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The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/11 and Security Council resolution 2145 (2014), by which I was requested to report every three months on developments in Afghanistan. The report provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan, including significant humanitarian, development and human rights efforts, since my previous report was issued on 9 September 2014 (A/69/540-S/2014/656). It also provides a summary of key political and security developments and regional and international events related to Afghanistan.

II. Relevant developments

2. The inauguration of the President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, on 29 September 2014 and the Agreement of 21 September to establish a national unity government with Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah brought an end to the electoral impasse and marked the first peaceful transfer of power in Afghanistan between elected leaders. The Agreement reached by the two presidential candidates and the inauguration of President Ghani and his appointment of Mr. Abdullah as Chief Executive Officer were welcomed in Afghanistan and by the international community, amidst concerns for the increasingly heavy political, security and economic toll of the protracted electoral process.

3. President Ghani announced a robust agenda, encompassing governance, rule of law and the fight against corruption, with reconciliation as a top priority and plans for regional engagement. On 30 September, Afghanistan signed the Bilateral Security Agreement with the United States of America and the status-of-forces agreement with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), thereby providing



the legal framework for continued international military assistance after 2014. Regional dialogue centred on the fourth Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process Ministerial Conference, held in Beijing on 31 October, where President Ghani outlined the reform agenda of the new Government and underlined the priority of an effective Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. Participant countries expressed readiness to work with the new Government of Afghanistan and strengthen cooperation across the region. The London Conference on Afghanistan on 4 December provided a basis for the renewal of political and financial support to the new Government and agreement around the main elements of the Government's reform agenda.

A. Political developments

4. On 21 September 2014, the presidential candidates, Mr. Abdullah and Mr. Ghani, signed the Agreement between the Two Campaign Teams regarding the Structure of the National Unity Government in the presence of the outgoing President, Hamid Karzai. My then Special Representative, Ján Kubiš, and the Ambassador of the United States to Afghanistan, James Cunningham, signed the Agreement as witnesses. Later that day, the Independent Election Commission announced that Mr. Ghani was the President-elect of Afghanistan, and stated that Mr. Abdullah had been designated Chief Executive Officer, while the release of the ballot results was reserved until a future date.

5. The Agreement reflected intense negotiations between both presidential candidates and their campaign teams, as well as mediation efforts by President Karzai, the United States and the United Nations to facilitate consensus on the final text. On 10 September, in separate discussions with Mr. Abdullah and Mr. Ghani, I underlined the need for both to abide by their public commitments of 12 July and conclude the political agreement for a national unity government. On 11 September, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, met in Kabul with Messrs. Abdullah and Ghani, reiterating this message and confirming that the United Nations would remain an active and supportive partner of Afghanistan.

6. Under its provisions, the Agreement sets forth the forms and functions of a national unity government and highlights the importance of political stability and reform. Central elements include the commitment to convene a Loya Jirga (grand council) within two years to consider the amendment of the Constitution to establish the post of Executive Prime Minister. In the interim, and in accordance with the Agreement, the post of Chief Executive Officer would be created by presidential decree. The Agreement also puts forward a set of principles linked to merit, parity and equitable distribution with regard to key appointments in the National Unity Government and steps for comprehensive electoral reform.

7. The Agreement followed the conclusion by the Independent Election Commission of the comprehensive audit of the presidential elections on 14 September, with the completion on that date of the adjudication on ballot invalidations. Unprecedented in scale and scope, the audit involved the individual opening and examination of more than 22,000 ballot boxes by the national electoral authorities, in the presence of the candidate agents, observers, media and the United Nations. While no formal cumulative totals were released during the audit process, the independent tallies of recounts and invalidations maintained by the two

campaigns meant that it was widely understood that the preliminary outcome announced by the Commission placing Mr. Ghani in the lead was not expected to change.

8. On 26 September, the Commission presented to President-elect Ghani a certificate of election, indicating that he had received 55.27 per cent of the 7.12 million valid votes cast in the second round of the presidential election. On accepting the certificate, he made a statement emphasizing the unity of the nation and congratulating the outgoing President, Mr. Karzai, on the peaceful transition of power from one elected president to another. Despite lingering tensions between supporters of both presidential candidates, fears of civil unrest reported in the media following the presentation proved unfounded.

9. Two days later, President Karzai delivered his final address to the nation as Head of State, highlighting the achievements of his administration and expressing his hope that peace would soon return to Afghanistan. He congratulated the President-elect, Mr. Ghani, and Mr. Abdullah on their agreement, and called upon all Afghans to support the National Unity Government.

10. Upon his inauguration on 29 September 2014, President Ghani swore in, as First Vice-President, Abdul Rashid Dostum; Second Vice-President, Mohammad Sarwar Danish; Chief Executive Officer, Abdullah Abdullah; and Deputy Chief Executive Officers, Muhammad Khan and Muhammad Mohaqiq. In his inaugural address, President Ghani outlined a broad agenda addressing institutional reform of the State and governance; interdependent issues of the economy, human capital and security, including a call to the Taliban and Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin to enter into political discussions; and foreign policy initiatives for building the stability and prosperity of the country. In his speech, Chief Executive Officer Abdullah expressed his commitment to national unity and working together with the President as one team for the advancement of the country.

