The Gillard Government today welcomed the announcement by Afghanistan’s President, Hamid Karzai, that a third tranche of provinces and districts would begin transition to Afghan-led security responsibility from the middle of the year.

The third tranche includes Uruzgan Province, where Australia’s Mentoring Task Force, Special Forces and Provincial Reconstruction Team work with their Afghan and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) counterparts.

With the third tranche of transition, more than 75 percent of Afghanistan’s population will live in areas under Afghan security lead.

At the Lisbon NATO-ISAF Summit in November 2010, Afghanistan and ISAF countries agreed that Afghan security forces would take responsibility for security by the end of 2014.

President Karzai’s announcement is a strong signal that the transition process is on track.

Australia is firmly committed to Afghanistan and to the agreed transition strategy and its implementation.

Transition is a gradual process, not an event, achieved when the conditions are right on a province-by-province and district-by-district basis.

The inclusion of Uruzgan province in Tranche 3 reflects the progress made by Afghan, Australian and ISAF military and civilian teams in improving security and in the training and mentoring of the Afghan National Security Forces.
As transition gets underway in Uruzgan, Australia’s Mentoring Task Force and Special Operations forces will support Afghan National Security Forces as they progressively take the lead for security.

As ISAF has said, the complete process of transition in an area can take 12-18 months, meaning that Australia’s target of completing transition in Uruzgan by the end of 2014, and possibly earlier, is on track.

Australia will continue its strong support for Afghanistan after transition, including through a training and advisory role and through a possible special forces contribution. This ongoing commitment to Afghanistan will be a feature of Australia’s contribution to the Chicago NATO-ISAF Summit next week, which we will attend.

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