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The situation in Afghanistan

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The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [68/11](#) and Security Council resolution [2405 \(2018\)](#), in which the Secretary-General was requested to report every three months on developments in Afghanistan.
2. The report provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan, including political, humanitarian, development and human rights efforts, since the issuance of the previous report, dated 7 December 2018 ([A/73/624-S/2018/1092](#)).

II. Relevant developments

3. Efforts towards a negotiated settlement to the conflict intensified, with progress reported in talks between the United States of America and the Taliban. The Government of Afghanistan also continued its preparations for an intra-Afghan peace dialogue, although no formal talks between the Government and the Taliban were held. The aftermath of the October 2018 parliamentary elections remained contentious, amid delays in the counting process, widespread irregularities and allegations of corruption. The Independent Election Commission postponed the 2019 presidential elections by three months until 20 July. Nominations of candidates for the presidential elections concluded on 20 January, with 18 candidates registered, including incumbent President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah. Security remained volatile, with a slight decrease in violent incidents in line with seasonal trends. Civilian casualties continued at record high levels. The Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations co-hosted the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, resulting in the adoption of the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework for development assistance. The humanitarian situation remained grave, compounded by ongoing drought and high levels of displacement.



A. Political developments

4. The previous three months were dominated by three crucial and related processes: the aftermath of the parliamentary elections, held on 20 October; the presidential elections constitutionally mandated to take place in 2019, now scheduled for July; and the redoubled effort to reach a durable political settlement between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban insurgency.

5. Efforts to end the conflict in Afghanistan through political reconciliation accelerated in the second half of 2018. During the reporting period, the Government continued its preparations for an intra-Afghan peace dialogue. At the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, held on 27 and 28 November, President Ghani announced that he had established a Government negotiating team, led by his Chief of Staff, Salam Rahimi. On 9 December, President Ghani announced the appointment of Mohammed Umar Daudzai as his special representative to the region for peace and concurrently as the new executive secretary of the High Peace Council. Mr. Daudzai announced reforms to the High Peace Council, including the suspension of the provincial peace committees. He also embarked on regional visits, travelling to Pakistan from 8 to 12 January and China on 26 January to discuss regional consensus on the Afghan peace process. On 12 December, the Government issued a presidential decree establishing the High Advisory Board for Peace, comprising 33 members, mainly Government officials and political opposition figures, including two women. On 11 February, President Ghani held the first national consultative meeting on the peace process. Following working group discussions, the President addressed the gathering, emphasizing the need for a Government-led and inclusive intra-Afghan process and tasking Mr. Daudzai with convening a jirga of prominent Afghans by the end of February to identify the parameters of peace.

6. Meanwhile, the United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, made several trips to the region to gain support for the Afghan peace process. During a regional visit from 4 to 22 December, Mr. Khalilzad held talks on 17 and 18 December with Taliban representatives in Abu Dhabi and governmental representatives from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. It was reported that the three countries asked the Taliban to consider announcing a ceasefire and publicly signalling its willingness to enter into direct talks with the Government of Afghanistan. These intra-Afghan talks did not materialize, however, despite the presence of a Government delegation in Abu Dhabi. Mr. Khalilzad made a further visit to the region from 8 to 26 January, beginning with trips to India and China. On 21 January, he travelled to Qatar for six days of intense negotiations with the Taliban Political Commission, reportedly over the military withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan and ensuring that the country did not become a haven for international terrorists. On 26 January, Ambassador Khalilzad and the Taliban issued separate public statements noting that important progress had been made, although the meetings had concluded without a formal agreement. Mr. Khalilzad then visited Kabul to brief President Ghani on the outcome of the talks. In a media interview, he acknowledged that the Taliban had refused to engage in direct talks with the Government of Afghanistan, as the movement believed that this would mean accepting the Government's legitimacy. President Ghani subsequently gave a public address on 28 January, in which he portrayed progress in negotiations between the United States and the Taliban as part of an overall framework initiated by the Government of Afghanistan. President Ghani reiterated his call for the Taliban to engage in intra-Afghan dialogue, warned against the mistakes of past Afghan peace processes and called for the withdrawal of foreign troops and for the peace process to be conducted in an orderly and sustainable manner.

7. On 5 and 6 February, a meeting was held in Moscow between a 10-member Taliban delegation and a number of Afghan political figures, many affiliated with opposition positions, including former President Hamid Karzai and several presidential and vice-presidential candidates, as well as several former Taliban members. Two women participated in the meeting. Speaking at the conference, Mr. Karzai welcomed recent peace efforts and emphasized that a free and democratic Afghanistan could be achieved only through national unity. A representative of the Taliban Political Commission, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, gave a speech in which he outlined steps towards a peace process, including the delisting of the Taliban from sanctions lists, the release of detainees and the formal opening of a Taliban office, and highlighted the need for international guarantees of an eventual peace agreement. Parliamentarian Fawzia Koofi said that the gains of the past 18 years, including the political participation and socioeconomic rights of women, should be protected in any peace process. At the conclusion of the conference, participants issued a joint declaration calling for an inclusive intra-Afghan dialogue. In the declaration, they also called for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan and expressed support for ensuring the educational, political, social and economic rights of women, as well as for the freedom of speech of all Afghans, in accordance with Islamic values. Subsequently, President Ghani emphasized the need for the peace process to be led by the Government of Afghanistan.

