



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

[as delivered]

New York, 26 June 2018

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Mr. President,

Afghanistan is experiencing a politically dynamic period. Ten days ago we witnessed an extraordinary series of events in Afghanistan which demonstrated both the possibilities for peace and the enduring structural obstacles. On 7 June President Ghani declared a unilateral ceasefire for the period of 12-19 June to commemorate the Eid festivities which conclude the month of Ramadan. Two days later, the Taliban announced their own unilateral ceasefire covering 15-17 June. During these overlapping three days, both sides honoured their respective ceasefires for the first time in the past 17 years of conflict. Many Afghans reacted with jubilation. Local Government authorities invited the Taliban to lay down their arms and enter cities to visit their families. Some Afghan soldiers visited Taliban controlled areas. Social media was inundated with photos of Taliban fighters embracing Afghan security forces. President Ghani then proposed to extend its ceasefire—a proposal endorsed by UNAMA and many members of the international community. The Taliban, unfortunately, recommitted themselves to battle.

I regret deeply that the Taliban did not take up the opportunity to cease fighting and reduce violence. Their decision to fight will only increase the suffering of civilians.

It is nonetheless worth taking stock of how much has changed this year alone on the question of peace in Afghanistan. The National Unity Government's offer for peace talks without preconditions, made during the Kabul Process Conference on 28 February, created a new reality. Even though the Taliban did not formally respond to the offer, a number of other developments reinforced it. First, we saw an unprecedented grassroots movement. Beginning in March, ordinary Afghan people began setting up tents in around 20 provinces out of 34, where they protested for peace. In early June, a group of 2,000 religious scholars met in Kabul. They pronounced suicide bombings to be against the teaching of Islam, and called for a ceasefire and for peace talks to begin. At the beginning of Ramadan, one of the first groups to set up a peace tent began a 500 kilometer march from Helmand to Kabul, stopping along the way gaining support for their call for a ceasefire and talks and reaching Kabul last week. Their demand to end the conflict is addressed to every party to the conflict. The Afghan people's genuine demand for peace, coming from the bottom of their hearts, must not be ignored.

We should ask ourselves two questions: what have we learned from these events for peace; and how do we respond?



What we have learned is that both the Afghan government and the Taliban have command and control over their troops. Afghans, including Taliban fighters, clearly want peace. It is also clear that President Ghani is taking courageous steps to seek peace through talks.

How do we respond? In returning to the battlefield, the Taliban insist that their goal is to end the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan. Therefore, they shun direct talks with the Afghan Government. However, any future political settlement in Afghanistan must take into account the concerns of all Afghans. The Afghans must talk among themselves to end the conflict and to decide on the future. This clearly requires the Taliban to have direct talks with the Afghan government. We believe that the issue of international forces will inevitably be taken up in the comprehensive context of peace talks, which will determine the future political order for all Afghans.

I should like to note here that regional efforts to counter terrorism have been receiving more attention with some important international conferences organized by Tajikistan and the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism.

Mr. President,

Preparations are now underway in earnest for parliamentary elections in October and presidential elections planned for the spring next year. Since mid-April, over seven million people have registered to vote. This is the first time since 2003 that Afghanistan is conducting a complete registration of voters for both parliamentary and presidential elections. The goal is a single, national voter register which can produce accurate polling station-based lists. When achieved, this is expected to reduce fraud significantly.

The registration of over seven million voters is a positive achievement under the difficult circumstances, particularly insecurity. On closer scrutiny, however, there remain reasons for concerns. First, in six provinces less than 35 percent of estimated eligible voters were registered. Secondly, registration within provinces is uneven, with certain areas prevented from registering for logistical or security reasons. Given Afghanistan's multi-ethnic composition, the exclusion of these communities could lead to significant contestation of the election results. The disparities have also affected candidate nomination.

This time, elections in Afghanistan are conducted as a fully Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process. All Afghans share responsibilities for transparent and inclusive elections.