11. The initial steps for the establishment of the new Government started immediately after the inauguration. Between 29 September and 1 October, President Ghani appointed several high-level advisers, including the Special Representative on reform and governance affairs, Ahmad Zia Massoud; the National Security Adviser, Hanif Atmar; and the National Economic Adviser, Hazrat Zakhelwal. He also took steps towards implementation of his campaign pledges. On 30 September, the new Government signed the Bilateral Security Agreement with the United States and the status-of-forces agreement with NATO, which together facilitate the establishment of the NATO Resolute Support Mission that is to provide training, advice and assistance to the Afghan security forces. Approved by the lower house and the upper house of the National Assembly on 23 and 27 November, respectively, the two agreements entered into effect on 30 November 2014.

12. President Ghani took initial steps to streamline his administration, strengthen the rule of law and combat corruption. On 1 October, the President amalgamated the Office of Chief of Staff of the President into the Office of Administrative Affairs to reduce the number and cost of governmental agencies. He launched discussions on improving coordination between the Attorney General's Office, the Supreme Audit Office, the High Office of Oversight and the Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, with a view to a more effective fight against corruption. That was accompanied by the broad outreach on the reform agenda, including discussions with Government and security officials, community leaders,

elders and civil society representatives in several provinces, including Kunduz, Herat, Ghor, Gardez, Kandahar, Nangarhar and Khost. On 2 October, a presidential decree was issued, reopening the investigation into the 2010 Kabul Bank fraud case.

13. On 13 October, Chief Executive Officer Abdullah chaired the first meeting of the Council of Ministers. In accordance with the Agreement of 21 September, a mechanism was established between the President and the Chief Executive Officer's advisers in early October to define requirements and criteria for ministerial nominations. The President and the Chief Executive Officer continue to work together to establish the new cabinet, pending which the incumbent ministers of the previous Government continue to serve. On 9 and 10 November, the lower and upper houses of the National Assembly, respectively, called for the expedited introduction of the new cabinet. Subsequently, the Chief Executive Officer issued a statement that underlined the collaborative nature of the discussions between the President and himself on the formation of the new Cabinet and arrangements to address electoral reforms.

14. On 25 October, the Independent Election Commission announced the results of the provincial council elections of 5 April. The 458 seats in the provincial councils were won by 361 male candidates and 97 female (21 per cent) candidates. Forty-seven candidates, who won according to the preliminary results, had their victories overturned as a result of the adjudication of complaints by the electoral institutions. Several of those candidates protested the final results and alleged improper handling of complaints and manipulation of results by the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission, most notably in Herat, where protests were particularly virulent. As the first order of business, the newly inaugurated provincial councils held internal elections to fill their quota of seats in the upper house of the National Assembly. They discontinued the practice of sending a provincial council representative to substitute for the vacant seats in the National Assembly to be filled by District Council representatives, for whom elections have yet to occur in Afghanistan.

15. Since assuming office, President Ghani has clearly communicated his commitment to launch an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. On 17 October, in his meeting with the members of the National Ulema Council, he urged the religious leaders to play a proactive role in bringing peace to the country, in cooperation with his administration. On 31 October, addressing the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process Ministerial Conference, President Ghani emphasized that peace was the highest priority of the new Government. In doing so, he reiterated his invitation to the "political opposition, particularly the Taliban, to join an inter-Afghan dialogue" and requested international partners to support an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process.

16. The Taliban have yet to signal a readiness to formally engage. In a statement issued on 22 September, the Taliban rejected the formation of the National Unity Government and called for a continuation of the conflict until "the end of foreign occupation". Following the Government's signature of security agreements with the United States and NATO, the Taliban issued a statement on 30 September that denounced the agreements and cited the President's inauguration message of peace and reconciliation as "deceitful". On 7 October, the Taliban released a statement marking the thirteenth anniversary of the start of United States military operations in Afghanistan, reiterating calls for attacks on international forces and condemning the two security agreements. Another statement was issued by Hezb-e Islami

Gulbuddin on 4 November that denounced the Bilateral Security Agreement and urged the National Assembly to deny ratification.

B. Security

17. Since the end of the summer period, the Government has faced a sustained and determined challenge in securing key districts that remained under insurgent pressure. The post-elections political impasse and the delayed signing of the security agreements with the United States and NATO created an environment of uncertainty, which appeared to embolden anti-Government elements in their actions across the country to undermine public confidence in the Government and its security forces. During the reporting period, multiple attacks took place on district administrative centres, security force checkpoints and major roads. Apart from their apparent intent to project insurgent strength and generate media attention, none of the attacks succeeded in permanently capturing the intended targets.

