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**Statement by Gert Rosenthal, Permanent Representative of Guatemala in the United Nations Security Council Debate on “The Situation in Afghanistan”  
(New York, 19 March 2013)**

Mr. President:

I wish to thank the Russian Federation for convening this debate. Allow me to acknowledge Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for the presentation of his report (S/2013/133) and for joining us today. I also thank the important statement by the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan. I commend the presence of the Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs at this debate.

Mr. President:

This debate offers an opportunity for a profound assessment well in advance in preparation for the post 2014 Afghanistan. We have commenced another critical and historical year for Afghanistan, and for the United Nations. As we enter this new phase, peace and stability will be conditioned upon the Afghan people’s ability to ensure not only peace and security, but also democratic governance, national reconciliation, the rule of law and human rights protection during the political and military transition of 2014.

Against that setting I would like to make the following remarks:

First, we consider it is a requirement for peace and stability, as well as for the normalization of the Afghan political arena, that credible, inclusive and transparent presidential elections are held in 2014, in strict accordance with the provisions of the Afghan Constitution. Thereby, we should all follow closely the progress on electoral reform and the outcome of the work by the Independent Electoral Commission, including the future appointment of its head. Both the Independent Election Commission as the Electoral Complaints Commission should take advantage of the ongoing deliberations with the United Nations to continue strengthening its capacities.

Second, we consider that another important step in the political process is the need to continue advancing Afghan-owned and Afghan-led national reconciliation. We support the efforts made by Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani and the High Peace Council of Afghanistan in pursuing the path of negotiation for a sustainable and lasting peace. At the same time, it’s important to continue sending a clear message to the Government’s political dissidents, in the sense that reconciliation dialogue will only take place with those who renounce violence, have no links with terrorist organizations and respect the Constitution, including its provisions on human rights. We welcome the constructive engagement with Pakistan, including through trilateral format under the auspices of the United Kingdom, considering that they are an important partner for Afghanistan and for the region.

Third, we value the steady progress observed in the transfer of responsibility for security matters, the transition has started its fourth tranche for which 87 % of the population is now under Afghan security. We understand that with the transition, the role of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) will evolve from combat to support for training, advising and capacity-building. In the post 2014 period the Afghan security forces will have to demonstrate to what extent they are ready to deal on their own in the fight against global phenomena such as terrorism, transnational organized crime and its links with the illegal drug trafficking.

Fourth, despite gradual progress in some areas, the situation of human rights continues to be a concern in many ways. We note that the number of civilian casualties and injuries decreased by 4% in the last year, but in turn the attacks against women and girls increased by 20%. In addition to the deplorable situation that women and girls continue to face in Afghanistan. We trust that the Afghan government will take concrete measures to protect and guarantee their rights. We fully support all UN efforts in this regard. Also we value the thematic reports prepared by UNAMA on violence against women, the situation of the detainees and the protection of civilians. We believe they have had an impact on the Government that is already taking action in response to the findings and recommendations of the report regarding the situation of the detainees.

Mr. President:

Turning now to the development of regional cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbors, we support the Istanbul process. We are encouraged by the recent meeting in Baku where implementation plans for confidence-building measures were endorsed. Moreover, we commend the shared vision of Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran to reach strategic solutions for Afghan refugees.

In relation to the mandate of UNAMA, Guatemala joined consensus for its twelve month renewal. For the transition to be truly effective and irreversible, the Afghan institutions must be strong and capable. We believe that United Nations in general and UNAMA in particular have an important role to play in the civilian aspects of the transition. Also, a strong and decentralized presence is justified throughout the country beyond 2014. We agree with the priorities identified in paragraph 66 of the report of the Secretary General. At the same time, we have the responsibility to ensure that UNAMA has the necessary resources to provide the necessary support.

Mr. President:

In closing, we consider that the United Nations has the multilateral experience, the coordination capacity and the impartiality needed to undertake the challenges and requirements of the new “Transformation Decade”. We encourage States to continue with their Tokyo commitments and not to derail from the achievements of the existing partnership between the international community and Afghanistan. We cannot lose sight of the broader picture, as we understand that there is still much to do. On this Council, Guatemala’s position will be guided in its support for the transition process by the Afghan leadership and ownership, but also by the primary responsibility of the Security Council to maintain international peace and security.

Thank you