The Independent Election Commission, the IEC, has the primary responsibility. Each Commissioner must become fully aware of the lofty responsibilities they shoulder for the future of Afghanistan; to strengthen the foundation of democratic political process and also to demonstrate that Afghanistan is determined and ready to take on the challenges to bring about an independent, sovereign state which can stand on its own feet.

Political parties and political leaders need to be fully aware that they also carry a large part of responsibility for credible elections. Rather than simply criticizing the process, they must be actively engaged to make elections truly Afghan-owned.

We welcome the commitment by civil society to conduct observation at every polling station to monitor voting, counting, tabulating, and transmission of results. The international community must support them in their observation.



The United Nations has 23 international experts currently working with the IEC and Complaints Commission as well as their respective secretariats, and additional technical advisors are being recruited. We will do everything possible in cooperation with the international community to assist the Afghan efforts to bring about transparent, inclusive and credible Afghan-owned elections.

Mr. President,

The Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, hosted by the UN and co-chaired with the Government of Afghanistan, is to take place on 28 November. The conference comes at the mid-point of the transformation decade during which the country transitions from dependence on the international community to self-reliance. The conference will focus on three areas. First, the extent to which the country is moving towards self-reliance and the effectiveness of aid. Second, remaining challenges, for example insecurity and job creation. Clearly, both a more safe country and one in which the private sector can grow faster is key to create employment. Third, the link between short-term humanitarian action and development cooperation. The link between peace and security, humanitarian action and development is a key theme for the United Nations, and the Geneva Ministerial offers opportunity to focus on this nexus. In Geneva, we expect the Afghan side to report on their achievement in the areas of development, poverty reduction and reforms and outline concrete plans to address remaining challenges. In response, I count on Afghanistan's development partners to support strongly the people and institutions of Afghanistan as they move the country forward. We are encouraged to see that the Afghan government is already looking beyond the Transformation Decade, for example by working to increase regional connectivity and trade. Much has been achieved but much remains to be done in the domains of peace, security, and development. Geneva affords us all this year's best chance to set in stone the road to a safer and better future.

Mr. President,

Much of Afghanistan, in particular the north and the west, have been struck by drought, more severe than anything experienced in almost a decade. Wheat production in 2017 was reported to be at 57 per cent below the 5 year average. The 2018 harvest is forecasted to be even lower. The Humanitarian Response Plan has been revised by \$117 million, up to a still modest total of \$547 million, in order to enable the UN to provide relief to affected populations and complement work by the government to service people in need.

Mr. President,

While our attention has been focused on the large political processes, it is important that we not lose sight of the critical issue of the protection of women's rights. UNAMA recently issued a report on the use of mediation to resolve criminal cases of violence against women. I was greatly disturbed by the findings. The report found that a majority of these cases were resolved through mediation instead of being prosecuted according to criminal laws. In many cases, these traditional means of resolution compounded the original violence. Women were left to suffer. Women who have been subjected to criminal violence must be able to assert their rights according to the law.



Mr. President,

The key political events of peace and elections are far from assured; but we are seeing unprecedented opportunities to make progress to seek peace and to consolidate the political foundation for the future. Afghanistan's evolving development needs the strategies to address them are being re-evaluated as part of the preparations for the Geneva Conference. In other words, the coming months will present critical opportunities for the international community to seriously review and adjust the way it is supporting and assisting Afghanistan in its efforts to bring about peace, democracy, and self-reliance.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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UNAMA supports the Afghan people and government to achieve peace and stability. In accordance with its mandate as a political mission, UNAMA backs conflict prevention and resolution, promoting inclusion and social cohesion, as well as strengthening regional cooperation. The Mission supports effective governance, promoting national ownership and accountable institutions that are built on respect for human rights. UNAMA provides 'good offices' and other key services, including diplomatic steps that draw on the organization's independence, impartiality and integrity to prevent disputes from arising, escalating or spreading. The Mission coordinates international support for Afghan development and humanitarian priorities.