18. Insurgents embarked on attacks against the Government in most parts of the country, with the most significant being in Hilmand and Kandahar provinces in the south; Ghazni, Paktya and Paktika provinces in the south-east; Nangarhar Province in the east; Kunduz Province in the north-east; Faryab Province in the north; and Herat, Farah and Ghor provinces in the west. Overall, the Afghan security forces were able to counter the insurgency with relative effectiveness, although reportedly with significant casualty rates. On 16 October, Afghan security forces announced the arrest of two senior commanders of the Haqqani network and expressed confidence that that would have a detrimental impact on the top command and operational capacity of the network. The next day, the Taliban issued a rebuttal that asserted that the two were the subjects of an extraterritorial abduction from a Gulf country, and called for their immediate release. Despite rumours of the presence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Afghanistan, to date no major part of the Afghan insurgency has declared allegiance to ISIL.

19. The United Nations continued to monitor security events that have an impact on civilian actors. From 16 August to 15 November, 5,199 security incidents were recorded, representing a marginal 5.2 per cent decrease compared with the same period in 2013, when 5,481 incidents were recorded. The overall number of 19,469 security incidents documented across the country since the beginning of 2014 through 15 November 2014 constitutes a 10.3 per cent increase over the same period in 2013 with 17,645 incidents. The most volatile areas continued to be the southern, south-eastern and eastern parts of the country, accounting for 69 per cent of reported incidents. The eastern part of the country, in particular, showed a marked increase in incidents relative to other areas, with Nangarhar Province registering 768 incidents, followed by Kandahar with 592 incidents. While the national security forces demonstrated the ability to clear and retake contested areas, longer term control and progress remained contingent on the delivery of governance and social services.

20. Efforts continued to provide assurance that the capabilities of the national security institutions, fostered over the last 13 years, are firmly entrenched and sustainable, as evidenced by the security arrangements concluded on 30 September. They were preceded by the NATO Summit of Heads of State and Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on 4 and 5 September 2014, where NATO allies and partners pledged their continued support to the Afghan

security forces until the end of 2017, with assistance of approximately US\$ 5.1 billion per year and continued dialogue under the NATO-Afghanistan Enduring Partnership. In the Declaration on Afghanistan, Member States noted the Resolute Support Mission's intention to train, advise and assist the Afghan National Security Forces after 2014; stressed the importance of transparency, accountability and cost-effectiveness in financial assistance to the Afghan forces; and restated the aim that Afghanistan should assume, no later than 2024, full financial responsibility for its own security forces. That support is calibrated to the areas of planning, intelligence, logistics, air support and medical evacuation functions.

21. Armed clashes accounted for 48.9 per cent of security incidents recorded during the reporting period, a 2.2 per cent decrease compared to the same period in 2013. Improvised explosive devices accounted for 27.1 per cent of the reported incidents. Anti-Government elements continued to use targeted killings and abductions to exert control and influence on the population. Between 16 August and 15 November 2014, there were 235 incidents of assassinations and 92 abductions, a 9 per cent increase compared with the same period in 2013, during which 211 incidents and 89 abductions were recorded. Also during this period, a total of 46 suicide attacks were reported countrywide against 36 for the same period in 2013. Of those attacks, 17 per cent were recorded in Kabul City.

22. During the reporting period, a total of 27 security incidents recorded were either directly or indirectly against the United Nations. Most of the incidents were directed towards United Nations national staff members, and included criminal acts and intimidation. On 20 September, a United Nations road mission was targeted with a remote-controlled improvised explosive device in Khost Province, but no casualties or damage were reported. On 13 October, a United Nations fixed-wing flight from Gardez to Kabul was hit by small arms fire. While the flight landed safely in Kabul, the incident resulted in minor injuries to two pilots and disruption to United Nations flight operations. On 24 October, a nearby impact of a rocket injured one international security provider at the World Bank compound. On 21 November, the Green Village international compound in Kabul was targeted in a complex attack, for which the Taliban claimed responsibility. One international guard was killed and two were wounded. One Afghan policeman was injured as well. No United Nations personnel were injured in the attack. Two United Nations road missions came under attack in Kabul Province on 25 and 26 November. While no United Nations personnel were injured, two members of the Afghan security forces were injured in the second incident. The Taliban claimed responsibility for both attacks.

C. Regional cooperation

23. In recognition of the role of regional relations in ensuring national stability, Afghanistan's leaders have prioritized cooperation with their neighbours and the region. On 10 September 2014, President Karzai met with the Minister of External Affairs of India, Sushma Swaraj, for talks on regional security. He participated in the Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on 11 and 12 September, which included in its Declaration support for the emergence of Afghanistan as an independent, peaceful, neutral and prosperous State, and for strengthening the central coordinating role of the United Nations in international efforts for an Afghan settlement.

24. Since taking office, President Ghani has emphasized regional cooperation as a pivotal factor for the stability and prosperity of Afghanistan. In doing so, he undertook visits to Saudi Arabia, China, Pakistan, Nepal and the United Kingdom and received the visit of the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and a ministerial delegation on 18 October in Kabul. During the visit, they signed the Afghanistan-Turkey Strategic Partnership and Friendship Agreement that commits both countries to further cooperation on security, reconstruction, investment and trade.

