to the fourth point, we agree with the Secretary-General that the increase in civilian casualties during the reporting period is a source of great concern. However, what we find truly outrageous is the information contained in paragraph 26 of the report, where it is pointed out that more than 355 children were killed or injured in the armed conflict from 1 August to 31 October. That is undoubtedly one of the most regrettable facts from this reporting period. In addition, we continue to find deplorable the situation faced by women and girls in Afghanistan. We call on the Afghan Government to take concrete measures to protect women and girls and guarantee their rights. We resolutely support the efforts of the United Nations in this area.

Lastly, we view positively the follow-up to the systems and mechanisms for carrying out the mutual commitments established at the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan. That is being boosted by the regional Istanbul Process. We believe that significant progress has been made in establishing confidence-building measures. Both processes will be an important avenue for generating social and economic opportunities, in particular as the international military forces draw down.

Before I conclude, I should like to join other delegations in thanking the delegation of Germany and Ambassador Peter Witting for their important role in leading the Afghanistan Sanctions Committee, and more generally in familiarizing the Security Council with the various issues relevant to that country.

Mr. M'Beou (Togo) (*spoke in French*): I should like to thank Mr. Ján Kubiš for introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2012/907), as well as for his tireless efforts as Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) aimed at restoring stability in that country. I also welcome the presence among us of Ambassador Tanin and I thank him for his statement.

In his report last September (S/2012/703), the Secretary-General stated that the situation in Afghanistan was a cause for cautious optimism. Three months later, we see that while we have reason for hope in certain areas, such as in the political situation, others, on the other hand, require additional commitment and sacrifice, in particular when it comes to security, human rights and combating narcotics.

On the political front, we see that, with the support of the international community, Afghanistan has made outstanding progress in fulfilling the commitments made at the Tokyo Conference last July, in particular by identifying steps to place the 2015-2024 on a solid foundation.

The holding of credible presidential and provincial elections, scheduled for 2014, continues to be a significant challenge to overcome. Afghan stakeholders, including civil society, have not hesitated in firmly committing themselves to preparing for those elections. In order to provide a more robust legal foundation for the electoral process, appointment to the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board will henceforth take place on the basis of a law. We express the hope that the Commission that is in place, in which

both houses of parliament are represented, will work tirelessly to find a compromise on the appointment of the remaining members.

The fact that political parties have also stepped up their activities is an encouraging sign.

Given that the media has an important role to play in that process, we appreciate President Hamid Karzai's approach of meeting with members of the media covering the elections. That approach also helps to entrench the freedom of expression, which continues to be a crucial aspect of democracy and of ensuring free and fair elections.

My country acknowledges the United Nations, and especially the United Nations Development Programme, for the valuable support extended to the Afghan authorities through the ELECT II assistance programme (Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow, second phase).

In addition to the measures undertaken to hold transparent and credible elections, it is encouraging to note that the peace process is under way. Proof of this was the holding of a week of peace and national unity, during which numerous events took place throughout the country. The release on that occasion of a number of Taliban members sends a strong signal to them and to armed opposition groups, which, we hope, will respond to the Government's outreach to them to resolutely join the peace process.

In that regard, we welcome the holding in Chantilly, France, starting today, as had been announced, of inclusive talks with the participation for the first time of representatives of the Taliban with close ties to Mullah Omar. Those talks will represent a necessary milestone towards the holding of genuine inter-Afghan negotiations on the security future of Afghanistan following 2014.

The visit by Mr. Rabbani late last month and his meetings with the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) made it possible to discuss prospects for the peace process. That progress has been made in a more favourable regional climate, given that the confidence-building measures undertaken under the Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan are continuing to be implemented.

In the context of the process of strengthening regional integration, several meetings have been

held, including the Mazar-e-Sharif conference on strengthening economic ties between Afghanistan and Central Asia, on 14 and 15 November.

While there have been positive developments in the political field, unfortunately the same cannot be said of the security situation, which remains unfavourable, even as we are seeing the gradual transfer of responsibilities from the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to the Afghan authorities.

We take note of the conclusions of the Brussels meeting held on 9 and 10 October, at the end of which ISAF was directed to begin planning a post-2014 training mission. We also welcome the negotiations undertaken bilaterally on 15 November by the United States and Afghanistan, in line with their strategic partnership agreement. For now, even though we are witnessing an overall decline in the number of security incidents, the people, particularly in the south and east of the country, continue to pay a heavy price, as they are the victims of the activities of illegal armed groups, tribal clashes and disputes over natural resources. In addition, United Nations personnel and implementing partners are the victims of violence, as evidenced by the attacks carried out against their convoys in several provinces.

Human rights have not fared any better in that atmosphere, which is marked by an increase of 28 per cent in the number of civilian victims as compared with the last three months of 2011. We are particularly disturbed to note that women continue to be subjected to violence and harmful traditional practices. The same holds true for children, as attacks have been carried out against educational and health-care facilities. It is important that such heinous acts not reoccur.

We welcome the initiatives of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) aimed at dealing with the practice of the early marriage of young girls.

