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MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND COOPERATION OF SPAIN  
AT THE INTERNATIONAL AFGHANISTAN CONFERENCE  
BONN, 5 DECEMBER 2011*

Honorable President Karzai,

Fellow Ministers,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank His Excellency President Karzai for chairing this International Conference, as well as the Authorities of the Federal Republic of Germany for their remarkable hospitality in hosting us here today.

It is a great honor, yet also a profound responsibility, to be in Bonn, marking the tenth anniversary of the International Community's commitment with Afghanistan.

The situation in Afghanistan has, for too long now, been a major source of concern for the International Community. Years of war and violence have brought enormous suffering to the Afghan people. We have gathered here today to change this, to make Bonn a genuine turning point, marking the way forward towards a secure, stable and prosperous Afghanistan. Moreover, the pivotal role of Afghanistan, as a crossroads connecting Central, Southern Asia and the Middle East, determines that its stability and prosperity are of strategic importance for regional and international security.

We therefore reaffirm our commitment to achieving the goals that we set for ourselves ten years ago, here in Bonn. We expect that the Afghan Government will be fully capable, by the end of 2014, of maintaining security and providing essential services throughout the country. But it is clear that Afghanistan will not be able yet to stand on its feet by itself, especially when serious threats to its peace and stability, such as terrorism and drug trafficking, may still be present.

Without the support of the International Community, what has been achieved so far could be reversed rather quickly. We need, therefore, to persevere in our efforts. Afghanistan should never again be a safe haven for terrorism and should play a constructive role in furthering cooperation in the region.

Spain has been part of this engagement from the very beginning, carrying out a very significant military and civilian effort in the stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan. We have unfortunately paid a high price for this engagement: so far 98 Spanish servicemen and women have lost their lives supporting Afghanistan. I would like to take the opportunity to praise and remember them, as well as all those who have participated in this long and complex mission.

A considerable financial effort has also been made by Spain to support the development of Afghanistan. Over the last few years, despite the economic crisis, we have maintained our level of involvement and all our commitments have been fulfilled.

Spain is responsible for the reconstruction and development efforts in one of the poorest provinces in the country, the Province of Badghis. When the Spanish development team arrived to this remote Province in 2006, there was not a single kilometer of paved road, no electricity, not one household with running water and there was a total lack of productive means for the local population. The provincial authorities could not provide basic needs in health or education for their population.

Today, thanks to constant, professional work and the active engagement of the Provincial as well as the Afghan National authorities, Spanish development cooperation has helped build nearly 200 kilometers of asphalted roads throughout the province, provided access to drinking water for more than 18.000 people, and created job opportunities for over 25.000 people. An airport has been built, the Provincial Hospital equipped and seven rural hospitals are now fully functional. Primary and secondary schools have been opened throughout the province, and there are now training centers for nurses, midwives, and teachers that have improved work opportunities for the population.

All of this has been accomplished without creating a single parallel institution. It has all been done with the Afghan authorities, within their development strategies and plans, and with their complete and total involvement in all the stages of the process. Because all development projects have been Afghan projects, implemented by the Afghan authorities in all of their stages, the transition of the civil component in the Province under Spanish responsibility should be easy and smooth.

Spain has strongly supported the principle of Afghan “ownership” in the planning and implementation of programs and projects in our areas of responsibility. From the start, we have worked hand in hand with the Afghan local and national authorities, fitting our objectives into their strategies and needs. Results have been very satisfactory.

All development programs of the Spanish PRT are already being managed, in different degrees, by the Afghans themselves. This will greatly facilitate the transfer of responsibilities to the Afghan authorities. In guaranteeing an irreversible transition of our projects, building a system for sustainable funding of sub national institutions and service delivery will be essential in a not so distant future.

Furthermore, in the Kabul Conference of 2009, President Karzai requested donors that by 2014, at least 50% of contributions should be directed to the budget of the Central Government. Since the beginning of our mission in Afghanistan, only around 30% of our contributions have been invested in the PRT. 70% has always been invested in the national budget or has been used to finance programs at a national level.

Development cannot be achieved without security. Our military effort, through the UN Security Council mandated International Security Assistance Force for Afghanistan (ISAF), has been very significant. Right now there are more than 1.500 Spanish troops in Afghanistan, stationed mainly in the Provinces of Badghis and Herat, as well as the ISAF Headquarters in Kabul. We are in charge of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Qala-i-Naw, the operation of the Herat Airport and five Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams (OMLTs). In addition to this, 40 Spanish Civil Guards are training Afghan National and Border Police in Police Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams (POMLTs) in Badghis, Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif.

Mr. President,

Spain, in conformity with its engagements with the International Community and allies, is committed to further efforts to help the Afghan people build a durable and just peace and to continue engaged, during the transition period and thereafter, until the task has been completed.