8. The United Nations continued its efforts to support an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process. In partnership with the Government of Norway, the United Nations organized an experience-sharing seminar in Kabul where experts on recent peace negotiations concerning Colombia and the Philippines shared insights with the High Peace Council and members of the Government negotiating team and the High Advisory Board for Peace. As part of ongoing efforts to support local-level peacebuilding, field offices of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) supported the implementation of three local peace initiatives during the reporting period, including one aimed at reducing the impact of resource disputes on marginalized communities in Badakhshan Province.

9. These efforts to find a lasting peace continued in parallel with two electoral processes: preparations for the 2019 presidential elections, and the delayed and contentious resolution of the October 2018 parliamentary elections. The tabulation of results for the parliamentary elections progressed slowly. Following widespread complaints of corruption and procedural irregularities, full or partial recounts were conducted in all 33 provinces where elections were held. Nevertheless, these did not assuage the concerns of many candidates and political parties, who alleged that some commissioners and staff of the electoral management bodies were tampering with the results of the recount. On 28 November, the National Directorate for Security arrested the Independent Election Commission's acting head of field operations over allegations of corruption. His case was subsequently referred to the Office of the Attorney General for investigation. During the extended counting period, protestors dissatisfied with recounts or the preliminary results held largely peaceful demonstrations in over 20 provinces across the country, temporarily blocking electoral offices in at least 11 provinces. While some candidates did have grievances with the electoral process, the majority followed the appropriate procedures and submitted complaints to be investigated by the Electoral Complaints Commission.

10. The parliamentary constituency of Kabul Province, with the highest number of seats and largest registered voting population, proved particularly contentious. On 6 December, the Electoral Complaints Commission announced that it had invalidated the Kabul election and called for the termination of five senior electoral officials, including the Independent Election Commission's Chief Electoral Officer. The decision prompted the Second Vice-President, the Chief Justice, the Attorney General

and the Head of Independent Commission for Overseeing the Implementation of the Constitution to mediate between the two bodies, which subsequently agreed to a recount at a limited number of polling centres. This controversy further delayed the release of results for Kabul Province. On 14 January, preliminary results for Kabul Province were announced. Following an initially quiet response to these results, which had originally been due to be announced on 10 November 2018, unsuccessful candidates staged a protest in the city of Kabul on 22 January, blocking the four main entrances to the capital before ending the protest later the same day.

11. The Electoral Complaints Commission received 4,946 complaints regarding the preliminary results, of which 2,980 complaints and 198 appeals were adjudicated. Of these, the Commission forwarded 119 cases to the Office of the Attorney General for further investigation. Following the complaints process, the Commission began announcing the final results of the elections, with the results in nine provinces announced on 20 January, three provinces on 23 January and six provinces on 30 January.

12. On 30 December, the Independent Election Commission announced that it would postpone the 2019 presidential elections from 20 April to 20 July. Although preceded by consultations with political actors and civil society, the announcement was met with criticism and concern over the delay. The Independent Commission for Overseeing the Implementation of the Constitution issued a legal opinion on 31 December 2018 in which it concluded that the postponement constituted a breach of the Constitution. Although it was not binding on the Independent Election Commission, the opinion added weight to public criticism surrounding the postponement of the elections. Also scheduled for July are provincial and district council elections, as well as the parliamentary election for Ghazni Province, which could not be held in 2018 owing to the volatile security situation and protests blocking the provincial office of the Independent Election Commission, both of which inhibited voter registration efforts in the province. Several stakeholder groups expressed scepticism about the Commission's capacity to conduct all four elections in July.

13. The electoral commissions, supported by the United Nations, nevertheless continued logistical preparations for the presidential elections. In January, the Independent Election Commission concluded a lessons learned process on the parliamentary elections, and, in line with its recommendations, began discussions with the Government over strengthening the structure and staffing of the Commission's secretariat. Both commissions started preparing their operational plans and budget. The Government allocated approximately \$23.4 million for four elections in its 2019 national budget, for use by the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission. Following the preparation of a draft operational plan, a draft budget of \$112,189,045 was prepared to fund the activities of the two commissions, as well as the United Nations Electoral Support Project. The nomination of candidates for the presidential elections commenced on 22 December and closed on 20 January, with 18 presidential candidates registering, including President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah. No female presidential candidates registered, but three women were among the running mates registered on presidential tickets. Verification of documents by the Independent Election Commission was completed on 4 February while candidate vetting for links to illegal armed groups by the Election Complaints Commission will continue until 22 March. On 7 January, the regulations for the voter registration update were approved, with the registration process scheduled to take place in March. The Commission has also begun to explore the use of technology, including the improved use of biometric voter verification equipment, which had functioned inconsistently during the parliamentary elections. In response to a Government request, two international non-voting members of the

Electoral Complaints Commission were identified and, on 5 February, an official letter of recommendation was sent to President Ghani for his approval.