The fight against drugs remains a major challenge. Joint research undertaken by the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime indicated that opium cultivation rose by 18 per cent in 2012. We look forward to seeing the implementation of measures in the context of the regional ministerial conference held on 12 and 13 November aimed at strengthening cooperation on counter-narcotics efforts, specifically the establishment of a hotline between the

relevant national agencies and the creation of a regional contact group.

There is no doubt that the situation in Afghanistan continues to require assistance from the international community, particularly in the wake of the scheduled withdrawal of ISAF at the end of 2014. The hopes sparked by the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan, held on 8 July, cannot be dashed. The considerable progress made must be consolidated.

Let me in conclusion reiterate Togo's deep gratitude to the United Nations and to all of its specialized bodies and agencies, in particular the United Nations Development Programme, UNAMA and ISAF, for all of the sacrifices they have made to ensure a prosperous future for Afghanistan.

Mr. Musayev (Azerbaijan): At the outset, I would like to thank the Special Representative, Mr. Ján Kubiš, for his briefing and his efforts, as well as the Secretary-General for his report on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2012/907). We are also grateful to Ambassador Tanin of Afghanistan for his statement. I would also like to express our deep appreciation to Ambassador Wittig of Germany and his team for their excellent leadership and valuable contribution as penholder for Afghanistan over the past two years.

Since the Council last considered the issue, in September (see S/PV.6840), Afghanistan has continued to make vigorous strides to achieve the objectives of the transition process to be completed by the end of 2014. The unanimous adoption by the General Assembly on 27 November of resolution 67/16, which Azerbaijan had the privilege of co-sponsoring, once again reaffirmed the irreversibility of the Afghan Government's choice for the future of the country and the international community's strong resolve to stand by Afghanistan on that path.

We share the Secretary-General's assessment of the Afghan Government's efforts to operationalize the Tokyo commitments. We welcome the promulgation of a comprehensive timeline for the 2014 presidential and Provincial Council elections, ongoing electoral reforms and measures to ensure greater public activity and involvement in the pre-election process. Successful elections will further strengthen the political foundations of the country ahead of the transformation decade. Therefore, we encourage the Government to continue its progress in that realm and stress the

imperative of uninterrupted international financial and technical assistance to Afghanistan to that end.

The activities of the High Peace Council aimed at advancing an inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process, in particular its practical initiatives to reach out to a wider spectrum of Afghan society and its close interaction with regional partners, are creating the necessary conditions and confidence conducive to a durable peace in the country. Resolution 2082 (2012), adopted on Monday, on the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), will further facilitate this process.

The continued support of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for the Council's activities and for the implementation of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme is critical to the promotion of a unified vision among all Afghans on the peaceful future of the country. In that regard, we welcome the plan announced by UNAMA to initiate a complementary track-2 dialogue aimed at encouraging diverse Afghan stakeholders to join the reconciliation process in an individual capacity.

Despite the quantitative decrease in security-related incidents during the reporting period, the high death toll prevailing among civilians as a result of the unabated assassinations and suicide bombings by insurgents is a matter of grave concern. All parties in Afghanistan must take the necessary measures to minimize the number and scale of civilian casualties. In particular, insurgents must renounce the tactic of targeting civilians, which not only violates international law and contravenes religious and humanistic tenets, but also seriously undermines reconciliation efforts.

We commend the Afghan security forces for their decisive actions to thwart insurgent attacks in Kabul and other provinces. Overall, we welcome the progress in the ongoing implementation of the first three tranches of the transition of security responsibilities to the Afghan national security forces. We also welcome the accomplishments in the areas under their control. We look forward to the earliest commencement of the fourth tranche in the remaining parts of the country and to the phased completion of the transition by mid-2013.

Greater political dialogue and cooperation between Afghanistan and its immediate neighbours and other regional counterparts on a wide range of issues based on a common vision and mutual confidence is an imperative for the peaceful and stable future of the

country and the region. That having been said, we emphasize the particular importance of the Istanbul Heart of Asia process on regional security and cooperation for a secure and stable Afghanistan and the timely realization of the agreed confidence-building measures. The meetings of senior officials involved in the Istanbul Process, which were held in September in New York and in October in Ankara, reviewed and agreed on the elaboration of implementation plans for all of the confidence-building measures. We will host the next meeting of senior officials in Baku on 6 February 2013, when all plans are expected to be endorsed.

Azerbaijan has long been a part of international efforts in Afghanistan. My country joined the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) almost at its beginning and has steadily increased its military participation in ISAF. Azerbaijan provides its territory to ISAF countries for overflights and transits to Afghanistan, accounting for 35 per cent of all non-lethal goods transit.

Azerbaijan has consistently expanded its contributions by providing capacity-building assistance in non-military spheres in Afghanistan and has provided financial support for the training of Afghan security forces. As part of the Istanbul Process, my country participates in a number of confidence-building measures and serves as one of the leaders in the implementation of counter-narcotics and regional infrastructure confidence-building measures.

The meetings of NATO-ISAF defence and foreign ministers in October and December, respectively, adopted important decisions on the post-2014 training, advice and assistance mission in Afghanistan. In furtherance of its long-term commitment to be a part of international assistance to Afghanistan and given its ongoing contributions, Azerbaijan has decided to partner with NATO in that endeavour.

