

Opening remarks

by UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon at the press conference with Afghan President Hamid Karzai and NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, following the high-level meeting on Afghanistan

I am very pleased to be here with you today. As you know, our purpose in Bucharest is to reaffirm the determination of the international community to help the people and the Government of Afghanistan to build an enduring, stable and prosperous democratic state, fully respecting human rights and free from terrorism. In that regard, I would like to commend the leadership of President Karzai to overcome these challenges and show the rest of the world, as demonstrated by this international conference on Afghanistan, that all the international community, including the United Nations, is behind it. At the same time, I would like to congratulate this successful convening of the international conference on Afghanistan, under the leadership of Secretary-General Scheffer, who mobilized the political will and the necessary resources to support the people and Government of Afghanistan. Again, I assure you that the United Nations, and you, and President Karzai will closely coordinate through my Special Representative, Kai Eide.

In addition to our group consultations, I have had productive one-on-one meetings with President Karzai and NATO Secretary-General Scheffer. I also met with a number of leaders attending this conference, of course, including our host, the president of Romania. We sought two outcomes: 1) to agree on a comprehensive strategy for ISAF as well as on NATO troop commitments; 2) to re-dynamize the partnership between the Afghan government and the international community.

In that regard, with this troop commitment, I emphasized when I met leaders that the cost of disengagement would be far greater than the cost of engagement. It is absolutely necessary that the international community continue to engage until the Afghan Government will be able to stand on their own. It was very encouraging, Mr. President, that you stated that the security of Kabul will be the responsibility under the leadership of yourself and the Afghan National Army.

This effort began with my appointment of a new and energetic Special Representative, Mr. Kai Eide, under an enhanced Security Council mandate. We are now working toward the upcoming donors' conference in Paris, where we expect to expand our assistance to the Afghan people in rebuilding their country and its institutions. The United Nations needs to be at the center of this effort, which is why I am attending this conference.

There has been much discussion, in recent weeks, about how to deal with the continuing violence in the south. We all agreed that resolving the situation in the south will require

more than a military response. We also agreed that the Afghan National Army needs to be increasingly in the lead; it is willing and increasingly able to do so.

Today's gathering shows how seriously we all take our commitment to Afghanistan.

Thank you very much.