14. The perceived mismanagement of the parliamentary elections and allegations of fraud and corruption generated calls for the removal of electoral commissioners and reinvigorated the demands for reforms to the electoral system. In December, the Grand National Coalition of Afghanistan and the contact group of political parties called for fundamental reforms in the structures of both commissions. The parties also warned, however, against Government interference that could undermine the credibility of the upcoming presidential elections. On 13 January, Second Vice-President Sarwar Danesh publicly signalled the Government's plans to consider reforms of both commissions. On 16 January, the Government began consultations with political actors and civil society to build consensus on potential changes to both commissions and the mechanisms for replacing commissioners. On 11 February, an ad hoc technical committee led by Second Vice-President Danesh, comprising Government officials, political parties and civil society organizations, agreed to proposed amendments to the Election Law, including a new appointment process for members of both electoral commissions. The draft amendments to the law were approved by the Cabinet on 12 February. On the same day, President Ghani issued a decree removing with immediate effect the seven commissioners of the Independent Election Commission and the five commissioners of the Electoral Complaints Commission from their positions and appointing the heads of the secretariats as caretakers of the two commissions, pending the selection and appointment of new Chairs.

15. In parallel, political actors continued their efforts to mobilize support ahead of the presidential elections. On 28 January, a spokesperson for the opposition Grand National Coalition of Afghanistan told the media that efforts to support a single presidential candidate as previously intended had failed. The formation of tickets also prompted a new round of debate over the political arrangements governing Afghanistan, with several candidates, including Chief Executive Abdullah and former National Security Adviser Hanif Atmar, signalling their support for decentralization and political reform. Persistent rumours about the possible establishment of an interim administration also sparked debate among presidential and vice-presidential candidates about the sequencing of presidential elections and a peace process. Further controversy was generated on 24 January upon President Ghani's announcement that Second Chief Executive Officer Mohammad Mohaqeq, who had registered to contest the 2019 presidential elections as Mr. Atmar's nominee for Second Vice-President, had been dismissed from his post. The following day, Mr. Mohaqeq issued a statement rejecting the President's decision, while Chief Executive Abdullah issued a statement in support of Mr. Mohaqeq. The move prompted a debate over the legality of President Ghani's decision, with the Government claiming that it had the authority to dismiss senior officials under the Constitution, while Mr. Mohaqeq's supporters argued that his position was grounded in the September 2014 National Unity Government agreement and that his dismissal therefore required consultations with Chief Executive Abdullah.

B. Security

16. The security situation remained volatile, with a consistently high number of security incidents. In 2018, the United Nations recorded 22,478 security-related incidents, a 5 per cent reduction as compared with the historically high 23,744 security-related incidents recorded in 2017. UNAMA recorded 13,805 armed clashes in 2018, representing 61 per cent of all security-related incidents and a 10 per cent decrease compared with 2017. Incidents relating to the use of improvised explosive

devices remained the second largest category of incidents. Reported airstrikes, which had already increased by 67.6 per cent from 2016 to 2017, rose by an additional 42 per cent, from 950 in 2017 to 1,352 in 2018. The Taliban succeeded in temporarily capturing 21 district administrative centres throughout the year, the second highest level since the security transition to the Afghan forces at the end of 2014. Targeted killings and abductions increased by 9 per cent compared with 2017, while 106 suicide attacks were recorded, the highest number since 2014 and a 5 per cent increase as compared with 2017. The southern and eastern regions recorded the highest number of incidents, accounting for 52 per cent of all security incidents.

17. Between 16 November 2018 and 7 February 2019, UNAMA recorded a total of 4,420 security-related incidents, an 8 per cent decrease compared with the same period the year before. The southern region saw the highest number of incidents, followed by the eastern and northern regions, with these three regions accounting for 67 per cent of all incidents. Established trends remain unchanged, with armed clashes dominating the security incident profile, accounting for 58 per cent of all incidents, a 12 per cent decrease compared with the same period in 2017. Suicide attacks decreased by 61 per cent, possibly reflecting successful interdiction efforts by Afghan National Defence and Security Forces in the cities of Kabul and Jalalabad, while air strikes by the Afghan Air Force and international military forces increased by 51 per cent as compared with the same period the year before.

18. The Government made significant changes to its security leadership. On 23 December, President Ghani announced the appointment of Assadullah Khalid as acting Minister of Defence and Amrullah Saleh as acting Minister of the Interior. Mr. Saleh subsequently resigned from office on 19 January to stand as a candidate for First Vice-President on President Ghani's re-election ticket. On 20 January, President Ghani appointed National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib as officer in charge of the Ministry of the Interior. On 11 February, the Government appointed Massoud Andarabi, a former deputy director of the National Directorate for Security, as the new acting Minister of the Interior.