To conclude, I would like to reaffirm my Government's strong support for Afghanistan's sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity, and we reconfirm our determination to further assist the Government of Afghanistan and its people, bilaterally and multilaterally, in their legitimate aspiration to become a secure, self-reliant and self-sustaining State.

Mr. Laher (South Africa): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ján Kubiš for introducing the quarterly report (S/2012/907) of the Secretary-General to the Council. We also thank

Ambassador Zahir Tanin for his statement on the situation in his country.

South Africa welcomes the continued progress registered by the Government of Afghanistan despite the very difficult and challenging security environment within which it operates. At the political level, the upcoming presidential and provincial elections in 2014 and 2015 will be a key step in the further consolidation of Afghanistan's nascent democracy. In that regard, my delegation welcomes the publication on 31 October by the Independent Election Commission of a comprehensive timeline for the elections, as well as the draft concept of operations with an indicative budget.

Given the divisive nature of elections in any society, particularly in post-conflict societies, we encourage the Government to complete the remaining elements of the electoral architecture, including the publication of the outstanding two electoral laws, and to continue dialogue and public debates to ensure the enhanced transparency, inclusiveness and sustainability of the elections. South Africa is pleased by the positive response of the United Nations to the request for support by the Independent Election Commission.

Long-term stability and security in Afghanistan can be sustained only through a process of reconciliation and nation-building. South Africa is therefore encouraged by the ongoing work of the High Peace Council, including the holding of its International Peace Conference in Kabul on 22 September. My delegation furthermore welcomes the visit of the High Peace Council to Islamabad from 12 to 14 November, which led to the release of a number of Taliban detainees and the adoption of a joint statement that should further enhance reconciliation and dialogue. In that regard, we are pleased with the support provided by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to the High Peace Council and with its efforts to initiate a track-two dialogue process.

The visit to Washington, D.C., and New York of Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani, Chair of the Council, is an important element in communicating the work and importance of the Council to the international community. Key in that regard is the fact that the international community and the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) should continue those engagements with a view to responding positively to the work of the Council in its reconciliation efforts. South Africa reiterates its view

that sanctions should be a flexible tool in the hands of the Security Council, which should adapt to the dynamic political situation on the ground. We therefore welcome the adoption of resolution 2082 (2012) as an important contribution to the peace process.

Turning to the security situation, while we welcome the decline in security incidents during the reporting period compared to the previous year, my delegation remains concerned about the impact of those incidents on the civilian population of Afghanistan and about the continued insecurity that confronts those communities on a daily basis. With the Government now exercising control for security in an area in which 75 per cent of the population resides, it remains critical that Afghan police and security forces should be well trained and well equipped to protect local populations. In that regard, we welcome UNAMA's role in facilitating and coordinating resources from the international community to assist Afghan authorities in strengthening the capacity of female police officers. South Africa welcomes the increased role of Afghan security institutions in performing training and oversight roles previously conducted by the international forces. That is an important development for sustaining Afghan ownership and leadership over its security forces.

Political stability and security inside Afghanistan will depend, by and large, on regional stability. We are therefore pleased at the ongoing engagement of the Government with regional States to address issues of mutual interest, including security and development. The recent high-level meetings with Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Turkey and China, as well as the international conference held in Lithuania on the theme "Afghanistan and the region: practical approaches for sustainable development", are encouraging.

Since the Government of Afghanistan relies on international support to address that country's economic and development challenges, we welcome the increase in development assistance. The withdrawal of the international military presence will, however, have an impact on the economic and employment situation. In that regard, my delegation is encouraged by the ongoing efforts to operationalize the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework. It remains important that Afghan and international stakeholders should build on that momentum to ensure that commitments and visions translate into meaningful progress and improvement in the lives of ordinary citizens, who have been traumatized by the conflict.

South Africa remains deeply concerned about the impact of the conflict in Afghanistan on the civilian population. We are particularly disturbed by the 28 per cent increase in civilian casualties registered during the reporting period, compared to the same period last year. We strongly condemn the targeting of civilians by the insurgents as a means of intimidation and coercion, as well as the use of pressure-plate improvised explosive devices.

The fact that 355 children were killed or injured during the reporting period is appalling. Most recently a further 10 young girls were killed in a landmine explosion while collecting firewood in the province of Nangarhar, in eastern Afghanistan. There can be no excuse for such diabolical acts. This is an intolerable situation, which must be condemned. Equally, the targeting of schools and health facilities are serious humanitarian law violations for which perpetrators must be held accountable.

We further wish to underline that all armed elements operating in Afghanistan have the responsibility to ensure that unarmed civilians are protected, and failure by both State and non-State actors to uphold this responsibility should not go unpunished. In that regard, we are concerned about reports that International Security Assistance Force air attacks continue to result in civilian casualties, including the killing of children, as witnessed in October in Helmand province.

