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***The situation in Afghanistan***

**Mr. Ambassador Ricardo Alberto Arias**

Permanent Representative of Panama to the United Nations

**Mr. Arias** (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, let me thank Jean-Marie Guéhenno, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for the briefing he has provided us this morning. We would also like to express our gratitude for the efforts by Mr. Tom Koenigs, former Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), as well as his entire staff. We are aware of the important role that UNAMA has played in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and that it why we would like to wish every success to Mr. Kai Eide in his new post as Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the Mission.

Since the latest report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan, the news that has reached us has not been very encouraging. This reflects the daunting challenge represented by the establishment of a viable and peaceful State in a country that, in recent decades, has only known war and intolerance. However, we wonder if the growing obstacles that the international community is facing in Afghanistan are not the result of the lack of coordination and determination on the part of those who are in charge of assisting in its reconstruction. This could be making it difficult for them to tackle the roots of the conflict.

For example, we are disappointed to see that member States of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the organization in charge of security in

Afghanistan, offer diverging strategies to stabilize the country. Decisions that prioritize swift results rather than long-term improvements, both in the institutional and security sectors, could be risky as they can undermine the attention and resources that are directed towards suppressing the insurgency.

Furthermore, unilaterally pushing for nonconsensual policies does not help to generate coordinated strategies and also undermines the will of the people of Afghanistan to rebuild their country and to play an active role in this reconstruction. This lack of coordination and promotion of shared objectives represents a serious obstacle to multilateralism, which is the very foundation of our institution. Lastly, we understand that, in order to bring more consistency to the efforts of the international community in Afghanistan, we need a more energetic leadership from UNAMA. The future of the country must, of course, be in the hands of the people of Afghanistan themselves, as was pointed out very clearly and accurately by the Ambassador of Italy, but UNAMA can and must assume a more proactive role in coordination efforts aimed at building and securing a viable State in Afghanistan.

Both the United Nations and the international forces must step up their efforts to improve cooperation mechanisms among themselves. They must also strengthen the able and responsible management of the Afghan leadership. For this reason, we support the extension of the UNAMA mandate until March 2009, with a greater and more energetic coordinating role for the United Nations in the efforts to rebuild the country and to improve its security situation.