19. Localized clashes between Government forces and anti-government elements continued across Afghanistan, at marginally lower levels, in line with seasonal patterns, with neither side achieving significant territorial gains. Winter operations of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces were focused on the southern region, as well as Nangarhar in the east, Balkh and Faryab in the north, Ghazni in the south-east and Herat and Farah in the west. They continued to face challenges with regard to improving overall security along major roads across northern Afghanistan. Between 16 and 19 January, a large Afghan National Defence and Security Forces resupply convoy, travelling between the cities of Maymana and Mazar-e Sharif, was attacked multiple times, resulting in an estimated 50 casualties and 40 vehicles destroyed, a setback for the efforts of the Afghan security forces in the area. Air strikes continued to underpin Afghan and international military efforts against anti-government elements around the country, with an unprecedented number of air strikes recorded during the reporting period. The largest number of air strikes – approximately one third – occurred in Helmand Province, where the Taliban's designated shadow governor, Mullah Manan, was killed on 1 December by a drone strike, followed by Farah, Uruzgan, Nangarhar, Ghazni and Faryab provinces. During the reporting period, five international military servicemen were reported as killed in action, including two in the first three weeks of January 2019.

20. Several high-profile attacks occurred during the reporting period, mainly in the city of Kabul, despite an overall lower tempo of suicide and complex attacks nationwide. Responsibility for two significant attacks in the city of Kabul remain unclaimed: a suicide attack against a religious gathering on 20 November and a complex attack against the compounds of the Ministries of Public Works and of

Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled on 24 December. United Nations staff inside the Ministry of Public Works facility during the attack were protected by elements of the Afghan Diplomatic Protective Service and safely evacuated. Responsibility for two attacks targeting international compounds linked to military efforts claimed by the Taliban: on 28 November against Camp Anjuman and on 14 January against the Green Village compound. Ten United Nations staff members present in the Green Village compound during the attack were unharmed, while two staff members were slightly injured. Another significant asymmetric attack against the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, claimed by the Taliban, occurred on 21 January when an explosive-laden humvee detonated inside an Afghan Quick Reaction Force base in Wardak Province, killing 39 security personnel and injuring another 58.

21. A number of protests occurred around the country linked to the elections, civilian casualties or the arrest of high-profile individuals. Within the span of a week in late November, at least four demonstrations against civilian casualties as a result of pro-government military operations were held in Gelan District (Ghazni Province), Jabal us Saraj District (Parwan Province), Muhammad Aghah District (Logar Province) and Gomal District (Paktika Province). On 25 November, the National Directorate for Security arrested Ali Pur, a Hazara militia commander, on suspicion of involvement in criminal activities. The arrest sparked widespread demonstrations in the cities of Kabul and Bamyan, where they escalated into violence, as well as in the provinces of Herat, Balkh, Daykundi and Wardak. Ali Pur was subsequently released on 26 November. The localized protests against the preliminary results and vote recounts for parliamentary elections resulted at times in the closure of roads or the provincial offices of electoral management bodies.

22. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP) remained resilient, despite Afghan and international military forces maintaining a high tempo of operations against its strongholds in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces. These operations, including air strikes, had a significant impact in degrading ISIL-KP. UNAMA recorded clashes in Kunar Province between the Taliban and ISIL-KP, suggesting that it was one of the most active locations for Taliban and ISIL-KP confrontation, although clashes also continued in Nangarhar Province. Increased measures implemented by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces have improved security in the city of Jalalabad in 2019, after the provincial capital witnessed a 10 per cent increase in suicide attacks in 2018, primarily driven by ISIL-KP. On 23 November, ISIL-KP claimed one suicide attack in a mosque situated in a military base in Manduzai District, Khost Province, reportedly killing 35 security personnel.

23. Nine incidents affecting United Nations personnel were reported, including two cases of intimidation and seven crime-related incidents.

C. Regional cooperation

24. Regional engagement with regard to the Afghan peace process intensified during the reporting period, as the Government of Afghanistan and countries of the region enhanced their mutual efforts. In January, the National Security Adviser of Afghanistan, Hamdullah Mohib, visited India, China, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to discuss the peace process, counter-terrorism, and bilateral and multilateral ties. Interlocutors expressed their support for the Afghan reconciliation process and for sustained cooperation in that regard.

25. The Islamic Republic of Iran also increased its engagement in support of the Afghan peace process. On 26 December, the Secretary of its Supreme National

Security Council, General Ali Shamkhani, met in Kabul with President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah and National Security Adviser Mohib. On 30 December, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran reported that a Taliban delegation had visited the Islamic Republic of Iran for discussions regarding the peace process in Afghanistan, and that those talks had been held with the knowledge of the Government of Afghanistan. On 5 January, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Abbas Araghchi, visited Kabul, meeting with President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, Salahuddin Rabbani. Mr. Araghchi briefed on Tehran's talks with the Taliban and reiterated his country's commitment to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process.