In conclusion, national ownership coupled with international support remains crucial to achieving political, security and socioeconomic progress in Afghanistan. For its part, the international community should continue its supportive role in the country's move from conflict to stability and prosperity. South Africa stresses that, given the magnitude of these challenges, a comprehensive strategy incorporating security, humanitarian efforts, good governance and socioeconomic development is required. In that regard, we wish to underscore the central role of UNAMA in supporting the Government of Afghanistan and coordinating international assistance to the country. The continued role played by bilateral and multilateral partners remains indispensable.

Mr. Briens (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for his briefing and his work at the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), as well as Ambassador Tanin for his statement. I align myself

with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

In my national capacity, I will address only three subjects: the transition, the elections and reconciliation. First, the transition is continuing and now involves 75 per cent of the Afghan population. We have seen no deterioration in the situation since the transfer of responsibility for security in Surobi and Kapisa, where we have seen the third Afghan Army brigade reveal its combat capacity in the field.

The Secretary-General notes the important drop in incidents, as compared to figures from 2011, and we welcome that. However, we share his concern about the increase in civilian victims in the last quarter, 80 per cent of whom were targeted by the insurgents. It is essential that UNAMA continue to carry out its impartial work of counting the civilian casualties, without any threats or interference.

In accordance with the announcement of the President of the French Republic in May at the Chicago Summit, our last combat forces withdrew on 15 December. We must now move towards another sort of long-term commitment. France will remain engaged in supporting and training the International Security Assistance Force until the end of the transition, on the understanding that this participation will involve no further combat.

Beyond its military presence, France will continue to stand with the Afghans, including after the transition period, in accordance with the international community's commitment, as stated at the Bonn and Tokyo Conferences. A treaty of friendship and cooperation was signed and ratified between our two countries. It establishes the long-term relations between France and Afghanistan over the next 20 years, on the basis of our 10 years of military engagement. On 8 July, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs announced at the Tokyo Conference a 50 per cent increase in our cooperation with Afghanistan over the next five years, totalling €308 million for the period from 2012 to 2016.

Secondly, the presidential elections of 2014 will mark an important moment for Afghanistan. They will mark a political transition after the two terms of President Hâmid Karzai and will therefore be a test of the strength of democracy in the country. They will be a milestone for the international community and its long-term support of Afghanistan, in accordance with the framework agreed in Tokyo.

From our point of view, it is vital that the Afghans be able to organize credible, free and transparent elections that will endow the leaders to be elected by the Afghans with a strong democratic legitimacy. We therefore call upon the country's authorities to ensure that they have the tools necessary to carry out the polling, count the results and follow up on possible complaints. That will require, in particular, revising and modernizing electoral lists.

We welcome the fact that the Independent Election Commission has decided upon a date, 5 April 2014, for holding the next presidential elections. The Commission has asked for help from the United Nations. We are obviously in favour of that, given that support for the electoral process is one of the priorities established by the Council for UNAMA. The international community must be duly informed about the electoral process on a regular basis.

Thirdly, only a genuine intra-Afghan reconciliation will make it possible to see the emergence of a stable and peaceful Afghanistan after 2014. In Bonn in December 2011, the international community announced its support for an inclusive, Afghan-led peace process open to the insurgents willing to forswear violence, sever all ties with international terrorism and respect the Constitution of Afghanistan, particularly with regard to women's rights.

This reconciliation process must be supported by the States of the region, and I welcome the most recent contacts and statements of the Afghan and Pakistani authorities on bilateral relations. However, the reconciliation process must, above all, be led by the Afghans, together with all the components of Afghan society.

It is in this context that the Security Council has renewed its sanctions regime against all persons and groups associated with the Taliban that constitute a threat to peace, security and stability in Afghanistan. Together with the delisting and listing decisions, the establishment of a more flexible travel ban exemption procedure should facilitate contacts in Afghanistan while observing Security Council rules.

Allow me to conclude by paying tribute to the men and women serving in Afghanistan under the United Nations flag, who today, under the leadership of the Special Representative, are doing excellent work in sometimes difficult conditions in the service

of the Afghans and at the invitation of the Afghan Government.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

At the outset, I would like to welcome the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mr. Ján Kubiš and thank him for his briefing on the situation in Afghanistan. We appreciate his efforts and his effective leadership of United Nations efforts in that country. We also appreciate the role of the Afghan Ambassador, Mr. Zahir Tanin, in our discussion today and his explanation of Afghanistan's achievements and ambitions and the challenges it faces.

The report of the Secretary-General before the Council (S/2012/907) is being presented in a very delicate regional and international climate, two years before international forces are set to leave Afghanistan and at the beginning of the transformation decade, which will start in 2015. The period covered by the report witnessed a profound domestic dialogue on the elections set for 2014, which will be the cornerstone of the political transition in Afghanistan. In preparation for those presidential and provincial elections, we welcome the ongoing consultations in the parliament concerning a new electoral law to be submitted to the Cabinet.

We express our satisfaction with regard to the gradual transition of responsibility for security from the international forces to the Afghan authorities, which now cover areas inhabited by over 75 per cent of the Afghan population. This coincides with a reduction in the number of security incidents compared to last year, by virtue of the effective role of the international and Afghan forces in combating insurgents, despite the increased number of casualties. We hope that all forces will increase their efforts to limit such incidents in order to preserve the safety and security of civilians.