25. On 31 October, the fourth Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process Ministerial Conference was held in Beijing and concluded with the adoption of the Declaration on Deepening Cooperation for Sustainable Security and Prosperity of the “Heart of Asia” Region. At the Conference, President Ghani reiterated his nation’s commitment to reform and reconciliation. Opened by Premier Li of China and President Ghani, the meeting was attended by representatives from the 14 Istanbul Process countries, 16 supporting countries and 12 international and regional organizations, as well as the United Nations. The outcome document of the Conference bolstered the political aspects of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and reiterated previous commitments to inclusive reconciliation and support for an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process. Likewise, the elements centred on economic cooperation were strengthened, notably for progress on confidence-building measures. In addition, participants welcomed the offer by Pakistan to host the next ministerial meeting in 2015.

26. On 5 November, the Agreement of Border Connection Point among Afghanistan, China and Tajikistan was concluded. The Agreement defines the border between the three countries, which pledge to respect mutual sovereignty and territorial integrity.

27. With regard to Afghanistan and Pakistan, tensions persisted along the frontier between the countries, but allegations of cross-border shelling and militant incursions were comparatively fewer in comparison with the previous reporting period. On 15 September, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan expressed to Pakistan its deep concern regarding the announcement by a faction of the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan of its intent to launch cross-border attacks. On 17 September, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan lodged a protest with Afghanistan over an alleged attack by militants across the border into North Waziristan.

28. There was a high level of engagement between Afghanistan and Pakistan during the reporting period. That included a visit by President Ghani to Islamabad on 14 and 15 November. On 11 October, Afghanistan and Pakistan had signed an agreement on energy transit pricing as part of the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA-1000), which provides for the construction of electricity lines from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan via Afghanistan to Pakistan. That was followed on 19 October by a visit from the adviser to the Prime Minister of Pakistan on national security and foreign affairs, Sartaj Aziz, to Kabul. On 6 November, Pakistan’s Chief of Army Staff, General Raheel Sharif, held meetings in Kabul with President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah for discussions on security cooperation issues. In Islamabad, President Ghani met with the Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif; the President, Mamnoon Hussain; the Minister of Finance, Mohammad Ishaq Dar; and the Chief of Army Staff, General Sharif.

III. Human rights

29. Between 16 August and 15 November, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) documented 2,606 civilian casualties (822 killed and 1,784 injured), reflecting a slight increase over the same quarter in 2013. In total, 73 per cent of civilian casualties were attributed to anti-Government elements, 15 per cent to pro-Government forces (13 per cent to Afghan National Security Forces and 2 per cent to international military forces) and 7 per cent to unattributed cross-fire between pro-Government forces and anti-Government elements. The attribution of 5 per cent of civilian casualties, resulting mostly from explosive remnants of war, could not be determined. Ground engagements remained the leading cause of civilian casualties, accounting for 785 civilian casualties (229 deaths and 556 injured), followed by improvised explosive devices, accounting for 716 civilian casualties (192 killed and 524 injured), an 8 per cent increase. On 3 November, in Gardez City an improvised explosive device detonated at a restaurant in a bazaar, killing four civilians and injuring 21 civilians. On 23 November, in the Yahyakhail district of Paktika Province, a suicide attacker detonated an improvised explosive device in a sports field, killing at least 50 civilians who were attending a volleyball match and injuring at least 60 others. Many children were among the dead and injured. Overall, civilian casualties from complex and suicide attacks increased by 10 per cent during the quarter, with the Mission documenting 64 civilian deaths and 424 injured (488 civilian casualties). The Taliban carried out and publicly claimed responsibility for several attacks that targeted the National Directorate of Security and resulted in civilian casualties, including an attack against the Directorate's compound in Ghazni City on 4 September, which killed 21 and injured 204 civilians.

30. UNAMA also documented a rise in civilian casualties from aerial operations carried out by international military forces, documenting 88 civilian casualties (53 deaths and 35 injured), a 120 per cent increase over the same period last year. UNAMA documented a rise in civilian casualties from explosive remnants of war, with 89 civilian casualties (21 deaths and 68 injured), a 22 per cent increase over the same quarter in 2013.

31. The United Nations-led country task force on monitoring and reporting on children and armed conflict documented the deaths of 148 and injuries to 422 children between 16 August and 15 November. Most child casualties resulted from ground engagements between pro-Government forces and anti-Government elements. The eastern region of the country remained the most volatile for children, witnessing 25 per cent of the total child casualties reported. The Taliban and other armed groups were responsible for the majority of child casualties (48 per cent). Casualties attributed to Afghan National Security Forces increased from 71 to 95 when compared with the last reporting period, largely owing to their increased involvement in ground engagements. The task force also received reports of 19 incidents of attacks against schools and educational personnel, 10 incidents of attacks against hospitals and health personnel, and six incidents of underage recruitment. On 1 November, the lower house of the National Assembly strengthened and approved a law criminalizing child recruitment by Afghan National Security Forces, which had earlier been endorsed by presidential decree.