26. Pakistan also continued its engagement with Afghanistan through bilateral and multilateral channels. From 24 to 26 December, its Minister for Foreign Affairs, Shah Mahmood Hussain Qureshi, visited Kabul, Tehran, Beijing and Moscow as part of Islamabad's regional outreach in support of peace efforts. On 15 December, the second Afghanistan-China-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue was held in Kabul. In their joint statement, the three sides agreed to continue building mutual political trust and to support reconciliation efforts and other key areas of trilateral cooperation, including development and connectivity, security and counter-terrorism. The three sides agreed to implement the consensus of the second Dialogue through the trilateral Vice-Ministerial Strategic Dialogue, Vice-Ministerial Consultation on Counter-Terrorism and Security, and Director Generals' Practical Cooperation, as well as other agreed mechanisms.

27. The trade connectivity of Afghanistan received a boost on 13 December with the inauguration in Herat of the Lapis Lazuli Corridor by President Ghani. The Corridor is expected to facilitate the export of Afghan products, particularly to European markets. During the reporting period, the first batch of Afghan goods reached Turkey via this route.

28. In November 2018, the 7th regional technical group meeting on counter-terrorism confidence-building measures under the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process was held in Abu Dhabi. At the meeting, participating countries expressed interest in jointly developing and implementing a unified regional counter-terrorism strategy.

III. Human rights

29. On 25 February 2019, UNAMA released its 2018 annual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The Mission documented 10,993 civilian casualties (3,804 people killed and 7,189 injured) between 1 January and 31 December 2018, the highest number of civilian deaths recorded in a single year since UNAMA began systematic documentation in 2009, and an overall increase of 5 per cent compared with 2017. UNAMA attributed 63 per cent of all civilian casualties to anti-government elements (37 per cent to the Taliban, 20 per cent to ISIL-KP and 6 per cent to unidentified anti-government elements, including self-proclaimed ISIL-KP), 24 per cent to pro-government forces (14 per cent to Afghan national defence and security forces, 6 per cent to international military forces, 2 per cent to pro-government militias, and 2 per cent to undetermined or multiple pro-government forces), 10 per cent to unattributed crossfire during ground engagements between anti-government elements and pro-government forces and 3 per cent to other incidents, including explosive remnants of war and cross-border shelling.

30. The use of tactics involving improvised explosive devices, including suicide and non-suicide attacks, caused the most civilian casualties in 2018 (42 per cent), resulting in 4,627 civilian casualties (1,361 people killed and 3,266 injured), an 11 per

cent increase compared with 2017. A particularly egregious attack during the reporting period occurred on 20 November when a suicide attacker detonated his body-borne improvised explosive device at a gathering marking a religious holiday, resulting in the death of 60 civilians and the injury of 86 more. Ground engagements, the second leading cause, accounted for 3,382 civilian casualties (814 people killed and 2,568 injured), amounting to 31 per cent of all civilian casualties, marking a slight decrease compared with 2017. UNAMA continued to document increasing levels of civilian casualties from aerial strikes by pro-government forces, documenting a record high of 1,015 civilian casualties (536 people killed and 479 injured) in 2018, an increase of 61 per cent compared with 2017, with women and children comprising 64 per cent of those casualties. Search operations by pro-government forces caused an increasing number of civilian casualties, resulting in 353 civilian casualties (284 people killed and 69 injured). UNAMA notes also that it has documented a high ratio of civilian deaths from search and air operations, with many of the search operations involving air support by international military forces. UNAMA documented 3,062 child casualties (927 children killed and 2,135 injured) and 1,152 adult female casualties (350 women killed and 802 injured) in 2018, both of which marked a decrease compared with 2017. The leading cause of child casualties in 2018 continued to be ground engagements, which caused 1,192 child casualties (276 children killed and 916 injured). Non-suicide attacks involving improvised explosive devices by anti-government elements were the second main cause of casualties among children, with 517 child casualties (129 children killed and 388 injured). Of concern, aerial operations by pro-government forces in 2018 caused 492 child casualties (236 deaths and 256 injured), an 85 per cent increase compared with the previous year and a 107 per cent increase in the number of children killed. Children continued to comprise the vast majority (87 per cent) of casualties from explosive remnants of war, with 426 child casualties (136 children killed and 290 injured) in 2018.

31. From 1 October to 31 December 2018, the country task force on monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children in armed conflict verified 69 incidents targeting schools and related personnel, compared with 33 incidents during the previous quarter. The task force attributed 65 incidents to anti-government elements (55 by the Taliban, 7 by ISIL-KP, 2 by undetermined armed groups and 1 jointly by ISIL-KP and the Taliban) and 4 to pro-government forces (2 by the Afghan National Army and 1 each by international military forces and a pro-government militia). The increase is mainly the result of attacks by the Taliban against schools used as polling centres. The task force verified 48 election-related incidents affecting education (46 by the Taliban, 2 of which involved mass abductions of education officials on election duty; 1 by a pro-government militia; and 1 resulting from fighting between the Afghan National Army and the Taliban).

