



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

[as delivered]

New York, 14 September 2016

Mr. President, Members of the Council,

As I look at the situation in Afghanistan today, I see opportunity and hope, but also formidable challenges. The progress made by the Afghan people over the past 15 years provides opportunities for further advances. With opportunity comes hope.

The challenges derive from almost 40 years of war. Despite the very real progress, Afghanistan still has a long way to go to meet fully the needs of its people. Success at the upcoming Brussels Conference would provide the time and space for the Afghan Government to move towards stability and self-reliance. The Government should seize this opportunity.

In order to meet its challenges, the Government must be able to act effectively. The current precarious political situation, including the tensions between the two leaders of the Government, must be brought to a resolution. A way must be found to ensure stability in the Government for the long term.

As one of the world's most aid-dependent countries, it will be difficult for Afghanistan to achieve self-reliance as long as there is conflict. The conflict diverts resources, which would be better spent on developing Afghanistan and helping its people. Peace is therefore a requirement. It is imperative that avenues for peace be explored with the utmost urgency and seriousness.

Mr. President,

Let me briefly talk about positive efforts underway that give cause for hope.

Sustained international support for Afghanistan is vital, and the Warsaw Summit sent a message to the Afghan people – including anti-government elements – that the international community will continue to support the security sector until 2020.

The Afghan Government is now preparing for the Brussels Conference, where the equally vital question of support for Afghan development will be considered. At Brussels, the Government

has an opportunity to secure continued development assistance, at or near existing levels, through 2020.

At the meeting of the Joint Coordination and Management Board, on 4 September, the Government demonstrated that its preparations for Brussels are well advanced.

I welcome President Ghani's comprehensive, long-term approach to tackling corruption, which seeks to develop the architecture needed to prevent corruption, as well as hold those responsible for corruption to account. The referral of the first cases to the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre demonstrates the Government's resolve. Successful, just, prosecutions would go a long way towards boosting public confidence.

I also wish to acknowledge the Government's continued progress on other reform and mutual accountability commitments, in particular preparing Afghanistan's National Peace and Development Framework and successfully negotiating a new IMF programme after strong performance on the earlier Staff-Monitored Programme, including with respect to revenue collection.

These achievements establish a firm foundation for the Brussels Conference. By demonstrating the government's commitment to development and economic growth and stability, they can build confidence that development funds will be used for credible, effective plans.

I particularly welcome the inclusiveness of the Government's vision for the Brussels Conference. Government attention to poverty reduction at the recent JCMB was widely appreciated. Decades of conflict have left many women widowed and vulnerable, and as President Ghani noted at the JCMB, the face of Afghan poverty is female. Serious attention to poverty reduction thus requires dedicated efforts to empower women in both peace building and development. Government planning in these areas is progressing, and a side event at Brussels will provide a valuable opportunity to discuss the plans in depth. We similarly look forward to the Brussels discussion focused on promoting regional cooperation, which is key to the stability and prosperity of the region.

Success in Brussels would mark another important step for Afghanistan towards self-reliance.

Mr. President,

The National Unity Government faces fundamental challenges, both from outside and from within. Security and political stability are the most fundamental.

On the security front, this has been another difficult year for Afghanistan. Intensive fighting continues in hotspots around the country, while Kabul has been the target of a series of horrendous suicide attacks. Several provincial capitals – such as Lashkar Gah, Tirin Kot and Kunduz City – have been under serious pressure, but none has fallen. The Afghan National Security and Defence Forces have been able to display more effective responses compared to last year and, coupled with tactical operations, they have been able – for the most part – to hold their ground.

The impact of the conflict on civilians remains severe, however. It is with a heavy heart that I must report that, yet again, year on year civilian casualty figures are trending upwards. Nowhere is this trend more apparent than for children, among whom there has been an 18 per cent increase in casualties, with 388 children killed in six months.

The attack – claimed by ISIL – against a demonstration in Kabul on 23 July was a particularly gruesome incident, with 85 civilians killed. The Government promised to investigate in full. UNAMA will share the findings of its own investigation with relevant stakeholders.

I must once again remind all parties to the conflict to strictly abide by their obligation under international human rights and humanitarian law to always place the preservation of human life above any other consideration; and to give a measurable effect to their commitment to the protection of civilians, women and children in particular. Accountability for violations of these commitments remains weak and must be strengthened by all parties.

Mr. President,

The numbers of people newly displaced by conflict have been swelled recently by a massive increase in the number of Afghan families returning from Pakistan. If current trends continue, Afghanistan will have to meet the needs of at least one million “people on the move.” This requires far greater amounts of assistance and places an overwhelming strain on already overstretched health and other social services. Unless measures are taken soon, many thousands of families face the prospect of winter with inadequate shelter or support.

Mr. President,

No effective policies are possible if the Government is internally divided. Tensions within the Government have surfaced, with public criticism by Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah about what he viewed as the incomplete implementation of the political agreement of 2014. The two leaders have met several times since then to try to identify the issues and to seek solutions. Efforts are still underway and further meetings are expected.

The National Unity Government is at a defining moment. A way forward must be found through realistic and flexible compromise and a show of true statesmanship. The leaders need to come up with a solution that would allow for the effective functioning of the Government for both the short and the long term. Afghanistan cannot afford political instability. The leaders must show to the people of Afghanistan and to the international community that they are able to govern effectively.

As the two year anniversary of the 2014 political agreement that established the National Unity Government draws near, the political oppositions have increasingly challenged the legitimacy of the Government.

The political agenda must progress constructively, political stability must be maintained; and the elections must take place. The recent signature by the President of the legislative decree for electoral reform is a constructive development in this regard.

The international community is deeply committed to supporting the National Unity Government, and would be reassured by continued stability and its effectiveness.

Mr. President,

Peace for Afghanistan is a necessity. Without peace, Afghans will continue to suffer and economic growth and prosperity will not materialize.

The Taliban has still not demonstrated explicitly a clear commitment to a peace process, despite the many offers of engagement by President Ghani and the international community.

The intensive fighting this summer has shown the conflict to be an endless cycle of gains and reversals, of destruction instead of development; and continued suffering for Afghan civilians.

It is my fervent hope that, as winter approaches and the tempo of the conflict slows, the Taliban show their willingness to enter into talks with the Afghan Government.

The agreement being negotiated between the Afghan Government and Hizb-e Islami shows that the Government is sincere about negotiations. Experience shows that peace processes can take months and years. Measures should be taken to build confidence between the Government and the Taliban, to prepare the way for substantive talks. The sooner a process is started, the less Afghans will suffer.

I would therefore urge both sides to come together to find a lasting peace for Afghanistan.

Mr. President,

Afghanistan has an opportunity to build on the achievements of the past fifteen years and move towards stability and self-reliance. With effective government and the continued support of the international community it has every chance of succeeding.

Thank you very much.