32. Soon after the inauguration of President Ghani, representatives of women's civil society held meetings with the President and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah

to urge that campaign pledges on women's rights be honoured. On 8 October, the United Nations co-chaired the annual Global Open Day event on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. Participants included civil society representatives, parliamentarians and representatives from the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Although there was general recognition of progress over the past decade on the empowerment of women, participants emphasized the need to work closely with the new Government on ensuring meaningful women's participation in political and peace processes.

33. On 8 October, President Ghani made a visit to Pul-e-Charkhi prison in Kabul, where he called attention to issues of due legal process with respect to prisoners' cases and detention conditions. Prisoners' grievances included alleged improper implementation and limited scope of programmes for prisoner release and sentence reduction, severe overcrowding, and sentence inconsistencies. On 3 November, President Ghani visited the Kabul Detention Centre to undertake a further assessment of prisoners' rights and detention conditions.

34. Between 4 and 12 November, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo, visited Afghanistan. She met senior Government officials, the Chair of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and representatives of civil society and the diplomatic community in Kabul, and held similar meetings in Herat and Jalalabad. In her statement of 12 November, she noted legislative and institutional improvements as a "reflection of political will" in the promotion and protection of women's rights and emphasized that such developments should not detract from the fact that violence against women remained a source of deep concern. The Special Rapporteur also highlighted the absence of comprehensive and coherent data collection, as well as the lack of effective interpretation and implementation of laws and resources to support shelters as a protective remedy, which includes a requirement to tackle negative perceptions of those facilities.

35. On 16 November, Afghanistan's first Gender-based Violence Treatment Protocol for Healthcare Providers was officially launched, following its development by the Ministry of Public Health with the United Nations. To implement the Protocol, activities are planned to strengthen the provision of quality gender-based care, including training for medical personnel on such issues as case management, survivor-centred care, medical-legal evidence, and treatment of burns, wounds and injuries suffered by victims of rape.

36. On 16 November, a suicide car bomb attack took place on the convoy of a prominent female member of parliament and noted women's rights activist, Shukria Barakzai. Although she escaped with minor injuries, three civilians were killed and 32 injured. To date, no insurgent group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

37. On 8 October, the Government of Afghanistan executed by hanging five men convicted of the rape of four women in the Paghman district of Kabul Province. The executions were carried out despite numerous appeals by human rights groups and a statement by the United Nations on 26 September expressing disappointment with the ruling by the Supreme Court and encouraging the Government to resume a moratorium on executions pending full abolition of the death penalty. On 7 October, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, informed President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah of his grave concerns that the legal process that had led to the convictions of the five men for

armed robbery and gang rape failed to comply with Afghan and international fair trial standards, and he reiterated his calls for a stay of execution to allow for a judicial review.

IV. Implementation of the Kabul Process and coordination of development assistance

38. The reporting period featured increased substantive engagement between the new administration and the international community on steps to present the Government's reform agenda, including preparation of the Government's paper entitled "Realizing Self-Reliance — Commitments to Reform and Renewed Partnership" in advance of the London Conference on Afghanistan on 4 December. The paper focuses on the country's economic crisis, the imperative of realizing self-reliance in the transformation decade, and the crucial need to strengthen governance, implement policy reforms and reinforce the management of development assistance.

39. On 27 November, the United Nations co-chaired with the Government a special session of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board to undertake final preparations for the London Conference. The event brought together representatives from the international community, including development agencies and financial institutions, as well as from civil society and the private sector, for an overview of the Government's reform paper and exchange of proposals. Participants welcomed the Government's reform agenda and emphasized the priority of its implementation, including with plans to refresh the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework next year before a planned meeting of senior officials in Kabul.

40. The economic and fiscal situations in Afghanistan remained challenging. In September, the Ministry of Finance reported that investment in the first seven months of 2014 had decreased by 79 per cent and trade by 9 per cent. On 27 October, the World Bank presented its updated economic assessment that projected 2014 economic growth at 1.5 per cent, sharply lower than the 3.7 per cent growth in 2013. The economic situation continued to have an adverse impact on the Government's budget. In late October, the World Bank advised donors that monthly revenue collection would need to increase by 42 per cent to meet the yearly target. In the same month, the Ministry of Finance disseminated a formal request for donor support to close the budget gap, describing an "urgent and immediate need" of US\$ 537 million. In response, the United States provided US\$ 75 million and the United Kingdom provided US\$ 18.9 million in additional support through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund administered by the World Bank. Other donors were reported to be considering options to reprioritize planned funding in response to the request. On 11 November 2014, the 1394 (2015) budget was submitted to the National Assembly. The budget included a proposed overall 3 per cent cut, with an 11 per cent reduction in non-security related costs relative to the previous year.

