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Ms Ana Gomes MEP
Mr Michael Gahler MEP
Sir Graham Watson MEP
Ms Barbara Lochbihler MEP
European Parliament
Rue Wiertz 60
1047 Brussels

Dear Members,

Thank you for your letter of 5 December, and for sharing your considerations on Afghanistan in the light of the Bonn Conference.

The core political message of this conference was that the international community will stand by Afghanistan beyond "Transition" through a "Decade of Transformation". But this international engagement will need to be coupled with renewed Afghan commitment to build a political system that reflects a pluralistic society, based on democracy and the rule of law. It must be firmly grounded in the Afghan Constitution, and uphold international human rights obligations. The shared goal of Afghanistan and of the international community remains a sovereign Afghan state which acts in the service of its people and which is able to contribute to peace and stability in the entire region.

Afghanistan's commitments in Bonn included an undertaking to step up progress on the Kabul Process. Key priorities are improving governance, fighting corruption and strengthening the Rule of Law, including the linkage between justice reform and the development of security institutions. The Afghans have also committed to foster the democratic process by strengthening electoral institutions and the electoral process.

The Conference conclusions also set out the fundamental principles for reconciliation.

The process leading to reconciliation must be:

- truly Afghan-led and Afghan-owned;
- inclusive, representing the legitimate interests of all the people of Afghanistan, regardless of gender or social status.

Reconciliation must involve:

- the reaffirmation of a sovereign, stable and united Afghanistan;
- the renunciation of violence;
- the breaking of ties to international terrorism;
- respect for the Afghan Constitution, including its human rights provisions, notably the rights of women.

The region must respect and support the peace process and its outcome.

The Conference underlined that all results of the peace process which respect these principles will receive the full support of the international community.

The issues you raise in your letter have been at key to the discussions I have had with my Foreign Minister colleagues in the Foreign Affairs Council. The Council Conclusions of the 18 July and 14 November reflect the EU's strong consensus on the way forward.

We have agreed to extend EUPOL's mission until 2014, in order to support Afghanistan's efforts to build its civilian policing capabilities. This is part of our commitment to assist the future development of competent formal justice institutions, which are able to implement existing legislation.

A strong, professional and independent justice sector will be essential to ensure that Afghanistan can meet its international obligations, notably in the field of human rights. At the Bonn Conference, I met with representatives of civil society, among them representatives of Afghan women's organisations. They shared their concerns about the need to safeguard the progress Afghanistan has made in recent years about respect to civil freedoms and, particularly, women's rights. I assured them that I will continue to follow these issues closely, and indeed I was able to raise them in my recent meeting with Afghan Foreign Minister Rassoul.

A functioning justice sector is also essential for creating a climate conducive to attracting private sector investment for broad-based economic development. It will also help to strengthen Afghanistan's institutional framework, and combat corruption. The Conference Conclusions were also specific as to how Afghanistan's mining resources should be managed on the basis of a sound regulatory system, and clear environmental standards.

I think we can be satisfied that the Conference conclusions reflect the objectives in the three areas set out in your letter, and also those agreed at the November Foreign Affairs Council. The emphasis in the short and medium term must therefore shift to implementation.

Yours sincerely,

Catherine Ashton

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