

[Extract]

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[...]

The situation in Afghanistan

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Mr. De Vengoechea (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, allow me to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kai Eide, for the briefing he has just presented. We would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his presentation to the members of the Council.

The picture painted by the Secretary-General's report (S/2008/617) shows how difficult and complicated the work of Mr. Eide and his team has been. We therefore commend the work that he has done to date and wish him every success in the coming months, which we know will be of crucial importance. "Afghanistan is at a crossroads" is a phrase we have heard before, but it has never been more fitting than at the present moment. The wave of setbacks suffered by the international community in recent months has presented us with two options: we can continue with the same strategy, becoming bogged down in an unending asymmetric war in which nobody wins and everyone comes out a loser, particularly the Afghan people.

Or, on the other hand, we could change course and accelerate our steps towards rebuilding the country, not by exclusively using force but through a dialogue that

seeks national reconciliation, which can sow the seeds of peace, human security and social development.

Panama is of the opinion that, to change course in Afghanistan, two actions must be taken as a matter of urgency. First, we must recognize that, as history has taught us, a military victory in Afghanistan is not merely a vague notion; it cannot be achieved in practice. If we think that victory in Afghanistan means totally removing insurgent groups, then we are mistaken. The Afghan insurgency is much more than a group of terrorists; it arises from a complex social movement with strong roots in local culture.

It is certain that greater commitments on the part of the members of the international security forces are necessary to bring peace to the country, particularly the most violent parts. But beyond that, Panama believes that the Government of Afghanistan, with the support of its international partners, must redouble its efforts to integrate moderate elements of the insurgency, including those members of the Taliban who renounce violence, in order to reestablish the Afghan State. Without them, national reconciliation, which is the basis of any stable, multicultural society, will be impossible.

The second action to be taken is to increase the political commitment to Afghanistan. That does not just include increased political, diplomatic and economic aid for reconstruction, but also redoubled efforts so that ordinary Afghans feel that their country is changing for the better and that it is improving because of the actions of its Government and the international community.

As indicated in the most recent report of the Secretary-General, such action requires great efforts to, among other things, establish the rule of law throughout the country, root out the corruption which permeates certain parts of the bureaucracy and improve the standard of living of each citizen, particularly those who live in remotest parts of the country. Ultimately, a reconstructed State is worth little if its people live in poverty and insecurity and do not enjoy the dividends of peace. Such a situation leads only to desperation, violence and extremism.