41. On 17 September, the Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee issued its biannual report, in which limited progress was noted towards addressing corruption, with attention focused on land seizures and investigation into the Kabul Bank fraud case. The report also launched the Committee's Anti-Corruption Framework and Tool, to track the implementation of

its previous recommendations. On 2 and 17 November, respectively, the Committee released reports on the Kabul Bank fraud case and the usurpation of land.

42. On 16 October, President Ghani reiterated his commitment to anti-corruption efforts in regard to illegal land seizure. The Afghanistan Land Authority formulated a five-year plan, with technical support from UNAMA, that seeks to strengthen State land management, including leasing of State lands and increasing State revenues by addressing land disputes and reclaiming illegally occupied State land. On 16 November, the Access to Information Law approved by the National Assembly was endorsed by the President. The law allows requests for government information to improve its transparency. It is also to act as a component of the Government's broader reform agenda by enabling civil society and the media to help to support accountability as part of the broader effort by the Government to promote anti-corruption measures.

43. In October, the Government reported its progress on action plan items to the Financial Action Task Force's International Cooperation Review Group, which monitors international compliance with anti-money-laundering and counter-financing of terrorism standards. In advance of the meetings of the Task Force from 20 to 24 October, the Government published in its *Official Gazette* new laws on combating money-laundering and financing terrorism. The new Government also took swift action to approve regulations. Those steps allowed Afghanistan to avoid "blacklist" status, but it remained under monitoring by the International Cooperation Review Group as a country with deficiencies in strategic anti-money-laundering and counter-financing of terrorism standards.

44. President Ghani held a series of meetings with the Independent Directorate of Local Governance in October to coordinate reforms to improve subnational governance. Planned reforms include the appointment of new provincial governors based on clear standard criteria and the delegation of authority to subnational administrations, accompanied by full accountability, establishment of a public-private partnership mechanism for improved service delivery, and 40 per cent of the budget to be allocated to the provinces. The Directorate commenced the establishment of reporting committees in the provinces that are to provide the Office of the President with regular updates and analysis of developments on subnational governance.

V. Humanitarian assistance

45. Military operations since June 2014 in Pakistan's North Waziristan Agency have led to large-scale population movements. As at 12 November, the United Nations assessed that 32,013 families had crossed into Khost and Paktika provinces. The majority were living with host families in 13 districts across the two provinces, with approximately 4,363 families living in the Gulan camp, Khost Province. With support from international partners, local authorities responded to the most urgent humanitarian needs in Khost and Paktika with a particular focus on the winterization of shelters.

46. As at 31 October, the internally displaced persons task force, co-chaired by the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation and the United Nations, recorded 118,022 persons displaced in Afghanistan owing to conflict in 2014. Since 20 June, military clashes in northern Hilmand had displaced more than 1,000 families, including

100 families in October. In Ghazni Province, 255 families were reported displaced from the Ajiristan district. In Kunduz Province, where access continued to be challenging, the United Nations was able to confirm 668 displaced families.

47. Ahead of the onset of winter, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations continued to work with the Government, through the National Disaster Management Commission and the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority, to ensure preparations and pre-positioning of relief items. An estimated 2 million Afghans live at elevations above 2,000 metres, leaving them exposed to harsh conditions and potentially inaccessible during the winter. Priority was accorded to those affected in 2014 by conflict and natural disasters, including the spring floods in the north and the internal displacement of families because of conflict. The influx of refugee families from Pakistan's North Waziristan Agency also increased the number of families in need of relief assistance during the winter. Current winterization preparation assessments indicate that only 60 per cent of estimated needs can be met by the initial plans to pre-position food assistance for 750,000 vulnerable people in 54 remote districts. Furthermore, emergency rations for refugees in Khost and Paktika provinces will be reduced by 25 per cent. Similar shortfalls are reported in provision of essential non-food items, including fuel, blankets and shelter material. That will result in shortfalls in assistance to remote districts, informal settlements in Kabul, and host families and refugees in Khost and Paktika provinces. In response to the support shortfalls, an additional US\$ 3.5 million was allocated from the Common Humanitarian Fund to winterization activities, including provision of food and shelter materials to vulnerable communities in Khost and Paktika provinces.

48. During the period under review, 14 more polio cases were reported in Afghanistan, which brought the total number of cases to 22 in 2014. That was an increase over the 2013 total of 14 cases and reflected the vulnerability of Afghanistan to a resurgence of the disease. While only seven of the 2014 cases derived from endemic strains of the virus, circulation of imported strains demands a robust vaccination programme within the country and access to children who remain unvaccinated. A major breakthrough was achieved in August, when humanitarian access was gained to vaccinate children in the southern Province of Hilmand after six months of impasse as a result of local disputes. Through the efforts of the United Nations and other stakeholders at various levels to restart campaigns, four rounds were immediately conducted, vaccinating over 650,000 children under five years of age. In October, the Second Vice-President, Mohammad Sarwar Danish, inaugurated the fourth round of 2014 National Immunization Days, which targets 8.9 million children aged five years and under to be vaccinated against polio. The Ministry of Public Health, with the support of the Global Partnership for Polio Eradication, mobilized an estimated 60,000 polio workers to support the immunization campaigns.

