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The central goal of UNICEF in Afghanistan for the next three years is to support the Interim and Transitional Administrations and their successor government. 

1) To ensure the survival of children and women, especially the most vulnerable;

2) To rapidly implement recovery and rehabilitation activities which directly benefit children and women;

3) To develop appropriate policies to assure the rights of women and children and to consolidate administration capacity to oversee, co-ordinate and monitor programs addressing these two critical groups in Afghan society.

I stress this essential point of supporting the Administration because its success will mean success for us all. It is critical that international partners work together to support the Administration to establish a policy, budgetary and legislative framework in the best interests of the women and children of Afghanistan.

It is also important that we together assist the Administration to establish a guiding framework which will liberate the dedication of civil society organisations, encourage the entrepreneurial spirit of the private sector, and devolve responsibility to local authorities, all to work in the best interests of the Afghan child.

UNICEF is co-operating in the new Afghanistan in a number of programme fields:

- in basic education for boys and girls;
- in child and maternal health and nutrition;
- in rural drinking water supply and sanitation programmes, with particular attention to schools;
- in a range of activities promoting the protection, recovery and social reintegration of children at high risk of abuse or exploitation (former child combatants and working children immediately come to mind);
- and in support of the active role of women in the reconstruction of the new Afghanistan.

But let us not forget that immediate humanitarian relief activities must still continue in the face of continuing insecurity, displacement, drought and deprivation.

Within these main programme thrusts, UNICEF is supporting three particularly urgent priorities in the coming months:

- the return to school of over 1.5 million children by 21 March;
- the immunisation of children against measles nation-wide;
- the assurance of continued life-saving humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable children and women

A successful return to school of Afghan children will be a significant indicator of the effectiveness of the Interim Administration. It is a complex operation into which the Administration will draw the many NGO partners who have been providing schooling - often clandestine - in recent years for girls and boys. Identification of schools, rapid orientation of teachers, textbook production, ordering and distribution of learning materials, co-ordination of partners and their activities - all these are accelerating now, and UNICEF is pleased to be supporting the Ministry of Education in this gigantic endeavour.

In our various efforts to help Afghans through the Interim Administration, we are of course working with many partners, national and international, governmental and non-governmental and within the UN system.

UNICEF is likewise supported by many of the bilateral donors represented at this table, and by the general public in many countries, through our global network of national committees." I thank you all for your generosity and confidence in UNICEF.

But as we are here in Tokyo, may I recognise in particular the support of our principal donor to date for the Afghan emergency - the Government of Japan - which has so far committed to UNICEF over US$22 million for humanitarian and reconstruction programmes in Afghanistan.

Children really are the future of Afghanistan, and now is the time to invest in that future. On March 21, when (not if) children return to school en masse, we will all be able to see an early, and very tangible, return on that investment.

Thank you.