



Briefing to the United Nations Security Council by the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto

[as delivered]

New York, 10 March 2017

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Mr. President, Esteemed Members of the Security Council,

The National Unity Government is almost halfway through its five-year term. We have seen some of the fruits of their efforts - and yet much remains to be done. Fortunately, the ground is being prepared to make Afghanistan a success. Internationally, Warsaw and Brussels set the stage for steady progress. Domestically, the National Unity Government has introduced programmes to improve social services and promote growth and development. Now is the time for action to deliver concrete outcomes that will improve Afghan lives today and for the future.

A major challenge is at hand. The Government has to pursue both an inclusive peace process and economic growth against the backdrop of an intensifying insurgency and worsening security. As the Afghan Government redoubles its efforts to tackle these challenges, strong international backing - political and financial - is required for the work ahead.

Mr. President,

Allow me to highlight three areas where the Afghan Government has made visible steps forward. These include anti-corruption, the electoral process and women's economic empowerment.

Firstly, the Government is making a break with the past by taking new steps to address corruption. The Anti-Corruption Justice Center is now prosecuting cases. In parallel, the Government has taken steps to address corruption through a range of institutional reforms, such as efforts to restore integrity to the management of public services. We need however to acknowledge that much remains to be done, including addressing corruption in the security institutions. This will require political leadership and strong determination. I have the pleasure to inform you that UNAMA will launch its first anti-corruption report, titled "Afghanistan's Other Battlefield: The Fight against Corruption" very soon. The report highlights the Government's achievements in addressing corruption, and recommends options for further progress.

Secondly, the Government has committed, at the highest levels, to holding parliamentary elections which are seen as fair, inclusive and transparent by the Afghan people. The commissioners of the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission are appointed. It is encouraging to see them making preparations for elections and pushing the electoral reform agenda forward. However, rebuilding trust in the electoral process will be challenging. I am hopeful that all stakeholders will invest in an inclusive process and build the broad political support necessary for improved elections.



Thirdly, just two days ago on International Women's Day, the Government launched the Women's Economic Empowerment National Priority Program. The plan recognizes women as key economic actors whose contribution to Afghanistan's future is essential. While it is an important step forward, Afghanistan remains one of the most difficult places in the world to be a woman. For many women, the story is one of discrimination, poverty, and oppression. For the story to change, women must be allowed full participation and leadership, and must be respected as decision-makers at all levels. This will require the strong support of the Afghan Government, civil society and international partners.

Mr. President,

Let me elaborate on the issues of development and economic growth. It is imperative that growth strategies start to deliver concrete results. In part due to the worsening security situation over the past two years, service delivery has become increasingly difficult. We have witnessed some downward trends in key indicators, such as access to health clinics and education facilities. Nine million people, or close to one third of the population, are below the poverty line, and given the population growth, per capita GDP is expected to go down. We need to act now to reverse this course. The commitments made in Brussels, as well as the Afghan National Peace and Development Framework and the Citizen's Charter provide an essential opportunity for progress in this regard. This is however neither an easy nor a simple process. The efforts of the Afghan Government will require continuing well-coordinated support of international partners. More focused action on governance, social services and private sector development to promote equitable growth will be necessary. We must work hand-in-hand to make a discernible change in the lives of all Afghans so that they feel the upwards lift of economic and social progress.

Mr. President,

Developing a nation while fighting an insurgency is an uphill struggle. Improving the security environment is essential to realizing economic growth and delivering on the ambitious plans this country's citizens deserve.

The deteriorating security situation remains of great concern. Armed clashes continued unabated in early 2017 despite the cold winter months. I am gravely concerned about reports pointing to an intense spring fighting season. Everything should be done to improve security. We must also remain vigilant about the presence of foreign fighters, including Daesh.

Last year, UNAMA recorded the worst number of civilian casualties since we began keeping records nearly a decade ago. The horrific attack two days ago is testament to the heavy price Afghans pay. This trend must be reversed. While parties to the conflict have expressed commitments to protect civilians, concrete efforts must be made to ensure that such statements translate into real protection for Afghan civilians and reduce casualties. I look forward to the formal adoption and implementation of the "National Policy on Civilian Casualty Prevention and Mitigation" by the Government of Afghanistan. Civilian casualties are preventable. I also encourage the Government to follow through on steps taken to break the culture of impunity and to make it clear that nobody is above the law.

Deteriorating security also led to the highest-ever level of internal displacement in 2016. More than 650,000 Afghans were displaced. Returns from Pakistan exceeded 620,000 people. Displacements and returns for 2017 are likely to remain at these levels. These



trends demand a major humanitarian response in the short term. The Government has shown strong leadership in developing plans for the long-term integration of those displaced and the returnees, but sustained international assistance is essential.

Mr. President,

There clearly can be no military solution in Afghanistan. It must be acknowledged that a prolonged conflict will only lead to further misery for the Afghan people and undermine the very foundation for economic growth and development.

Since my last briefing, I travelled the region extensively to discuss how neighbouring countries can support or play a proactive role in peace efforts. I have been encouraged. I sensed that countries in the neighbourhood are more ready to work towards bringing peace to Afghanistan. They recognize the importance of establishing an environment conducive to peace and regional stability. For these reasons, I urge the countries concerned, particularly in the neighbourhood, to support the Afghan Government's interest in the intensified regional peace effort. UNAMA is closely working with the Afghan Government for this purpose. In this regard, I am deeply troubled by the heightened tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and call for the reduction of tension through dialogue.

The future of Afghanistan has to be built through an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led process for all Afghans. The path of peace must be pursued through negotiations, and not through violence. The Taliban should enter peace talks without preconditions. I call on all relevant actors to exercise their influence to this end. The Government, neighbouring countries and other key powers should reinforce the message that the Taliban can be a part of Afghanistan's future, and its political and social fabric.

Afghanistan's future must be placed above all considerations. An endless conflict and violence is simply not acceptable. We all need to make peace our new and absolute imperative. In close consultation with the Afghan Government, UNAMA stands ready to move the process forward and to help generate momentum for peace. Afghanistan's most important battle ahead is one for a lasting peace.

Mr. President,

UNAMA is looking forward to the adoption of the renewed mandate by the Council. We wish to reassure you of our commitment to the ever more effective discharge of our mandate for the benefit of the people of Afghanistan.

Thank you.

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UNAMA is mandated to support the Afghan Government and the people of Afghanistan as a political mission that provides 'good offices' among other key services. 'Good offices' are diplomatic steps the UN takes publicly and in private, drawing on its independence, impartiality and integrity, to prevent international disputes from arising, escalating or spreading. UNAMA assists the process of peace and reconciliation; monitors and promotes human rights, including the protection of civilians in armed conflict; promotes good governance; and encourages regional cooperation. The Mission also promotes coherent development support by the international community.