32. ISIL-KP continued to target girls' schools in retaliation against aerial attacks by pro-government forces in the eastern region. Of the 12 attacks against health facilities and health-care personnel verified by the task force, 8 attacks were against facilities, 2 attacks against health-care personnel and 2 against facilities and personnel, compared with 19 incidents in the previous reporting period. The task force attributed 10 incidents to armed groups (9 to the Taliban and 1 to ISIL-KP) and 2 to international military forces.

33. The task force verified five incidents of abduction of children by armed groups, involving 11 boys (four by the Taliban affecting 9 boys and one by ISIL-KP involving 2 boys), compared with five incidents in the previous quarter, involving 15 boys. Moreover, the task force verified two incidents of the recruitment and use of children by armed groups, involving two boys (one by the Taliban and one by undetermined anti-government elements).

34. The Government took further steps for the promotion and protection of women's rights. On 18 December, the Government approved a policy promoting women's access to inheritance and property ownership rights, with the aim of increasing women's economic empowerment and financial independence, which will come into force in March 2019. On 20 December, Afghanistan submitted its third periodic report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The report noted the Government's achievements in promoting women's participation in the political, economic and legislative spheres, such as the implementation of the national priority programme on the economic empowerment of women. The report further noted progress on the implementation of recommendations of the Committee, particularly regarding women and peace and security, legal protection mechanisms, violence against women and harmful practices. The Government also continued efforts to increase the representation of women at senior levels in the civil service. On 4 December, the Government appointed the first ever female Deputy Minister of the Interior, responsible for policies and strategies. Also for the first time, on 14 December, a woman assumed the position of ambassador of Afghanistan to the United States and on 31 December a woman was appointed Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations. At the municipal level, on 2 January, the Kabul Provincial Municipality appointed 11 women as deputies in 22 district municipalities. The reporting period saw heightened concern regarding the preservation of the achievements of human rights, particularly women's rights, over the past 18 years. This propelled advocacy and lobbying efforts by rights defenders countrywide encouraging the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban to include women as equal participants in discussions on the peace process.

35. On 21 January, the third cycle of the universal periodic review of Afghanistan was held in Geneva. The Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review adopted the report on Afghanistan on 25 January. In its national report to the Human Rights Council, Afghanistan noted measures taken to implement recommendations of the second-cycle review, including for the protection of civilians, protection of women's rights and the achievement of progress to align national development priorities with the Sustainable Development Goals. From 7 to 9 January, the United Nations implemented a technical assistance programme to prepare the Afghan delegation for the review and to strengthen the capacity of the relevant ministries to implement recommendations of the review.

36. Journalists and media workers continued to face high levels of conflict-related violence. During the reporting period, UNAMA documented five incidents that resulted in the killing of two journalists, one abduction, and threats against media workers in Farah, Kabul, Nangarhar and Zabul Provinces. During the reporting period, UNAMA organized seven events to promote the safety of journalists and the role of human rights defenders and media workers for the protection of human rights. These events were attended by 246 participants, including 41 women, in Baghlan, Helmand, Herat, Kunduz, Paktiya, Sari Pul and Zabul Provinces.

IV. Coordination of development assistance

37. On 27 and 28 November, the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations co-hosted the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, where the Government and the international community took stock of the implementation of the country's reform agenda. The Government noted that certain challenges, in particular the ongoing armed conflict, had undermined efforts towards self-reliance. Participants held in-depth discussions on the issue of peace, emphasizing the linkages between peace and development. The conference concluded with the adoption of a joint communiqué and the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework, which consists of

24 short-term deliverables outlining mutual responsibilities for aid programmes in 2019 and 2020. These included one deliverable aimed at increasing women's participation in the civil service, and another aimed at improving women's protection. Following the Conference, the Ministry of Finance began developing an implementation plan for the Framework with inputs from the donor community. UNAMA, together with the World Bank and development partners, also initiated a discussion centred on paragraphs 6 and 15 of the communiqué, dealing with the socioeconomic requirements for peace. Work also began to develop a package of economic initiatives, including a prioritized list of policy reforms and public investments to achieve improved economic outcomes in Afghanistan.

38. By the time of the Geneva conference, all 10 national priority programmes had been finalized and approved by high development councils. All are currently under implementation. According to the progress update on national priority programmes, issued in November 2018, the implementation of the Citizens' Charter programme had begun in more than 11,000 communities across all 34 provinces, reaching nearly 10 million people. As at January 2019, more than \$100 million in community grants had been disbursed to communities and more than 4,000 projects were under way. Women's participation in local decision-making increased under the programme, with women making up more than 49 per cent of more than 200,000 elected community development council members and 50 per cent of council leaders. An estimated 78 per cent of eligible female voters participated in the elections, which was higher than the participation rate among male voters.

