



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

[as delivered]

New York, 8 March 2018

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Madame President,

Thank you for scheduling this meeting on Afghanistan on International Women's Day. I wish to express my appreciation to Your Excellency Minister Kaag's initiative to lead an all-women delegation today, and to encourage others to do the same. I am also very pleased that the Afghan delegation is joined today by Dr. Sarabi and Ms. Mariam Safi, two women with distinguished careers in working for the advancement of peace in Afghanistan.

Members of the Council,

You have witnessed the importance of women's rights and women's empowerment for yourself during your recent visit to Kabul. I am sure that you were deeply impressed, as I am, by the resilience of Afghan women. Their strength holds the fabric of society together. I will touch upon the women, peace and security agenda throughout my briefing.

Madame President,

One week ago Afghanistan successfully hosted the second conference of the Kabul Process for peace and security. All the conference participants have endorsed the call for direct talks between the Government and the Taliban without pre-conditions. All relevant parties including the Taliban agree that a negotiated political settlement is the way to bring an end to the conflict.

President Ashraf Ghani offered peace to the Taliban without preconditions, and laid out a path for negotiations with a series of concrete proposals to create space for the opening of talks. The offer of negotiation is on the table. It is now incumbent upon the Taliban to come forward with an offer of their own, and start direct talks with the Government to put an end to the suffering of the Afghan people. The Taliban's argument that they will not talk to the Afghan government because the conflict is not between Afghan parties misrepresents the reality that tens of thousands of Afghan people are killed and maimed every year in direct confrontations between the Taliban and the government forces.

Madame President,

Making peace and reaching out to opponents requires resolve, courage, and above all national unity. When looking at the recent domestic political developments, I am compelled to express my concern about some actions which could deepen divisions in society. Political leaders need to place the national interest above partisan agenda. National unity provides the only basis for the continuation of international support for Afghanistan, and for the implementation of effective reforms. Political stability requires also inclusivity. The prolonged political impasse over the Governorship of Balkh should be resolved swiftly through a negotiated solution. It must not undermine the authority of the National Unity Government, nor hinder progress on the delivery of key Government functions. The upcoming elections



provide a further opportunity to ensure that unity and stability prevail, and that all groups are represented.

Members of the Council,

When you visited Afghanistan in January, you delivered a clear and strong message that parliamentary elections must be held in 2018 and presidential elections in 2019. There has since been accelerated progress on voter registration preparations. The Independent Election Commission, with its new Chairperson, is working hard on electoral preparations but timelines remain tight. In one of his first statements, the IEC Chair acknowledged that elections would most likely have to be delayed beyond the current July 2018 date but could still be held this year, as long as preparations are not delayed and voter registration begins on schedule in April.

The IEC must also concentrate on areas where it can deliver, and seek the assistance of other agencies of the government in areas such as recruitment of voter registration staff which needs to be accelerated. The Afghanistan Central Civil Registration Authority must now do all it can to enable eligible Afghan citizens to register to vote by issuing citizen identity cards, known in Afghanistan as “tazkeras” to millions who do not possess them. Public outreach is important. Afghan voters will need to understand the importance for them to cast their votes, even though they may have serious concerns about the electoral system because of past experiences. The UN is working with the Commission to ensure women’s participation in all stages of the elections as candidates, campaigners and voters.

Madame President,

The new Penal Code, which entered into force on 14 February, reinforces Afghanistan’s compliance with international human rights and criminal justice standards and is a milestone in the country’s criminal justice reform; and we whole heartedly welcome the Penal Code coming into force. UNAMA had played a valuable role in drafting the code. I am pleased to report on today’s International Women’s Day that the Afghan Cabinet has adopted the necessary amendment to the Penal Code to ensure that all provisions of the Elimination of Violence Against Women law continue to apply, giving Afghan women continuing legal protection from violence.

Women are also disproportionately affected by the conflict. Last year, more than 1,200 women were killed or injured, mostly from ground fighting and suicide attacks. I am particularly concerned by the increase in civilian casualties caused by the Islamic State in the Khorasan Province, ISKP. The ISKP has been expanding its geographical spread beyond the hitherto stronghold of eastern Afghanistan into northern Afghanistan. We are monitoring these developments very carefully in light of potentially destabilizing effects in the north and beyond.

Madame President,

I would like to turn to another issue of pressing importance, which is the question of refugees and displaced persons. Pakistan and Iran have generously hosted Afghan refugees for decades in times of great needs, and we appreciate their contribution. It should not be forgotten that in 2016 and 2017, 1.5 million people returned to Afghanistan. The Afghan Government has welcomed the return of its citizens, but such large numbers inevitably stress the Government’s ability to provide services. Assurances that returnees would gain



access to land, housing, and basic services have unfortunately not been realized. We believe this gap must be addressed before encouraging more people to move back to their homeland voluntarily. It is possible and even likely that hundreds of thousands more Afghans will return from Pakistan alone this year. While the international aid community is preparing contingency plans to provide short-term help, the responsibility for people's protection and welfare rests with the state. Simply put, only the state can provide land, guarantee property rights, and ensure adequate service provision.

With regard to investment and improving Afghanistan's economy, I am pleased to note the recent ground-breaking ceremony of the construction in Afghanistan of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline (TAPI). The nearly 2,000 kilometre pipeline will be able to transfer 33 billion cubic meters of gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India through Afghanistan. The ground-breaking was not only a success for regional cooperation and integration, but the beginning of the fulfilment of a long-standing project in Afghanistan that will contribute significantly towards Afghanistan's economic self-reliance.

Madame President,

UNAMA appreciates the adoption of the renewed mandate by this Council. We have important tasks ahead of us this year including peace efforts, the upcoming elections and the Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan which the United Nations looks forward to hosting with the Government of Afghanistan in Geneva on 28 November. I must also mention the critical areas of human rights and reforms including anti-corruption. As we work with and for the People and Government of Afghanistan, we look to the Security Council to provide us with a clear mandate.

Thank you, Madame President.

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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.