At the regional level, during the reporting period a number of meetings were held between Afghan officials and officials from neighbouring countries in order to expedite cooperation on various fronts, including in the economic, security and energy sectors. With respect to financial cooperation, we appreciate the efforts of the Afghan Government to implement the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, and the detailed work plan it has put together, and we welcome the recent decision of the Afghan Cabinet in this regard.

Afghanistan has taken considerable steps recently towards stability, but still faces many challenges that must be met in close cooperation with the international community, which has frequently reiterated its readiness to support the efforts of the Afghan Government in this regard.

I cannot fail to highlight the effective role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in coordinating international efforts and cooperation aimed at achieving stability and sustainable development for all Afghan constituencies. Afghanistan is a very important country in the region, and its stability and security are of vital importance to neighbouring countries and to its many partners. We wish Afghanistan every success in addressing its security challenges and in its efforts to achieve stability, national reconciliation and development in order to maintain its unity and territorial integrity.

In conclusion, I thank our colleague Ambassador Wittig for his extraordinary and sincere efforts in the service of peace and stability in Afghanistan through his chairmanship of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), and to promote the implementation of Security Council resolutions on Afghanistan.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Kodama (Japan): I would like to thank Special Representative Ján Kubiš for his comprehensive and informative briefing, and to acknowledge with appreciation the hard work and dedication of all the staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) under his leadership. I would also like to thank Ambassador Tanin for his statement. Let me also express our sincere appreciation to Ambassador Wittig of Germany and his team for their leadership in guiding the debate on the situation in Afghanistan, as the pen holder, in a most effective manner for the past two years.

Japan is pleased to welcome the progress in the Afghan-led peace and reconciliation process over the past quarter. The visit of Mr. Rabbani, Chair of Afghanistan's High Peace Council, to Pakistan in November achieved substantial outcomes and reinvigorated the momentum of stakeholders in

re-embarking upon the long and uneven path towards the ultimate goal of the peace process. In the same month, we also witnessed Chair Rabbani's active interaction with the United Nations through dialogue with the Security Council and its Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). These exchanges gave us an opportunity to reflect on how the United Nations and its organs could more efficiently serve the peace and reconciliation process.

It is Japan's fervent hope that the Afghan Government's strong political will and efforts, combined with the profound engagement of its neighbouring countries and the rest of the international community, will succeed in propelling the peace process forward and achieving further and more inclusive dialogue. In this vein, it is also encouraging to see the continued positive trend of the increasing number of ex-combatants included in the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme.

Furthermore, Japan welcomes the Afghan Government's intensive follow-up efforts over the past four months, in close coordination with international stakeholders, to realize the commitments made in the context of the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, which resulted in the holding of the first meeting of the steering committee on 5 December.

Despite these recent positive developments, challenges in the field of security, including the high level of civilian casualties, continue to be one of the predominant obstacles to the country's stability. Only recently, we again witnessed another reprehensible incident — an attack against the chief of the National Directorate of Security. Japan calls for renewed determination and actions by the Afghan Government to ensure the safety of those Afghans and internationals who devote themselves to creating a better future for the country.

Looking back on the past year, Japan would also like to call on all the stakeholders for their continued attention and further efforts in addressing the persistent humanitarian needs and the worrisome decline in assistance. Without improving the severe humanitarian situation of the more than 450,000 internally displaced persons in the country, any gains achieved in socioeconomic development or in the political process will remain fragile and unsustainable.

The year 2013 must lay the foundation for 2014, the critical year for the sustainable future of Afghanistan.

During this upcoming year of truly decisive importance, Japan would like to see the following three things in particular: first, as we made clear at the beginning of this statement, continuous efforts for further development of the Afghan-led peace and reconciliation process; secondly, concrete evidence of the enhanced quality and capability of the Afghan national security forces in their efforts towards the successful completion of the transition process; and last but not least, commitments made in the context of the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, especially the holding of fair and credible elections in 2014 and the completion of the remaining six national priority programmes, in order to provide further steady and tangible results on the ground. In order to achieve a transparent and inclusive election, results-oriented measures must be taken in a timely manner to meet both the technical and the political challenges, such as building the capacities of the Independent Election Commission, establishing a unified and functioning voter registration system and accelerating electoral law reforms.

In conclusion, Japan believes that the year 2013 should be the year that gives the people of Afghanistan a sense of security and future prospects.

The President: I give the floor to Mr. Vrailas.

Mr. Vrailas (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The acceding country Croatia; the candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Iceland and Serbia; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina; the European Free Trade Association country Norway, member of the European Economic Area; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2012/907) and Special Representative Ján Kubiš for his briefing and for the work that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) does under his leadership.

The international Conferences held in Bonn last year and in Kabul and Tokyo earlier this year, as well as the Summit in Chicago, have reaffirmed the partnership between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community for Afghanistan's long-term security, economic growth and development.

Those Conferences have set out the way forward for Afghanistan to progressively assume responsibility for all aspects of policy and to achieve its security, development and governance goals.

