



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

[as delivered]

New York, 16 December 2019

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Thank you very much Madam President.

When I last addressed this Council, the people of Afghanistan were preparing to vote in the country's fourth presidential election since 2001. This election took place as scheduled on 28 September. Turnout on the day was modest, dampened by security threats and low voter mobilization in many areas. Preliminary results were to be announced on 19 October; however, they are yet to be announced.

The primary reason for the delay is to ensure that the electoral process is as transparent and credible as possible even at the sacrifice of time. From a technical perspective, the presidential election this year has improved considerably on past elections in Afghanistan, with much greater transparency. The use of biometric voter verification devices seemed largely effective in detecting and deterring fraud, and several new check mechanisms throughout the process have enabled the electoral management bodies to detect and eliminate multiple and fraudulent votes. Candidates and other political stakeholders have had far greater access to information than in previous elections.

After the election day, the Independent Election Commission, the IEC, retrieved electoral materials, and tallied results forms in the presence of candidate agents and observers. Results forms and data, which were electronically transmitted, were matched and processed at the newly established Digital Audit Verification Support System. Deduplication of biometric data to identify multiple voters, and data comparison between the tallied results and Digital Audit Verification Support System was completed. Their primary objective was to detect potential fraud and exclude fraudulent votes from the count. The Electoral Complaints Commission, the ECC, also adjudicated more than 4,000 election day-related complaints.

Nevertheless, this electoral process has not been without problems. Some candidates and their supporters have expressed concerns regarding the technical aspects of the process and the lack of public information. There have been numerous exchanges between the electoral management bodies and candidates both orally and in writing. This process entailed the blockage of audit and recount in seven provinces by supporters of some candidates. This also added to the delay in the announcement of preliminary results. However, the process finally resulted in the resumption of audit and recount in the remaining seven provinces yesterday on 15 December. Now we are expecting to hear the preliminary results soon.

In this process, the United Nations technical experts and international commissioners have had extensive consultations and worked closely with the IEC and the ECC at both commissioners and secretariat levels. I acknowledge and commend the leadership exhibited by both the IEC and the ECC. I felt the strong sense among all stakeholders that the Afghan ownership has to be maintained throughout the electoral process, and that this Afghan lead and ownership would need to take root in the Afghan political scene. I call upon all



stakeholders to enable the electoral institutions to exercise their responsibilities in full, including by addressing all complaints through the appropriate legal and institutional channels. Once electoral complaints have been adjudicated in accordance with the law, I urge the candidates and their supporters to accept the outcome. When the election is completed with credibility, it will become a milestone in the history of establishing a representative political system of the country.

Madam President,

The war continues to take an appalling toll on civilians living in Afghanistan. The third quarter of 2019 saw the highest number of civilian casualties since UNAMA began systematic recording, ten years ago. Over the months of October and November, we have seen a slight decrease in overall numbers. But this is not enough. I am particularly concerned about the ongoing deliberate attacks on civilians, and an increase in civilian casualties from non-suicide improvised explosive devices, and aerial operations. Escalating violence in order to attain a position of strength in peace negotiations, causing many civilian casualties, is unacceptable. Much more concrete efforts to reduce civilian casualties are required by all parties.

I am also alarmed by the increased threat to aid workers in Afghanistan, which has affected the UN family in the past month. It is with profound sadness that I note the death of a UN staff member, Anil Raj, who was killed while travelling in a UN vehicle in Kabul. Mr. Raj was a highly capable professional and a well-liked colleague. His death has been deeply felt by the UN family in Afghanistan. I also note with indignation the death of Dr. Tetsu Nakamura, whose assassination was a profound shock to the Afghan people and the humanitarian community in Afghanistan. Sadly, these were not the only violent attacks on aid workers since my last briefing. There is no conceivable justification for attacks against humanitarian workers, whether they are Afghans or internationals.

