



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

*[as delivered]*

**New York, 25 September 2017**

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Mr. President,

As we reach the third anniversary of the National Unity Government, I see progress. I see challenges which are still daunting; and I also see new opportunities for political engagement for peace.

I would like to first focus on some areas where progress on key reforms has occurred. This has been achieved despite ongoing security challenges. If these reforms can be consolidated and sustained, they will significantly strengthen the foundation for a more self-reliant Afghan state. The good working relationship between President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah has greatly enabled this reform process.

The efforts of the Government to address corruption have begun to bear results after many years in which this debilitating issue was ignored. The major effort has been led by the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre (ACJC), which is increasingly tackling complex cases involving high-level officials. The ACJC has completed 21 cases and 14 appeals, enabling the ACJC to put a dent into the longstanding problem of impunity for government corruption.

On 5 October, exactly one year from the Brussels conference, senior officials will convene in Kabul to review progress of the Brussels commitments. In this meeting of the senior officials, the Afghan Government needs to demonstrate in this meeting of the senior officials to the donors including to their tax payers and to the Afghan citizens that the reform and development programmes are translating into real improvements in the well-being of all Afghans. I was encouraged, during the intensive preparations for the meeting, by the active engagement of all Afghan and international partners. International partners also need to demonstrate their clear commitment, and I very much count on the highest level of participation from your respective capitals.

Mr. President,

There has also been progress on the organization of parliamentary and district council elections scheduled for next July. The Independent Electoral Commission has completed its assessment of polling stations, reportedly reaching more than 90% of districts. The next step is the voter registration. These two processes would lay the foundation for what will be the most important electoral reforms since 2001: the establishment of polling station-specific voter lists and the completion of a viable voter registry.

It is imperative that we hold the elections according to the plan. Timely elections will enhance the credibility of the political system and institutions. Many stakeholders, however, remain skeptical that credible elections will be held on time.

The IEC, the electoral commission, needs to further increase its public outreach to demonstrate both greater transparency and greater urgency in its electoral preparations. Many



Afghan politicians and citizens across the country told me repeatedly that the country could not endure another election like that of 2014. The electoral Commissioners and their staff have inherited a huge responsibility, but the elections are not the IEC's responsibility alone. The independence of the electoral management bodies must be respected, and the Government must do everything possible to secure the elections. The international community must provide financial and technical support, but the IEC is in the lead and time is passing quickly.

The announcement of the electoral date has prompted the creation of new political coalitions, some of which are highly critical of the Government. Because democracies require responsible oppositions, this may be seen as a constructive development. Many of these groups are crossing ethnic lines in a way that we have not seen before, and building national coalitions. A risk, however, is that some might orient their activities towards actions that destabilize the constitutional order, promote ethnic and geographic divisions, or seek to undermine the State. The need to avoid this risk has been a constant element in UNAMA's outreach to all political actors.

Mr. President,

The security situation continues to be a major concern. The Secretary-General's report describes the main security trends in some detail. With the persistence of Islamic State, also known as Daesh, in the east of the country, and some reports of new Daesh activity in the north as well as in Kabul itself, the situation has become more complex.

The human cost of this violence is high, disproportionately impacting women and children.

Current Afghan security planning foresees that by 2020 Afghan forces will reach sufficient strength to reverse recent Taliban gains. The Taliban, meanwhile, continue to resist appeals to negotiate with the Afghan Government. At the current rate of deaths due to conflict, by 2020 tens of thousands more Afghans will have been killed.

In the midst of this human tragedy, all sides acknowledge that there is no military solution to the conflict. The costs including the human cost of the on-going conflict raises the urgency of the peace process. Frankly the efforts of the past few years have led to little progress. We are, however seeing renewed interest and efforts for political engagements for peace. The announcement in August by the United States administration of a continuing, conditions based commitment to Afghanistan has removed some uncertainties. Some countries in the region and key countries are actively seeking to foster and promote regional engagements for peace. We are all aware that preparations leading to a peace process are complex and require patience and time. Such efforts must be pragmatic and flexible; yet principled to ensure an inclusive political process to define the country's future. This can only occur when all relevant parties to the conflict communicate with each other to identify the contours of a mutual settlement. On this basis confidence can be built and a process can be structured. The process must allow for strategic interest of the countries in the region to be taken into consideration, and be built on a regional consensus.

I am convinced that a political settlement is possible. We should not let another fighting season begin without progress towards substantive negotiations. Opportunities will be lost, with the cost paid in thousands of Afghan lives and at tremendous financial cost.



I appeal to the countries in the region to conduct a profound reassessment of their strategic interest and renew work towards a viable peace process leading to an Afghan-owned solution to the conflict.

If requested, the United Nations stands ready to assist all parties to achieve this goal.

Another potential cost of the conflict is backsliding on recent human rights gains. Violence against women and girls remains widespread. The criminalization of acts of violence against women included in the legislative decree remains to be approved by parliament. The ongoing involvement of children in armed conflict remains a major problem. On a positive note, I welcome the Government's formal endorsement of the National Policy on Civilian Casualty Prevention and Mitigation. I now call on the Government to implement the national policy through a structured Action Plan. I am encouraged by Afghanistan's candidacy for the Human Rights Council and hope that it will be used to consolidate human rights progress in Afghanistan.

Mr. President,

Allow me to turn to the Secretary-General's Strategic Review of UNAMA, carried out at the request of the Security Council. This undertaking provided us a renewed opportunity to think more profoundly about our role, especially the centrality of the search for peace. We look forward to the Security Council's review of the Secretary-General's recommendations.

Furthermore, the entire United Nations family in Afghanistan, as requested by President Ghani, is developing an innovative strategy to deliver its development assistance as one, and in full alignment with the Government's priorities. President Ghani welcomed our proposal, and we are now working evermore closely with his office and key parts of the Government to put things into place swiftly.

Mr. President,

The recommendations of the Strategic Review will entail significant cuts to the Mission. We will implement our mandate with more focus and with a streamlined structure. In the past two months, I have visited eight of our twelve field offices, and met government officials, civil society and UN staff. These visits made clear that the presence of the United Nations is seen as a great benefit to Afghanistan and its people. I am confident that UNAMA will remain well positioned to deliver on its strategic tasks and serve the needs of the Afghan people.

Mr. President,

In closing, may I emphasize how important it is that Afghan leaders deliver and demonstrate concrete achievements. Progress must be made in less than four years to make the best use of the Warsaw and Brussels commitments. Afghanistan must demonstrate to its donors that it has taken not just steps, but *strides* towards self-sufficiency. It is my hope that Afghanistan will soon not be perceived as a source of global security threats, but as a destination for trade and investment.

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*

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