In the EU statement in the Security Council debate on Afghanistan in September (see S/PV.6840), we briefly highlighted the important outcome of the Tokyo Conference, in particular the principle of mutual accountability encapsulated in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, and addressed the importance of regional cooperation. The implementation of the Tokyo Framework remains paramount to achieving a successful transition and transformation in Afghanistan. Without consistent delivery on commitments and the implementation of reforms on good governance and transparency, the rule of law and human rights, the international community will find it increasingly difficult to defend a continued commitment and allocation of financial resources vis-à-vis domestic constituencies.

In this statement, we want to focus on two topics, namely, progress on national reconciliation and preparations for the upcoming election.

We welcome the visit of the Afghan High Peace Council to Pakistan and the increased dialogue between the Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Progress will be sustainable only if the peace and reconciliation process is truly inclusive, not only engaging armed groups, but fully involving civil society and including a balanced representation of people from all regions and sections of Afghan society, in particular Afghan women. Both the process and its outcome must respect the principles set out by the Afghan Government and the international community at Bonn, including the human rights provisions of the Afghan Constitution.

We also encourage particular attention to the progressive implementation of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women. The European Union wishes to reiterate its firm commitment to resolution 1325 (2000) and all subsequent resolutions on women and peace and security. We welcome the commitment of the Afghan Government to its full implementation through the establishment of the inter-ministerial steering committee on resolution 1325 (2000).

We welcome the announcement of the date for the presidential election. It will be critical for Afghanistan's

future that elections are inclusive and transparent, and lead to an outcome that is widely accepted as legitimate.

We call on the Afghan authorities to engage all political parties and civil society in agreeing to reform the electoral process, based on lessons learned from previous elections. In particular, it will be important to put in place a legal framework consistent with the Constitution, with credible measures to prevent fraud, and overseen by independent bodies. Definitive and clear decisions by the relevant Afghan authorities, in consultation with parliament, political parties and civil society, on the system and registration process to be used for elections are needed, both to enable international support to the processes, in particular by the United Nations, and to allow for clear communication and voter education.

Allow me to reiterate our full support for the essential role of UNAMA during the transition and beyond. The political role of UNAMA in advising and assisting the Afghan Government is of central importance, not the least in the perspective of the elections in 2014 and 2015. UNAMA must be properly mandated and adequately resourced to fulfil that role. UNAMA also plays a key role in supporting increased Afghan ownership and in coordinating international development efforts in the coming years. The work of UNAMA will be vital in enabling Afghanistan and the international community to work effectively together to fulfil the commitments made in Tokyo earlier this year and in monitoring the human rights and humanitarian situation.

In conclusion, it is important that the international community remain strongly committed to progress in Afghanistan. That will require sustained support beyond 2014. The EU commitment to Afghanistan is long-term. We look forward to the swift completion of the negotiations on the cooperation agreement on partnership and development between Afghanistan and the European Union and its member States early next year. The European Union is currently giving more than €1 billion a year in development assistance to Afghanistan, and we will continue to prioritize and enhance support to Afghanistan in the decade of transformation agreed at Bonn.

The aim of our overall strategy in Afghanistan remains clear — supporting a successful transition process in Afghanistan and partnering Afghanistan beyond transition to become a self-reliant, peaceful,

democratic and prosperous society for the benefit of all Afghans.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Dehghani (Islamic Republic of Iran): It gives me great pleasure to address the Council today on the situation in Afghanistan, which is an issue of great significance to us, our region and the world.

I wish to express my thanks to the Secretary-General for the report contained in document S/2012/907. Let me convey my warm welcome to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ján Kubiš. We thank him for presenting a comprehensive report on the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and for his analysis of the situation in Afghanistan.

Recently, there have been notable political, economic and development changes in Afghanistan, as elaborated by Afghan Ambassador Zahir Tanin earlier in the meeting. On the political scene, one important development has been the reduction of foreign forces as we head towards the target date for the complete withdrawal of foreign combat troops.

On the issue of the national reconciliation process in Afghanistan, we believe that it should be an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led process. National reconciliation is an important component in settling the internal conflict in Afghanistan. In the light of resolutions 2082 (2012) and 2083 (2012), adopted by the Council on Monday, 17 December, and while supporting the Afghan Government's peace and national reconciliation efforts, we believe that there is a need to draw a fine line with extreme diligence. The Afghan people have endured a great deal of suffering, caused by extremist policies and terrorist acts, for so many years. Rebuilding Afghanistan and a new Afghan society requires, inter alia, repudiating those policies and acts. Thus, any efforts towards national reconciliation should be undertaken without appearing to be rewarding the perpetrators of those acts and policies.

In the economic field, international and regional partners should concentrate their efforts on laying the foundations for sustainable economic growth and better employment conditions in Afghanistan. For that purpose, there is a need for accelerated progress on economic cooperation with regional and international partners, in accordance with the national objectives set

forth by the Afghan Government. It goes without saying that the expansion of infrastructure and industrial, agricultural and transportation projects have priority. The Islamic Republic of Iran is ready, as before, to undertake its share in implementation of such projects.

