



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

[as delivered]

New York, 17 December 2018

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Mr. President,

Today I would like to focus on elections and peace, and touch upon the outcomes of the Geneva Ministerial Conference.

First on elections.

On 20 October an estimated four million people in Afghanistan voted in the parliamentary elections. The people of Afghanistan will also make a critical political choice next year for their president. These elections are essential steps as they walk on the path to firmly establishing a representative democracy.

It has been almost two months since the parliamentary elections were held in 33 out of 34 provinces. So far, the results for 29 provinces have been released. Preliminary results show that 28 per cent of the newly elected are women, going above the quota. We commend the courage and strong will of the people of Afghanistan to have defied the threat of the Taliban to exercise their fundamental rights to vote.

When we look at the elections this year, it is necessary to realize that the preparations and implementation as well as the management of security were primarily conducted by the Afghan people with only assistance and advice from international experts. Compared to the elections in 2005 when 550 international experts were responsible for the implementation of the elections, this year only around 60 international experts participated in the advisory capacity. Also, this year the Government of Afghanistan bore more costs than in the past. The international contribution decreased from approximately 140 million US dollars in 2014 to 60 million US dollars this year.

In the area of security, the threats were real: there were more than 108 verified incidents causing 400 civilian casualties, the largest number of casualties on a single election day since systematic records were kept in 2009. At the same time, it must be recognized that the total number of civilian casualties throughout the electoral period this year was on a par with those in 2014. We need to acknowledge the efforts of the national security forces who managed the security primarily by themselves this year without the significant international support which they had in 2014.

There were, however, major and avoidable irregularities in the preparations and implementation of the parliamentary elections by the electoral management bodies. It is clear that these electoral institutions need to significantly improve themselves before the presidential election. The irregularities and mismanagement of the parliamentary elections will be unacceptable for the presidential election. We strongly urge the Independent Election Commission, IEC, and the Election Complaints Commission, ECC, as well as the Government to take all necessary corrective measures and focus intensively in the coming months to complete reforms so that the problems are addressed as they prepare for the presidential election in 2019. It is more important to conduct credible elections by allowing for reforms and sufficient preparations to take place



rather than to conduct the elections without proper reforms from the lessons learned. The presidential election is critical to the future of this country.

As part of our commitment to helping the Afghan institutions deliver a credible presidential election, the United Nations, in response to the request by the President and the ECC, will recommend two international experts to be appointed as non-voting members in the ECC. We will also reassess the roles of international experts in the IEC and determine if more are necessary.

Mr. President,

The Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations co-hosted a Ministerial Conference in Geneva on 28 November. Ninety-six countries and organizations participated. The international community reconfirmed that it will continue to assist Afghanistan to achieve self-reliance on the basis of mutual accountability between the development partners and the Government. The Conference acknowledged the need to improve on reform while recognizing the commitment of the Government to mutual accountability and a real reform agenda, in particular to counter-corruption. The importance of the private sector and regional economic connectivity were underlined. A joint communique and the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework were unanimously adopted at the end of the Conference.

Another key outcome of the Geneva Ministerial was the assurance of continued international support in the post-peace phase. The international community expressed their commitment to continue providing assistance to Afghanistan in the event that a peace agreement is reached with the Taliban.

Mr. President,

The possibility of a negotiated end to the conflict has never been more real in the past 17 years than it is now. On the Afghan side, a peace plan was presented by President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah at the Geneva Ministerial Conference. A team to negotiate directly with the Taliban was appointed. A senior advisory board representing a broader set of Afghan politicians to support the peace efforts was also announced. On 9 December, a new head of the Secretariat of the High Peace Council was appointed. In Geneva, there was a dedicated meeting on peace where participants reiterated that all international efforts, including those by regional actors and neighbours, need to be in concert and aligned with the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace efforts. The reiteration of this key consensus is timely and important as a number of initiatives are underway to advance the process. For instance, the United States Special Envoy for peace has been conducting active engagements with various parties concerned; and a meeting was held in Moscow on 9 November, where parties from the region participated to discuss peace. Many countries in the region, including the neighbours, have also expressed their support for the peace process which appears to be emerging.

UNAMA is also encouraged by these developments. We understand, however, that they are at a delicate stage where political space must be allowed for the main actors to formulate their positions and how to react to recent developments. The key next step would be for representatives of the Government and the Taliban to meet, or at least to formally initiate what in mediation is referred to as “talks about talks”. We hope that the current momentum will bring these parties together so that they can begin to explore how they would address the multitude of agenda points needed for arriving at a peaceful settlement.

Mr. President,



In this forum I have frequently spoken of the need to move from sporadic contacts to structured, formal talks. The efforts are underway to bring about this change. Whilst ‘fighting and talking’ is often a reality in the initial stages of a peace process, it is also the case that actions on the battlefield can have an impact on progress in any peace process. I would therefore urge all parties to the conflict to consider carefully how they can reduce the levels of violence: in particular, the harm to civilians. I urge all those to foster trust and enable dialogues to take place. I call upon the countries in the region, in particular, to contribute to creating an environment conducive to peace talks, allowing the people of Afghanistan to resolve their internal differences through negotiations.

By moving from contacts to talks, we can begin to move from a logic of war to one focused on opportunities for peace. With this shift, we can begin to envisage the benefits of stable Afghanistan in the middle of a region full of promise and potential for growth, rather than continue to fear threats emanating from an unstable Afghanistan. As President Ghani has stated, there is a need to change the perception of Afghanistan from “a site of danger or battle ground” to “a platform of cooperation by location and by strategic perspective”. This is a moment of hope and possibility. Like all such moments, when adversaries begin to engage with each other, it is also a moment of risk. For the sake of a peaceful future of Afghanistan, these opportunities must be fulfilled, and the risks managed.

Mr. President,

UNAMA’s human rights service has reported that there were over 8,000 civilian casualties between 1 January and 30 September this year. This is the same level as last year. Child casualties remain high with 2,136 recorded in the same period. Efforts must be made by all concerned to reduce the casualties. Almost 60 per cent was caused by suicide attacks and ground engagements. The increase of direct targeting of civilians by Anti-Government Elements this year is a concern for us. We also note the significant increase in civilian casualties from aerial operations. UNAMA also recorded 1,513 civilian casualties from suicide and other IED attacks claimed by Daesh/ISIL this year. This is a more than three-fold increase compared to the same period last year. Given the way in which Daesh/ISIL expanded its influence in other parts of the world, we remain concerned about the threats from Daesh/ISIL.

Mr. President,

Before closing, I need to mention the ongoing suffering that plagues a large proportion of citizens in Afghanistan. Despite progress on economic reforms, the country remains one of the world’s poorest, and it is blighted by climate change. Of most immediate concern are people struck by drought and violence, and the suffering of 4.5 million people needs to be alleviated. The United Nations and its partners are issuing the Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan. Around 612 million US dollars is required for 2019, and I ask the international community for their immediate financial support to help people in need across 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.