Statement by Ambassador Munir Akram, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations, in the General Assembly Debate on the Situation in Afghanistan (December 8, 2004).

Mr. President,

This week marks the third anniversary of the historic Bonn Agreement which was the turning point in Afghanistan’s transition from war to peace. Pakistan has worked very closely with the international community in the implementation of the Bonn process. During the last year, two important benchmarks of this process have been achieved - the successful conclusion of the constitutional process and the holding of the Presidential elections in Afghanistan. President Mr. Hamid Karzai’s inauguration this week as the elected President of Afghanistan was the manifestation of the successful steps in the Bonn process. President Musharraf visited Kabul last month to personally congratulate President Karzai.

2. While the Bonn process is on track, security remains the most serious challenge to peace and prosperity in Afghanistan. We thank the Secretary-General for his informative report. The Secretary General’s report identifies the following main threats to Afghanistan’s security: “(i) extremist or terrorist attacks; (ii) factional violence among militia forces; and (iii) violence and other threats to human security by criminal elements, in particular those involved in the trafficking of drugs.”

3. In our view, the most serious threat emanates from the warlords and the factional militias and the nexus between them and drug traffickers. Robust measures and resolute action is, therefore, required to address these threats. Such measures include: comprehensive disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of all factional militias and the demilitarization of Kabul. The Bonn Process will remain incomplete until this is achieved. To facilitate this it is necessary to ensure a robust presence of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and to accelerate the creation of a professional and ethnically integrated Afghan National Army, Police, security and intelligence services and institutions. State authority needs to be extended across the country. A national reconciliation policy, aimed at incorporating all Afghans willing to join the rebuilding the country, will also help in this national integration process.

4. Pakistan recognizes the serious threat posed to Afghanistan’s security by the resurgence of extremist forces – including Taliban remnants and Al-Qaeda. We have been working closely with United States and Afghan authorities to strengthen security along the international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan through the Trilateral Commission. Pakistan has deployed over 75,000 troops along this difficult 2,500 kilometer long border. Extensive anti-terrorist operations have been undertaken. We have captured over 600 Al-Qaida and Taliban terrorist elements. Unfortunately, Pakistan has lost over 200 soldiers and policemen. For the complete success of these operations, it is essential that Pakistan’s substantial security presence will be matched by a commensurate security presence on the Afghan side of the international border.

5. We welcome the new discerning approach adopted by President Karzai’s government to separate ordinary Afghans from the terrorists who continue to challenge the authority of the central government. National reconciliation in Afghanistan now demands a new approach - one which casts off the shackles of war and looks forward to the dawn of peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Mr. President,

6. Over the last two decades, Pakistan has hosted millions of Afghan refugees, without much appreciable assistance from the international community. We are pleased with the voluntary repatriation of many of these refugees over the past few years. However, we remain concerned
that the repatriation process has slowed, due to insecurity in Afghanistan as well as the absence of economic opportunity for the returnees. To ensure sustainable returns, we hope that recovery and reconstruction assistance will be especially targeted in the rural areas from where most of the refugees originate.

Mr. President,

7. The first person to cast her vote in the Afghan Presidential elections was a 19-year old Afghan woman in Pakistan. We also expect that the Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran – who constitute 20% to 30% of the Afghan population – will be enabled to exercise their democratic right to vote in the forthcoming parliamentary elections as they did in the Afghan Presidential elections. Such a large proportion of the Afghan population cannot be disenfranchised. We strongly urge the Afghan and international authorities to make the necessary preparations for out-of-country voting by the Afghan refugees in the parliamentary elections.

8. Afghanistan’s peace and stability depends on security and a stable political process. But this can be sustained only through reconstruction and development. In this context, the level of reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts in Afghanistan remains inadequate and disappointing.

9. The economic vacuum is being filled by the illicit production and trafficking in narcotics. The international community must simultaneously combat illicit drugs and energize reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. In addition, comprehensive counter-narcotic strategies must seek to provide income generation and alternative livelihood to Afghan farmers to wean them away from poppy production. Efforts will also be required to reduce the demand for Afghan drugs in destination countries as well as combating illicit trafficking of precursors which play an essential part in the production of narcotic drugs.

10. At the Tokyo Conference, Pakistan pledged 100 million over a five years, towards Afghanistan’s reconstruction. Our assistance is being provided in areas identified by the Afghan government and channeled through its authority. In addition, we have extended additional transit trade facilities to Afghanistan. Bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan now stands at over $1 billion. We are also exploring with the Afghan government the possibilities of private sector cooperation and investment opportunities, particularly in such areas as cement, pharmaceuticals and consumer goods. Pakistan strongly supports implementation of the gas pipeline project between Pakistan, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. We also welcome all other initiatives aimed at economically integrating Afghanistan with its neighbours and regional economic structures.

11. Finally, I wish to reaffirm Pakistan’s full and unequivocal support for the Bonn Process and President Hamid Karzai’s Government. Pakistan supports Mr. Karzai’s efforts aimed at national reconciliation and reconstruction of his country. There can be no doubt that a strong, stable and prosperous Afghanistan is in the interest of Pakistan. We will therefore spare no effort to help in achieving this. Pakistan is resolved to work actively with the international community to promote peace, stability, reconstruction and economic development in Afghanistan.

I thank you, Mr. President.