Spain welcomes the recent official announcement by the Government of Afghanistan of the “Second Tranche” of Transition, which will bring more than half of the population of Afghanistan into the Transition Process. We are particularly happy that two key districts of Badghis Province –Qala-i-Naw and Ab Kamari—, where the Spanish PRT and most Spanish bilateral projects are located, have been included in the aforementioned Tranche.

Spain will soon begin the hand-over of security responsibilities to Afghan authorities in Badghis. In order to make security sustainable in the years to come, Spain will give priority to two paramount lines of action: freedom of movement on the main thoroughfares of Badghis Province and training and mentoring of the Afghan National Army and Police.

Mr. President,

Afghanistan’s future is in the hands of the Afghans themselves. Without reconciliation among the Afghan people, all that has been accomplished could easily be put at risk. The despicable assassination of Professor Rabbani was a great setback, but his death would have been in vain if the murderers succeed in putting an end to the reconciliation process.

His legacy will be best honored by carrying on his task, and for this reason we encourage the Afghan authorities to try and resume efforts with those groups that are ready to talk peace and reach an inclusive political settlement with all those who renounce violence, cut ties with terrorist groups and respect the principles enshrined in the Afghan Constitution.

Neighboring countries should give their full support and cooperation in this difficult but essential process.

Reintegration should also be facilitated to all those who truly prove their readiness to abide by the laws and completely break their links with Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. Finally, ways to involve the civil society in the transformation process and to encourage participation at all levels of government should be explored, as a means to achieve success in the long term. Spain reiterates its support for reconciliation and reintegration efforts. Afghanistan should receive whatever assistance it might need to reach these critical goals.

Through transition, the Afghan Government will be increasingly capable of exercising its authority and will have a crucial role to play across the domains of governance, stabilization and development. Although the country will need substantial support from donors for many years, it is necessary to gradually build a self-sustaining economy and government. The Government of Afghanistan should carry out its responsibilities in a manner consistent with the commitments made at the London and Kabul conferences of 2010.

The so-called “Kabul Process” has set forth the way to achieve this goal, through the establishment of specific activities under the National Priority Programs. The implementation of these programs with the support of the International Community is of the utmost importance. We are looking forward to a review next year of the results

achieved, in particular as regards institutional building, structural reforms, governance, transparency, access to justice and the rule of law. Progress in some programs in the context of the Kabul Process should not give place to complacency. Further steps in democratization are needed, including the improvement of the electoral process. And the observation and respect of Human Rights, especially the rights of women and children, should deserve primary attention during the transition and beyond.

As aid is moved from specific projects to on budget disbursements, it will be necessary to improve the Government's capacity as regards budget execution and delivery of essential services at national and sub national levels. An economic environment favorable for private sector investment is also vital in order to promote the conditions for sustainable economic growth.

At times of severe economic difficulties throughout the world, Afghanistan must be able to use the support provided by international donors with great efficiency. We all hope that, as we draw closer to 2014, the first signs of progress towards a more economically sound, viable, fully-functional and financially self-sustaining Afghanistan, will begin to appear.

Mr. President,

I could not end without specifically mentioning the urgent need for greater involvement of the countries in the region. Without their involvement, Afghanistan's immense task is unapproachable. This involvement must have a political, economic and security dimension, taking into account the importance a stable Afghanistan and an effective Afghan Government have on the entire region. We urge all countries and organizations in the region to continue creating synergies and participating in efforts to achieve a peaceful solution to the conflict in Afghanistan.

I would like to commend the outcome of the recently held Istanbul Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Heart of Asia and, on behalf of my Government, declare that we are encouraged by the positive attitude shown by Afghanistan's neighboring countries to set up a number of Confidence Building Measures that will reinforce security in the region as well as the commitment to hold a follow-up ministerial meeting in Kabul in 2012, opening a process of political cooperation in the region.

Recognizing that the UN leadership will remain vital to Afghanistan's fate, let me pay tribute to the excellent work that has been done by Ambassador de Mistura and wish all success to Ambassador Kubis.

Finally, as a European Union Member State, Spain considers of great importance the role that the EU has been playing and will continue to play in Afghanistan, assisting the Afghan authorities in capacity building, including governance, civil service, police training –through EUPOL–, and the judicial sector, and in supporting economic and social development. In this sense, a mandate has been given to the Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to negotiate a Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development with the Afghan Government, which will create a framework for the EU's long-term commitment for cooperation with Afghanistan.

Mr. President,

Afghanistan is at a crucial stage in its history. The Afghan people deserve a more promising future. We must all be part of this process, helping Afghanistan to become a factor for peace and stability within its region, a model of integration and

solidarity, and a success story that we can share with future generations. Spain, as a reliable partner of the Afghan people, reiterates its firm commitment to remain engaged until the completion of this mission.

Thank you very much.