



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

[as delivered]

New York, 19 December 2016

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Mr. President, Esteemed Members of the Security Council,

The National Unity Government marked its second anniversary with a continued effort towards advancing its reform agenda, and enhancing public services.

Despite security challenges and some political volatility, I continue to see opportunities and hope in Afghanistan.

Afghan Government demonstrated unity at the Warsaw Summit and the Brussels Conference, stressing their shared commitment to security, development and reform priorities. The Afghan leaders have continued working to overcome their differences to advance the Government's reform agenda. The message from the international community sent at the highest level was clear: Afghanistan will not stand alone. The significant international financial commitments in both security and development allowed Afghanistan to achieve greater stability and self-reliance.

I welcome the reconstitution of the electoral management bodies, which must advance electoral reforms and preparations for elections. It is essential to restore public confidence in the democratic process in Afghanistan, and this provides an important opportunity to take steps in that direction. The commencement of prosecutions by the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre shows the Government's seriousness in tackling corruption. The Citizens Charter was adopted to enable a more systematic approach to eradicate poverty and provide services to the people of Afghanistan.

Mr. President,

Afghan citizens are returning home in record numbers. The country has received hundreds of thousands of returnees from both Pakistan and Iran in the past six months alone. While these returnees are being welcomed back to Afghanistan, they face an uncertain future, alongside the internally displaced, including half a million newly displaced just this year.

Over one and a half million people are "on the move" this year. It is likely that the coming year will see similar numbers of people. The sheer scale of this population movement will necessarily bring with it strains and pressure on the economy, on social services and could further swell the number of those seeking employment.

I welcome the swift response of the international community to the United Nations' appeal for the provision of immediate life-saving assistance for the displaced and returnees. I also wish to acknowledge the work that is being undertaken by the Government to put in place programmes that will enable both the displaced and returnees to integrate into the economy and with their host communities.



The longer term needs of integration must be addressed with urgency if we are to prevent more people sinking into absolute poverty. The scale of return will require further international support and flexibility in the use of existing funding mechanisms. Meanwhile, we must make greater efforts to ensure due recognition of the voluntary nature of return and for the process of return to be undertaken with dignity and respect.

Mr. President,

Refugees come back to Afghanistan with hopes. Despite all the efforts by the international community and the Government, a better future is not possible without peace.

In 2016, thousands and thousands of Afghans have been killed in the conflict, and tens of thousands more were wounded. Such human suffering and tragedy is unacceptable.

The conflict also erodes the living conditions of people and deprives the country's opportunities for development and growth. This year, we saw around 50 per cent decrease in economic investment, which is so much needed to achieve a sustainable future. The international commitment for development will not be able to deliver its full potential in the absence of peace. Financial resources that are spent on the conflict could be utilised for the economic prosperity of Afghanistan.

Mr. President,

We all know that the conflict in Afghanistan has no military solution.

Once again, I call upon the Taliban to commit to direct talks with the Afghan Government, without preconditions. The Taliban leadership must reconsider the notion that their objectives can only be achieved on the battlefield.

At stake is the future of the Afghan people and the country. Are the differences really irreconcilable? Is compromise and accommodation really not possible?

All Afghans must come together and work through their problems and find ways to accommodate their differences, for their own joint future.

These are issues of mutual interests and high priorities to all parties. There are issues, such as lessening the civilian casualties. Identifying such common interests could be a starting point for dialogue.

The vast majority of Afghans consider that their country should be a sovereign, united, Islamic country, free from interference by any foreign powers.

This basic agreement on fundamental principles should make it possible to reach a peace agreement, as long as countries in the region are prepared to play their part in a positive, supportive way.

Mr. President,

It takes courage to enter into a peace process. It is not an admission of defeat; it is a recognition of reality. An endless war ruins the country and impacts on people. The only path to a meaningful peace is through intra-Afghan dialogue.

The eventual process will need to be inclusive, involving Afghans in all strata of society, including women and youth. Women in particular could play a crucial role in helping shape a lasting peace.



The peace agreement with Hizb-i Islami shows that the Government is prepared to negotiate on key issues, such as prisoner release, lifting of sanctions, and integration into the political life of Afghanistan. Reaching such an agreement demonstrates the seriousness of its intent. Successful implementation of the agreement should address any remaining doubts, help unite the Afghans, and could pave the way for further peace agreements.

I welcome assurances made by the Government that there would be no compromise of the rights of Afghans in implementing the peace agreement, including the rights of victims of gross violations of human rights.

Mr. President,

Peace and stability in Afghanistan are not the sole interest of Afghanistan; regional countries will also benefit from them both security-wise and economically.

I am encouraged by the active contributions of the regional countries to assist Afghanistan in social, economic and human resources development. Impressive investments are being made in regional infrastructure development. The positive development in these areas is reflected in the outcome of the Heart of Asia Ministerial meeting in India—Amritsar—where we also saw the concurrence of the regional countries to further their cooperation in the counter-terrorism efforts.

But can we not collaborate and cooperate more, to put an end to the conflict in Afghanistan and long-standing human suffering?

I call upon each country of the region to ask itself what more it can do to help create an environment conducive to peace in Afghanistan and the region. There are many strands for cooperation and steps that can be taken by the regional countries to improve the prospects for peace, such as increased consultations, exchanges of information and people-to-people contacts.

Mr. President,

I am encouraged by the positive messages of support of the regional countries for an Afghan-led peace process, and I look forward to these messages showing positive results.

We, the United Nations, remain committed to working for peace in Afghanistan in cooperation with all concerned.

Thank you very much.

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