49. In the mine action sector, 10 battlefields and 145 minefields were cleared in 71 communities, with an additional two districts declared mine-free during the reporting period. While progress to date was significant given current resources, Afghanistan will not meet its targets outlined for 2014 towards achieving the Ottawa Treaty plan to remove all known mine hazards by 2023. It is estimated that 4,006 minefields and 231 battlefields remain. The United Nations continued to work with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to help to ensure that bases and firing ranges set for closure were cleared of unexploded ordnance. In October,

the Congress of the United States approved US\$ 250 million to carry out subsurface clearance, where required, on the 83 United States high-explosive firing ranges.

50. As at 15 November, humanitarian funding for Afghanistan reached US\$ 413 million, of which US\$ 248 million (60 per cent) was aligned with the United Nations Common Humanitarian Action Plan for Afghanistan. Of the remaining balance, US\$ 68 million was reported for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, almost US\$ 21 million was committed for humanitarian action but not allocated, and the remainder not aligned. On 26 November, the United Nations and the Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Abdullah, launched the 2015 humanitarian response plan. The plan aims to assist 3.8 million persons who are the most vulnerable of the Afghan population with food, health care, water and other assistance, with a focus on insecure, underserved and hard-to-reach areas. The plan includes a funding request of US\$ 405 million.

VI. Counter-narcotics

51. During the period under review, it was reported that opium cultivation in 2014 increased over the previous year. The Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Yury Fedotov, visited Kabul on 8 November and met with President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah. During the meetings, he underlined the United Nations commitment to continued close cooperation with the Government of Afghanistan over the long term to counter the harmful effects of illicit drugs, organized crime and corruption on Afghanistan and its people. He noted the progress made in the capacity of local authorities to counter drug trafficking, corruption, money-laundering and terrorism, as well as the provision of essential drug treatment and rehabilitation services.

52. The Afghanistan Opium Survey 2014, released on 12 November, recorded an increase of 7 per cent in the area under opium cultivation over 2013, with an estimated 224,000 hectares under cultivation. As a result, opium production may potentially increase 17 per cent, with yields estimated to reach 6,400 tons in 2014 compared with the previous year's total. The Ministry of Counter-Narcotics and the United Nations, having jointly produced the survey, attributed the rise to the links between insecurity and opium cultivation. An estimated 89 per cent of opium poppy cultivation was concentrated in nine provinces in the southern and western regions, which include the most insecure provinces in the country. Hilmand Province, registering a 3 per cent increase in cultivation, remained Afghanistan's leading crop grower with 46 per cent of the national total, followed by Kandahar, Farah and Nangarhar. Opium production was estimated to be worth approximately US\$ 850 million, or roughly 4 per cent of the country's estimated gross domestic product. The farm-gate value of opium decreased 13 per cent in 2014, as a likely result of greater crop production and supply. Across the country, eradication decreased by 63 per cent to 2,692 hectares in 2014. The number of casualties during the 2014 eradication campaign fell significantly to 13 lives lost, compared with 143 fatalities in 2013.

53. Afghan law enforcement authorities conducted a total of 415 operations between 16 August and 31 October, resulting in seizures of 743 kg of heroin, 26,857 kg of opium, 3,558 kg of cannabis, 0.057 kg of amphetamine, 3,217 kg of solid precursor chemicals and 16,844 litres of liquid precursor chemicals. In

addition, 91 vehicles, 260 weapons and a total of 11 heroin laboratories were dismantled. The authorities' operations resulted in the combined arrest of 477 suspects, while two counter-narcotics police officers were killed.

54. On 14 and 15 October in Qatar, the United Nations convened regional counter-narcotics information centres, including the Central Asia Regional Information Coordination Centre, the Gulf Countries Criminal Investigation Coordination Centre and the Joint Planning Cell, under the initiative "Networking the Networks". From 19 to 21 October, senior officials from the Triangular Initiative countries — Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan — met in Iran. The purpose of those meetings was to strengthen information-sharing, coordination and joint operations in the region.

VII. Mission support

55. UNAMA continued to pursue co-location options with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to achieve financial efficiency in the area of common and shared services. Expansion of existing co-location initiatives took place in compounds maintained by UNAMA in Jalababad, Bamyan, Kunduz and Farah. On 2 November, the Government of Afghanistan formally notified UNAMA that it would need to relinquish one of its long-time premises near the diplomatic enclave in Kabul, leading to the necessity to identify, secure and finance appropriate options for relocation, in accordance with the provisions of the status-of-mission agreement.

VIII. Observations

56. Afghanistan's first democratic transfer of leadership is another milestone in the country's political transition. The electoral impasse was protracted and challenging but concluded in the interest of the nation. I commend the two presidential candidates for working together and finding solutions. There are formidable challenges ahead that call for a large measure of national purpose, which a national unity government is well placed to deliver. To date, the collaboration demonstrated by President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah is encouraging, and, after months of uncertainty, there is a sense of hope and expectation among the population.

