

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN

Bonn, 5 December 2011

Your Excellency Chancellor Merkel,
Your Excellency President Karzai,
Foreign Minister Westerwelle,
Foreign Minister Rassoul,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking our hosts for their hospitality and generosity.

Our thanks and congratulations, as well, to President Karzai, for convening this forum of more than 100 member states and international organizations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ten years ago, leaders joined here in Bonn in the wake of a terrible terrorist attack.

Over the past decade, our unity and resolve have been tested. And yet, we have persevered, together, on behalf of the Afghan people.

That road that started in Bonn brings us back once again.

The Afghan chairmanship of this Conference symbolizes something very important. It shows the increased capacity of our Afghan friends to lead. It demonstrates their willingness to own the processes that will shape their future.

At the same time, we know that the cycle of suffering has not been broken. I am deeply concerned that violence remains a constant factor in the daily life of the Afghan people. It is hard to build when violence hijacks the reconstruction and development agenda.

Today, the international community comes together to reinforce this fundamental link between development and security. We re-affirm our commitment to support Afghanistan in its efforts for a better, peaceful and prosperous life for all its people, women and men alike.

Over the past decade, our work has made a difference.

Together, we have supported the return of 4.6 million Afghan refugees. We have enrolled 7.3 million more children in school and helped deliver better health care. 80% of the country is now polio-free. More women are empowered and representing their communities. As the Afghan Mortality Survey shows, infant and maternal mortality has declined. Far fewer people are victims of landmines.

Along the way, we have supported the priorities of the Afghan government and advanced on the aspirations of the Afghan people.

Looking ahead, we know the challenges are large — but we will not be deterred.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The theme of this conference sums up the challenge before us: “From Transition to Transformation”.

Success requires effective engagement from us all, now and for the long-term.

Above all, that requires reconciliation.

The Afghan people have long understood that lasting stability must grow from a political process grounded in dialogue and consensus.

We must draw from the centuries-old wisdom of the Afghans and endorse the fundamental principles of national reconciliation – Afghan-led and fully inclusive.

We share the same aspirations:

To safeguard human life and property.

To seek justice in good faith and mutual trust.

To ensure that all parties renounce violence, cut ties to international terrorism, and respect the Afghan Constitution with its protections for human rights.

Reconciliation is in everyone’s interest. It must be everyone’s concern.

As we look ahead, we must also ensure that protection of civilians remains at the fore.

The lion’s share of civilian deaths and casualties have been caused by anti-Government forces. All such killings, whether targeted or indiscriminate, are unacceptable and must stop.

This is also an issue for the International Security Assistance Force. The Afghan people must see ISAF as true partners in the deepest sense, and that begins with personal security.

We appreciate the dedication and courage that ISAF forces have displayed in helping Afghanistan reach this important point of transition. But incidents in which innocent civilians become casualties can only undercut our work and our ultimate goals.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As Afghanistan assumes full responsibility for its security, the government and its international partners must shift and intensify their focus on the non-military aspects of transition — on development, on governance and on extending effective civilian authority throughout Afghanistan.

There are no easy solutions. The trust and confidence of the Afghan people will be won by fighting corruption, tackling the drug trade, sustaining the rule of law and progress on human rights, ensuring women rights, and advancing social and economic development.

In Afghanistan and elsewhere, the basic building block of social well-being is education — inclusive, equitable, comprehensive. Clearly, this means the education of girls and young women as well as boys and young men.

And while the empowerment of Afghanistan's women can start with education, it must not end there. It must extend to political participation and the full range of areas where discrimination is deeply entrenched, either socially or legally.

Afghanistan cannot realize its full potential if half of its population is not fully empowered.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentleman,

The regional dimension is crucial.

Afghanistan is not an island; it must be moored in the broader stream of regional commerce and development. Regional cooperation is essential for addressing transitional threats — organized crime, trafficking in illicit drugs, and the links between these activities and terrorism.

To Afghanistan's neighbours ... Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Iran:

Let me stress that your cooperative understanding will be indispensable to peace and reconciliation. Political reconciliation in Afghanistan can proceed only if it is supported by its neighbours.

To all other friends of Afghanistan, near and far:

Let us build on the momentum of previous meetings such as this one and re-commit ourselves to practical, coherent and concerted action by us all.

To the people of Afghanistan, especially:

Let me say that the United Nations will be there for you – to listen and to help in every possible way.

We are in the process of reviewing our roles and activities to best serve the Afghan people. We are doing so in line with requirements of the transition process ... the mandates of the Security Council ... and above all the expectations of the Afghan Government and people.

In closing, I would like to express my immense gratitude to the UN Special Representative Staffan de Mistura for his dedication, service and leadership of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. He is returning to Italy, but we look forward to working closely with him in a new capacity.

And I want to warmly welcome Mr. Ján Kubiš, who will be succeeding Mr. de Mistura. I am certain that he can count on our full support and cooperation as he undertakes this very challenging mission.

Thank you.