39. On 31 December, the National Assembly approved the 2019 national budget, marking the first time the budget was approved on its first submission. The security, infrastructure, education, health and agriculture sectors received the greatest share of budget allocation. Of the total budget, 71 per cent is allocated to operational expenditure, leaving 29 per cent for development initiatives. The 2019 development allocation increased by 12 per cent compared with 2018. The Government will fund about 47 per cent of the budget, with the balance to be financed by donors. On 25 December, the Ministry of Finance reported that development expenditure had increased by 91.5 per cent in 2018 compared with 67 per cent in 2017, attributing the increase to reforms in budgetary processes, including improved consultations during the budget preparation phase.

40. The Government continued its efforts to implement civil service reform. On 31 December, the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission launched a three-year public administration reform programme, entitled "Tracking Afghanistan's government human resource management and institutional reforms", financed by the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. The programme is aimed at improving human resources planning, enhancing merit-based recruitment and strengthening the capacity of government ministries and agencies. It is also aimed at increasing the representation of women in the civil service, through the imposition of an additional quota of 10 per cent for women in all new recruitments in order to meet the Government's commitment that women will represent 30 per cent of the civil service by 2020. The Government also made progress towards the implementation of its subnational governance policy. On 26 December, the President issued a decree establishing a ministerial-level subnational governance committee under the High Council for Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption to coordinate the implementation of policy.

41. On 25 December, a subcommittee of the High Council for Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption, chaired by Second Vice-President Danesh, finalized its revisions to the Government's anti-corruption strategy, incorporating suggestions from UNAMA and international partners aimed at making the strategy's benchmarks easier to measure. The adoption of the revised strategy by the High Council remains pending.

On 30 December, the commissioners of the new Access to Information Commission were appointed, paving the way for the implementation of the Access to Information Law.

42. The Government continued its efforts to combat impunity for high-level offences, with mixed results. On 25 December, a former Minister of Telecommunication and Information Technology was acquitted on a charge of misuse of authority relating to recruitment and collection of tax revenue, in a special panel case which had been pending before the Supreme Court for more than two years. Separately, the former Minister was convicted by the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre for another charge of misuse of authority committed when he was a deputy minister. Since its establishment, the Justice Centre has finished 49 cases involving 199 defendants on trial and 45 cases involving 142 defendants on appeal. The enforcement of arrest warrants for Justice Centre cases remains a concern. As at January 2019, about one third of pending warrants had been executed, with none of the concerned defendants in detention.

V. Humanitarian assistance and refugees

43. Between 1 November and 10 January, 49,001 people were newly displaced by the conflict, bringing the total number of displaced in 2018 to 364,883 people. More than half of this figure (58 per cent) comprised children under the age of 18. Although conflict-related displacement in 2018 was down by more than a quarter compared with 2017, many displaced families continued to have no immediate prospect of returning to their areas of origin in safety and dignity. In 2018, humanitarian partners provided life-saving assistance to 114,697 people displaced by conflict.

44. In November 2018, heavy fighting among ethnic groups in the Khas Uruzgan district of Uruzgan Province spilled over to the Jaghuri and Malistan districts in Ghazni Province, affecting Hazara communities and resulting in the displacement of almost 5,000 families to surrounding villages and provinces. In response, displaced families received a combination of assistance from the Government, United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners, including fuel and firewood for heating, multipurpose cash, food and non-food items, as well as family reunification and psychosocial support.

45. The number of trauma cases in which treatment was received in the period from 1 November to 31 January was 30,934, an increase of 17 per cent compared with 2017. The need for trauma care was particularly high in Nangarhar, Kandahar and Helmand Provinces, where clashes have taken heavy tolls and access has been reduced. During the reporting period, 15 partners from the health cluster provided consultations to 593,643 people, of whom 61 per cent were women and girls.

46. During the reporting period, two new cases of polio were identified, bringing the total number of polio cases in 2018 to 21. Fifteen of these cases were in the southern region, while five were in the eastern region. Polio vaccination campaigns faced access challenges in the southern region, where a ban on house-to-house vaccination has remained in place since May 2018. Through dialogue with community representatives, the programme gained access to fixed sites; however, this approach is not adequate to interrupt polio transmission. Two subnational campaigns were conducted during the reporting period: the first in December 2018 targeting 4,313,221 children, and the second in January 2019 targeting 2,375,710 children. The programme was unable to reach approximately 800,000 children during December owing to access constraints.

47. In the final two months of 2018, the humanitarian community significantly scaled up its operations to respond to the 22 provinces most severely affected by drought, as well as the worsening displacement in the western region. As at 31 December 2018, humanitarian partners had reached 3.5 million drought-affected people with a range of humanitarian assistance. Three million people received food and livelihood support, 1 million people benefited from access to clean water, 800,000 received emergency health services and 15,100 families in Badghis and Herat Provinces received emergency shelter. Of the total assisted caseload, 2.3 million people were reached by the United Nations with 40,000 metric tons of food and more than \$3.24 million in cash-for-food transfers. According to the most recent analysis, around 13.5 million people, representing over a third of the population, are facing crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity, placing them at increased risk of excess morbidity and mortality. The Famine Early Warning System Network noted that a combination of drought, ongoing conflict and low financial remittances had resulted in atypically high demand for food and livelihood assistance, and predicted that Badghis, Badakhshan and Daikundi Provinces were likely to remain in emergency conditions until at least May 2019, unless humanitarian partners continued to deliver food and livelihood assistance in rural areas.