The production of and trade in narcotic drugs is still rampant. According to the joint *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2012* carried out by the Afghanistan Ministry of Counter Narcotics and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), opium cultivation in Afghanistan has risen by 18 per cent in 2012. UNODC warns that the rise in cultivation occurred despite the Afghan Government's recent increased efforts to destroy poppy fields and help farmers find alternative sources of income. The *Survey* sends a strong message that the international community should not remain complacent in the face of the problem. A strong commitment is needed on the part of Afghan and international partners alike to curb the menace of drug cultivation and drug trafficking, which breed extremism. In that regard, we commend the initiatives launched to fight drugs, with the help of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, particularly because drug production has been a major source of funding for terrorist activities in Afghanistan.

The issue of refugees remains a challenge not only for Afghanistan but for neighbouring States and the international community as well. Additional efforts must be undertaken to repatriate refugees and ensure that they are reintegrated into Afghan society. At present, more than 1 million Afghan refugees are registered in Iran, while an even greater number of unregistered Afghans are also living in our country. Afghan nationals have continued to enjoy Iran's educational and welfare facilities, among others, and to benefit from the same subsidies that our own people receive. We urge the international community to continue to strengthen and expedite its efforts to create the conditions conducive to the sustainable repatriation of refugees and their full rehabilitation and reintegration in their homeland.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has always firmly supported Afghanistan in its efforts to maintain its national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and to realize enduring peace and stability. We hope that the international community will adhere to the principle of an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process and continue to support the Government and the people of Afghanistan in their efforts towards peace and stability.

In that regard we emphasize the United Nations role in coordinating issues related to Afghanistan. As our officials indicated in their meeting with Mr. Ján Kubiš during his visit to Tehran, we support UNAMA in fulfilling its mission to provide assistance for peace and the reconstruction of the country within its mandate and through a robust regional engagement with neighbouring countries on issues such as border security, immigration, refugees and drug control.

Building a sustainable, stable Afghanistan is crucial not only for the future of the Afghan people but also for peace and stability in the region, Asia and the world. It is our sincere hope that we will soon witness more development, progress and prosperity for the people and Government of Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Mr. Quinlan (Australia): First, I must thank Ambassador Peter Wittig and the German Mission for their leadership on Afghanistan in the Council over the past two years. I also recognize Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ján Kubiš for his ongoing leadership in-country at such a critical juncture and also all the personnel of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I must also acknowledge and thank Ambassador Zahir Tanin for his leadership, tenacity and collegiality here in New York.

The year 2012 has seen serious progress in strengthening the partnership between Afghanistan and the international community and in establishing an essential, comprehensive international framework for supporting Afghanistan beyond 2014. The year 2013 will now bring important preparations for the period after transition is complete and when the Government of Afghanistan will have full responsibility for security. International political and diplomatic efforts to support peace and stability in Afghanistan and in its region will be central to ensuring the irreversibility of progress made during the transition.

I would like to highlight two key issues in the Secretary-General's quarterly report (S/2012/907) that will be crucial to long-term stability in Afghanistan: political settlement and the conduct of national elections. The revitalization of the High Peace Council and its efforts to work towards a political solution is obviously very welcome. The international community has made it clear over the past 12 months that it remains

absolutely committed to securing Afghanistan's future stability, a fact that we should underscore to all parties in Afghanistan by emphasizing the need to end violence and join a political settlement. We have said that before. We have made it clear. The Council's recent adoption of resolution 2082 (2012), renewing the sanctions regime on the Taliban, was a positive example of the Council further enabling the reconciliation process.

Recent visits to Pakistan by High Peace Council Chair Rabbani and Foreign Minister Rassoul demonstrate promising cooperation and concrete outcomes. It is worth recalling that both sides appealed to the Taliban to participate in an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned reconciliation process. It is essential that this momentum be sustained to build the foundations for reconciliation and a durable political settlement. UNAMA itself has an important role to play in facilitating an Afghan-led process, including through its good offices and innovative track-two mechanisms.

The international community can and should assist in preparing for elections. Credible, inclusive and transparent elections in 2014 and 2015 will play a decisive role in Afghanistan's decade-long transformation. As hard as they are, accelerated efforts and further reform in preparation for the elections remain critical. We encourage the Afghan Government to leverage as much assistance as possible from UNAMA and the international community, particularly following the conclusion of the needs assessment mission, which will help to define the areas where assistance is needed more closely.

Despite progress, the Secretary-General's report does outline some worrying trends. While there has been a decline in overall levels of violence, the rise in civilian casualties is obviously of great concern, particularly the significant increase in deaths from insurgent attacks. That trend demonstrates the ruthlessness of the insurgency. The Taliban remains capable and determined. The continued targeting of civilians remains a serious strategy of the Taliban and highlights the need for in-depth training for the Afghan security forces and sustained international support for the Afghan Government.

Australia welcomes efforts to mitigate the threat from insider attacks, which, as we know only too well, have claimed lives recently, including those of Australian personnel. The broader strategic threat of insider attacks comes not from the attacks themselves,

but from the risk that we do not respond to them correctly. The best evidence that we will prevail against the threat from insider attacks is that we have not allowed and must not allow them to disrupt our training and operations in Afghanistan.

