

**Statement by Ambassador Asoke Kumar Mukerji, Permanent Representative at the Security Council Debate on United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA) on 22 June 2015**

**Madam President,**

Let me at the outset express our strong condemnation of this morning's terrorist attack on the Afghan Parliament and our solidarity with the people and Government of Afghanistan at this hour.

We would like to thank you for organizing this debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan [UNAMA]. I would also thank the Secretary General for his report on the situation in Afghanistan, and SRSG Nicholas Haysom and Ambassador Zahir Tanin for their briefings.

2. President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan H.E. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, paid a state visit to India from 27-29 April, 2015. This visit further cemented the age old historic, cultural and geographical links between India and Afghanistan. The leaders of our two countries acknowledged that these links have today provided the solid foundation for the India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership that is in turn forged on the two countries' common perception of challenges and shared interests. Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi assured the President of Afghanistan of India's abiding support for Afghanistan's ongoing crucial transitions-political, economic and security, for the decade of 2015-24 and beyond.

**Madam President,**

3. I wish to express our concern at the security situation in Afghanistan as brought out in the latest report of the Secretary General, which mentions that there's been an increase of 45% in armed clashes from 2014. The report also highlights that 71% of the violence has been concentrated in the southern, south-eastern and eastern regions in this period. These statistics are a matter of concern for India and the international community. It only reinforces our view that terrorism, and not tribal differences or ethnic rivalries is the main source of insecurity and instability in Afghanistan.

**Madam President,**

4. This spurt in violence is taking place at a time when Afghanistan is in the midst of a sensitive and historical political transition under the leadership of H.E President Ashraf Ghani and H.E. Chief Executive Dr. Abdullah Abdullah. Given the critical phase that the political transition has entered, and the deteriorating security situation, we feel there is a strong case for the international community to take a fresh look at the manner in which the drawdown of the international military presence in Afghanistan is being planned out.

**Madam President,**

5. We have also noted with concern, Secretary General's reference to an Afghan Ministry of Interior estimate that 7,180 'foreign fighters' are presently in Afghanistan. It is obvious that they could not have entered Afghanistan, or continue to sustain their terror attacks without support from beyond Afghanistan's borders.

6. President Ghani has taken exceptional steps to launch a Reconciliation process to bring peace to his country. Sadly these efforts are being repeatedly rebuffed by the Taliban and its supporters. Mr. President, India will continue to support a truly Afghan-led and Afghan owned reconciliation process within the framework of the Afghan constitution and the internationally accepted red lines.

**Madam President,**

7. I would also like to once again reiterate the importance we attach to enhancing Afghanistan's economic connectivity to markets in the region. Afghanistan's unique geographical location makes it a natural land bridge to connect people and markets of Central Asia to the rapidly growing regions in South Asia. India has been taking steps in this direction. We have indicated our willingness to join the an expanded PATTTA (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan Trade and Transit Agreement), we are working with the Government of Iran to see how the Chahbahar Port in Iran can be used to provide Afghanistan with an alternate access to the sea route, and have unilaterally offered Afghanistan access to the facilities of the Integrated Check Post at Attari on the Wagah-Attari border crossing point on the India-Pakistan international border.

**Madam President,**

8. Finally, UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan must continue to play a leading role in shaping and coordinating the international community's efforts to assist Afghanistan's political and economic reconstruction process. UNAMA must also focus on the important role it plays in ensuring delivery of valuable humanitarian and development assistance to Afghanistan.

9. India is proud to call itself Afghanistan's first strategic partner. We admire the courage of the people of Afghanistan in moving forward towards a prosperous state, for which so many Afghans have sacrificed so much. India stands ready to do whatever is possible within our capacities and our means, to work with the Afghan Government and its peoples to realize this great vision.

I thank you, Madam President.

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