I am similarly concerned about the rise in threats and attacks against human rights defenders in Afghanistan, and those with different political views. To name a few, a member of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission was killed by the Taliban earlier this year; and two human rights defenders became incommunicado and arbitrarily detained by the National Directorate of Security, when they were courageously investigating allegations of sexual abuse of children in Logar province. Targeting and attacking such representatives of civil society is totally unacceptable. We will continue to work closely with a range of interlocutors to strengthen human rights protection for those striving to create a more just and equitable society. In this context, I would like to welcome the recent "A" status re-accreditation of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission.

Madam President,

Whatever the outcome of the presidential election may be, peace will be the issue of paramount importance to the new administration. Even while we await the outcome of the elections, efforts for peace have not ceased. Talks between the United States and Taliban have resumed. Efforts are underway to continue with intra-Afghan dialogue. President Ghani outlined his thoughts on peace at the Istanbul Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference. These efforts reflect the strong yearning for peace by all, particularly the people of Afghanistan.

Through the past efforts in the peace process, some key issues have emerged which need addressing to make substantive progress. These include reduction of violence and ceasefire, as well as finding agreeable ways to build on gains made in the areas of human rights, justice,



and governance. These are the issues fundamental to the life and wellbeing of the Afghan people. Therefore, the peace process by necessity must be Afghan-owned. It is imperative that the new government establish inclusive mechanisms through which the views and interests of the entire spectrum of the Afghan society, including women and youth, are justly reflected.

But we all know that peace in Afghanistan has wide-ranging implications for the region and beyond. It is a key issue which affects the stability of the region. It is also an issue fundamental to the international efforts to counter terrorist groups including the ISIL-KP. Peace in Afghanistan would create opportunities for accelerated development and enhanced connectivity of the region and provide common benefits for the people and countries in the region. The strategy for peace therefore needs to have a broad base of support. All peace efforts made by the Afghans and other various stakeholders, including regional countries, should be closely coordinated, in a way that creates synergy.

Madam President,

I would like to emphasize the importance of women's participation in all activities in the Afghan society. In this context, I welcome and thank Afghanistan and the United Kingdom for creating the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan. I also note that the Parliament of Afghanistan passed a resolution on 25 November, calling for the protection and promotion of women's rights and for the inclusion of women in the peace process. Those are strong expressions of commitment to support Afghan women, particularly in promoting their participation in the peace process and in addressing the continuing pervasiveness of violence against women and girls.

Incorporating the voices of the next generation will also be crucial. On this note, I would like to warmly welcome Aisha Khurram, sitting next to me, the newly appointed Youth Representative for Afghanistan. I know she has engaged seriously with a broad spectrum of youth in Afghanistan, and I look forward to hearing her remarks later in this session.

Madam President,

Afghanistan will need to continue its reliance on the support of external donors, both for its immediate humanitarian needs and to support longer-term economic development. We expect to have an important Ministerial conference next year. It will be the first Ministerial-level conference on the development of Afghanistan for the new administration. It will also likely be the last pledging conference for the remainder of the Transformation Decade ending in 2024. Here I should like to point out that in order to make meaningful progress in the field of development and reforms, Afghanistan must take positive and tangible steps on the fundamental issues of anti-corruption and accountability including the issue of impunity. On the humanitarian front, the United Nations, working with the government and non-governmental organizations, expects to reach 7.1 million people by the end of 2019 in 371 out of 401 districts in Afghanistan, exceeding the annual target due to the massive drought response. Next year we hope to reach at least 7.1 million people and, to achieve this, we hope to raise 733 million USD. We look forward to and appreciate your support.

Madam President,

As Afghanistan expects a new government, the country and its international partners together have an opportunity to address key challenges and promote rightful causes in shaping a better



future for that country. The key issues are peace, development, poverty reduction, human rights, and accountability. For the country to succeed in addressing these issues in the next years, the immediate goal is to deliver a credible election whose results reflect the genuine will of the Afghan people and are accepted by the broad range of stakeholders, particularly by the candidates. The United Nations will continue to work with all those concerned, both Afghans and international partners, to achieve peace, stability, and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Thank you very much.

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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.