I must say that continued violence against women remains a serious concern for all of us. We welcome Afghan Government efforts to implement the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Of course, more remains to be done, and in that regard we look to the recommendations of UNAMA's recent report on the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

The Secretary-General's report notes the establishment of a police women mentoring programme, aimed at building the capacity of female police officers to help address violence against women and raise awareness among male officers of the importance of integrating women into the police force as equal members. Such initiatives are to be encouraged. They will build a stronger police force, develop community confidence and enhance equality.

Much progress has been made over the past decade, and we are confident that international resolve to support Afghanistan through transition and beyond 2014 will remain strong. The United Nations continues to play a critical role in that project. Australia welcomes the ongoing commitment of the United Nations and strongly supports UNAMA's mandate. We appreciate UNAMA's efforts to right-size its mission in the context of mandate review and significant fiscal constraints, while maintaining an important network in Afghanistan's provinces. But we must ensure that those constraints do not compromise the essential ongoing work of UNAMA or of other United Nations agencies in Afghanistan, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees .

To conclude, as Australia itself prepares to serve on the Security Council in 2013 and 2014, Afghanistan will remain a major area of concern for us. We look forward to working with all Council members and interested parties during this critical time in Afghanistan's transition. Australia remains committed to supporting Afghanistan in assuming full responsibility for its own security, and to bringing enhanced opportunities for its people to improve their livelihoods in a safe and secure environment. One would expect no less, and that is what we will try to do.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Çevik (Turkey): Let me begin by thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ján Kubiš for his comprehensive briefing on the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2012/907).

We welcome all of the positive signs mentioned in the report. On the other hand, as responsibilities are handed over to the Afghan authorities at an accelerated pace, significant political, economic and security challenges remain, many of them highlighted in the Special Representative's insightful briefing. The increase in the number of civilian casualties and attacks on schools and health facilities, particularly those targeting girls' schools, are matters of grave concern. The potential economic consequences of the transition are worrisome.

While we are progressing towards the implementation phase of the commitments put forward in Chicago and Tokyo last year, we must remain in touch with the realities on the ground. Tackling those challenges and building a sustainable, stable Afghanistan is crucial not only for the future of the Afghan people, but also for peace and stability in the subcontinent, Asia and the world.

In these challenging times, a continued display of will on the part of the international community will strengthen the hopes of the Afghan people for the future and help ensure that a smooth transition is under way. We are glad to see increased efforts on the part of the Afghan Government and the international community aimed at ensuring the concrete implementation of the mutual pledges made in Tokyo, and we are ready to support those efforts in any way we can.

The conduct of credible and inclusive elections will be a key indicator for a smooth and viable political transition process. The announcement of the date of 5 April 2014 for the presidential and Provincial Council elections is an important step forward. We commend the efforts made by the Independent Election Commission, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to ensure that free and fair elections are realized. We also welcome and encourage the constructive participation of political parties and civil society in the electoral process.

The successful continuation of peace and reconciliation efforts under the leadership and ownership of Afghanistan will foster peace and stability in Afghanistan and constitute another important step towards a political transition. We congratulate the recent progress made in this area under the successful guidance of Mr. Rabbani, the head of the Peace Council. We welcome the adoption of resolution 2082 (2012). Turkey will continue to support this process with the best interests of the Afghan people in mind.

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of regional cooperation for establishing and sustaining a secure, prosperous and peaceful Afghanistan. The constructive engagement of Afghanistan's regional partners will remain key to addressing common challenges such as terrorism, barriers to trade and investment, illicit drugs and refugees.

The trilateral summit process between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey has made a valuable contribution towards dialogue and cooperation among the three countries through seven meetings since 2007. The summits provide a functional platform for cooperation that is focused on political dialogue, military and security issues, peace and reconciliation efforts, and economic development and partnership.

The seventh trilateral summit, held on 11 and 12 December in Ankara, was convened under the theme of connectivity, with the view that strengthening local and regional networks of transportation will facilitate connectivity for economic development, stability and self-sustainability. The three countries reiterated their determination to intensify their cooperation in the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation efforts and to address the security challenges affecting the region. A parallel meeting of the Istanbul Forum, which comprises the apex organizations of the private sectors of the three countries, was also held on the sidelines of the summit.

We are also pleased to see that the Istanbul Process is steadily moving towards the phase of development and implementation, with several follow-up meetings held based on the framework accepted at the Kabul Ministerial Conference held on 14 June this year. During the most recent senior officials' meeting, held in Ankara, we agreed to finalize all implementation plans for confidence-building measures before the senior officials' meeting to be held in Baku on 6 February. We would like to thank all Heart of Asia countries, regional

organizations, the United Nations and supporters for their strong support for the process.

As Afghanistan's regional and international partners, we should spare no effort to contribute to the vision of a secure, peaceful and self-sufficient Afghanistan. That is our mutual interest. Turkey will always remain in solidarity with the Afghan people and continue to contribute to a safe, secure and prosperous Afghanistan, as we have done for many decades.

In concluding, I would like to voice our strong support for the crucial role played by the United

Nations in Afghanistan. I would particularly like to commend the valuable efforts of the United Nations, and UNAMA in particular, in taking the Istanbul Process further and to express our heartfelt gratitude to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Kubiš and his hard-working team.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There are no more speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.