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Statement by Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, U.S. Permanent Representative, on UNAMA, in the Security Council, October 14, 2008

Mr. President, I would like to thank Mr. Eide for his report to the Council today. Concurrent with Mr. Eide's appointment, the Security Council took the crucial decision to refine and expand the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA). To implement the revised mandate and given the huge challenges that UNAMA faces regarding civil-military coordination, effectiveness of humanitarian relief, and elections preparation -- we support an immediate increase, indeed a surge, in UNAMA's capabilities based on proposals made by Mr. Eide.

Mr. President, the United States is gravely concerned about the humanitarian conditions in Afghanistan. The situation is worsening and many lives are in jeopardy -- both from possible food shortages and extreme cold weather. The United States is the largest donor to Afghanistan, both financially and in kind. We are prepared to do more.

We urge UN member states to respond to Afghan government as well as UN appeals -- to avoid a worsening humanitarian situation this winter. Planning and preparations for winter should aim at assisting needy Afghans in dealing with food shortages as well as cold weather.

Mr. President, we concur with the Secretary-General's conclusion that the security situation has become more challenging as the number of anti-government incidents have increased and the extremist Taliban and their terrorist allies have continued to wage deadly attacks on Afghan security forces, ISAF, and the civilian population. But success in Afghanistan is critical not only for the Afghans but for the region and the broader struggle against terror and extremism. Success can be achieved -- despite the recent talk of doom and gloom as referred to by Mr. Kai Eide.

We recommend that the government in Afghanistan implement its National Development Strategy: making tough decisions and implementing agreed policies specifically in the areas of local governance, combating corruption, enforcing rule of law, achieving economic development, pursuit of robust counter-narcotics, and reform of police forces. We hope that the recent changes in the cabinet proposed by President Karzai can assist with making progress with regards to these goals. We welcome -- indeed -- we believe it is crucial that Afghan security forces take increasing responsibility for protecting the Afghan people as their capabilities grow and as conditions warrant.

President Karzai has committed his government to holding elections in 2009. This is very important. We welcome UNAMA's efforts to support the Afghan government in preparing for these elections. It is imperative that the international community redouble efforts to ensure credible elections. We call on the Afghan government to maintain its commitment to carry out these elections as scheduled, to further instill a culture of democratic and representative government in the country and sustain international

support.

Mr. President, for Afghanistan's success, I would like to underscore the importance of the role of the country's neighbors. The recent election of a new government in Pakistan provides an opportunity for increased cooperation between the two countries against terrorists and extremists who threaten Afghanistan, Pakistan, and indeed the world.

The agenda for regional cooperation is clear: No sanctuaries for hostile forces; no use of extremists and terrorists to advance national interests; intelligence sharing; precluding regional geopolitical rivalry; encouraging reconciliation; and integrating Afghanistan into regional institutions and the regional economy. Progress on these fronts is crucial to Afghanistan's stability and development. Both Afghans and Pakistanis need and deserve international support to resist the extremists and terrorists. The U.S. is committed to doing its part.

We urge the Secretariat to do everything in its power to make sure that Mr. Eide is given the support and resources he needs to carry out his mission. We must find ways to allow him to hire the people he needs and get them on board immediately, not months from now. Mr. Eide in turn needs to use these capabilities and the promising relationships he has built with the Afghans and with the international community to develop targets and plans with timelines for achieving each of the major tasks in his mandate.

The U.S. and its partners are committed to success in Afghanistan – and will adjust our approach as necessary to achieve our common goals.

Mr. President, The United States deeply regrets the accidental loss of civilian lives. And we do not take this lightly. We share the Secretary General's grave concern over the issue of civilian casualties. I want to assure the council members that we will do everything in our power to ensure that ISAF and Operation Enduring Freedom take every precaution to prevent civilian casualties.

We have intensified our efforts with the Government of Afghanistan to improve coordination and communication in operations to prevent future incidents. And our military's Central Command has issued guidance to U.S. forces to continue to take steps to prevent civilian casualties and to acknowledge them when they occur.

At the same time, we should not lose sight of the fundamental cause of this increase in casualties, clearly spelled out in the Secretary General's report: the Taliban and other anti-government elements are waging a systematic campaign of violence and intimidation against civilians. They deliberately target civilians and use them as shields. And, as the report points out, and Mr. Eide mentioned in his remarks, the Taliban are increasingly resorting to asymmetric attacks on population centers, aid-related targets, and NGOs.

The challenging security situation highlights the need for more forces and better civil-military coordination. On the military side, the United States, in consultation with our ISAF partners, has streamlined its chain of command to make our forces better able to carry out their mission. General McKiernan is now the Commander of both the International Security Assistance Force and U.S. Forces-Afghanistan and is working very closely with the Afghan security forces. The United States and its partners will send more forces to Afghanistan.

Civil-military coordination is important for success and is a crucial part of UNAMA's mandate. We expect Mr. Eide to partner with General McKiernan to carry out this task as soon as possible.

Furthermore, UNAMA is at the center of coordinating international relief efforts. Mr. President, last June the international community endorsed the Afghan National Development Strategy, and there was an unprecedented level of pledges. These are clear signs of our determination to help Afghans succeed. As Afghans do their part, donors must also follow through on their commitments.

In closing, Mr. President, the Secretary General's report accurately highlights the increasing difficulties and challenges that the Government of Afghanistan and its international partners are facing. Rather than causing mutual recrimination -- these challenges should serve to reaffirm and renew mutual commitment to Afghanistan's success -- by making the necessary changes and adjustments. The United States is committed to doing so and remains firmly committed to Afghanistan's success.

Thank you Mr. President.