57. In accelerating efforts to address Afghanistan's many political, economic and security challenges, the timely appointment and confirmation of senior government officials is required. It is to be hoped that a national unity government will be viewed as an opportunity to demonstrate the strength of Afghanistan in its diversity. In terms of a political agenda, the candidates' agreement of 21 September includes commitments to electoral reform, the establishment of robust means for population registry and identity verification, and the holding of parliamentary and district council elections, to culminate in the convening of a constitutional Loya Jirga within two years to consider the establishment of the post of Prime Minister. Urgent attention is required to plan and sequence these ambitious timelines, to best meet legal and practical requirements and ensure progress.

58. Afghanistan's economic situation remains of grave concern. I welcome the reform agenda set forth by President Ghani at the London Conference, including commitments to promote an egalitarian and equitable society and address corruption. The agenda reflects a vital ambition to tackle the challenges facing Afghanistan. Even with continued progress in structural reforms, including enhanced revenue performance, however, it is predicted that the Government will continue to run significant budget deficits for the foreseeable future, in large part owing to high rates of security expenditure. The impact of the security situation and revenue shortfalls risks limiting investment in programmes for long-term development and poverty reduction. Sustained donor commitment will be required to allow the Government's reform proposals to become firmly embedded and thereby restore higher levels of economic growth and increase self-sustainability. I am encouraged by the President's recognition of the importance of women and youth in the development of Afghanistan and the contribution their empowerment will yield in the country's continued social and economic development. I equally welcome the new administration's intention to accelerate progress in support of the rights of women and children and a wider rights-based agenda.

59. The illicit economy, largely predicated on increasing opium production, continues to erode the social, economic and political fabric of Afghanistan. A successful response needs strong political will, as well as coherent legal, socioeconomic and development approaches, led by the Afghan authorities with the support of regional and international partners. These efforts will be reinforced by the regional frameworks and coordination mechanisms already in place to interdict the flow of narcotics and associated illicit revenues. I encourage the renewed commitment of Afghanistan and all regional and international stakeholders.

60. The constructive role of regional countries will be vital to ensuring stability and economic development in Afghanistan and the broader neighbourhood. Regional trade, assistance from non-traditional donors, and greater connectivity are in the mutual interest and will be critical to Afghanistan's increased self-sufficiency. A major area of focus for President Ghani since his inauguration has been enhancing regional engagement, as underlined by his initial visits. Afghanistan's relationship with Pakistan, in particular, will be central. I welcome signs that the civilian administrations in Islamabad and Kabul are utilizing opportunities and exploring the means to reshape engagement. I am further encouraged by the continued forward momentum of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, with the Beijing Declaration underlining unanimous support by regional stakeholders for a timely Afghan-owned and Afghan-led reconciliation process.

61. For indeed, the underlying requirement for sustained and durable progress in Afghanistan is peace. The year 2014 has been one of the more violent since 2001. Afghan National Security Forces have mounted multiple counter-offensives to prevent insurgents from capturing and holding district centres. This is, however, at the cost of high levels of casualties. To ensure the continuing improvement and long-term viability of Afghan National Security Forces, international commitments of support, most recently reiterated at the NATO Summit in Wales, must be met. I would also urge Afghan authorities to make every effort to implement their strategy to counter improvised explosive devices and encourage international support in order to reduce the appalling impact of these devices on the population.

62. I am deeply concerned about the increase in civilian casualties. Civilians continue to bear the brunt of conflict, with the fear and uncertainty deeply impacting daily life and future calculations. I welcome recent progress in expanding humanitarian access for vaccination campaigns. This is essential to combating polio in one of its final outposts. The Mission's effort to improve compliance by all parties, particularly anti-Government elements, with their obligations under international humanitarian law, and to decrease the devastating impact of the violence on the civilian population is one of its most crucial tasks. Longer term solutions are political in nature, however, as recognized in the fresh encouragement by the new administration in Kabul for intra-Afghan reconciliation. I welcome President Ghani's emphasis on outreach and prioritization of a structured Afghan-owned and Afghan-led reconciliation process. The United Nations stands ready to support this.

63. I would like to take this opportunity to commend President Karzai for his leadership. He assumed the helm of a shattered nation in December 2001 and oversaw the agreement and implementation of a new Constitution, instatement of institutional and legal frameworks, and the rebuilding of national security forces. The democratic transfer of power is an achievement that rightly secures him a place in the history books.

64. I wish to thank Ján Kubiš for his service as my Special Representative and welcome my new Special Representative, Nicholas Haysom, who assumed the post in November. His previous service in Afghanistan, through the challenging electoral process, will help to ensure the continuity of the Organization's support. He will, in turn, be ably assisted by the deputies, Mark Bowden, and Tadamichi Yamamoto, who assumed his duties in November. I would like to reiterate my gratitude to all staff members of the United Nations in Afghanistan for their dedication, often under difficult and very challenging security conditions, to fulfilling our commitments in support of the people of Afghanistan.