48. The United Nations and partners continue to implement a two-pronged response to the drought, with sustained assistance planned in drought-affected rural areas until the next harvest in order to prevent further displacement, restore livelihoods and encourage returns. At the same time, they are providing winterization and emergency shelter support to displaced families in urban centres for at least the first quarter of 2019. As at the end of 2018, the United Nations and partners had assisted more than 400,000 displaced people in the western region, while also relocating 484 displaced families at risk of eviction to the Shahrak-e-Sabz site in Herat Province. In total, there are approximately 29,500 displaced families living in informal sites in Herat Province and more than 13,000 displaced families in Badghis Province.

49. Also in November, the country's first all-female demining team successfully cleared one of the last minefields in Bamyán Province. The 13-member team released 51,520 m² of contaminated land back to the community. In December, the United Nations cleared contamination from explosive remnants of war in and around the Girls' Central High School of Almar district in Faryab Province. As a result, students were able to return to school and take their exams before winter break. From November to January, the United Nations and its partners cleared 4.78 km² of contamination from high-impact explosives, benefiting 46 communities. Responding to the protection concerns of returnees from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, approximately 80,715 people received United Nations-funded risk education across the country during the reporting period.

50. A total of 156,280 undocumented persons and returnees arrived in Afghanistan between 1 November 2018 and 20 January 2019, with 5,285 undocumented returnees from Pakistan, 146,633 from the Islamic Republic of Iran and 3,299 returnees from Europe. In the same period, 823 refugees returned from Pakistan, 219 from the Islamic Republic of Iran and 21 from other countries. The number of registered refugees returning to Afghanistan in 2018 (13,584 from Pakistan, 1,964 from the Islamic Republic of Iran and 151 from other countries) was 73 per cent lower than in 2017. The number of undocumented returns from the Islamic Republic of Iran reached a historical high, with 773,125 returnees and deportees in 2018 compared with 460,000 in 2017. In January 2019, the Government of Pakistan extended Afghan citizenship cards for some 327,000 Afghan nationals residing in Pakistan until 23 March 2019, after which Afghanistan and Pakistan have agreed to the return of 50,000 holders of such cards by 30 June 2019.

51. Constraints on humanitarian access continued, with a total of 79 incidents affecting the United Nations and its humanitarian partners between 1 November 2018 and 27 January 2019. In 2018, a total of 317 incidents were recorded, including the killing of 28 aid workers. Moreover, an additional 53 aid workers were injured and 88 abducted. The trend towards more violent and deliberate attacks on health facilities and health workers also continued, while deminers faced a particularly heightened risk of kidnapping and armed violence. Humanitarian access in contested areas and areas under the control of anti-government elements remained a persistent challenge. The increased presence of anti-government elements on major transit routes, such as the highways between Kabul and Kandahar, Herat and Badghis, and Kandahar and Tirin Kot, continues to be problematic for the movement of humanitarian aid workers and assets.

52. The 2018–2021 humanitarian response plan was revised in November 2018 to accommodate emerging drought-related needs. With a view to reaching 5.2 million people by the end of 2018, the plan called for \$599 million to support these activities. According to the Financial Tracking Service, a total of \$537.3 million in funding was received for humanitarian action in Afghanistan in 2018, including \$468.1 million for activities included in the plan, or 78 per cent of the total funding requested.

VI. Counter-narcotics

53. The Government, supported by international partners, continued its counter-narcotics operations. Between 1 November and 31 January, law enforcement authorities conducted a total of 1,004 counter-narcotics operations leading to seizures of 850 kg of heroin, 3,250 kg of morphine, 4,574 kg of opium, 205 kg of methamphetamine, 244,688 kg of hashish, 2,196 kg of cannabis, 3,595 tablets of 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA), 45,514 kg of solid precursor chemicals and 82,315 litres of liquid precursor chemicals. Eight heroin manufacturing laboratories were dismantled, and 28 narcotics storage facilities were destroyed. These operations led to the arrest of 1,144 suspects and related seizures of 182 vehicles, 330 weapons and 12 radios. Two officers of the Counter-Narcotics Police of Afghanistan were killed while carrying out operations.

54. The Government and its partners conducted several initiatives in support of the licit agricultural sector. In a joint initiative between the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), a one-day national conference on investment in development of the pine nut trade was organized on 8 January in Kabul. The event was attended by the Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, the Chief Executive of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry and representatives of the private sector. Participants discussed the potential benefits of the pine nut value chain and explored investment opportunities for the private sector. On 16 December, the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock inaugurated the first farmer call centre as part of its alternative development activities supported by UNODC under the national drug action plan of Afghanistan. The service provides free advice and information to farmers in local languages and is aimed at establishing consultative contacts between local farmers and agricultural experts of the Ministry.

VII. Mission support

55. As at 31 January, the Mission's vacancy rates were 9 per cent for international staff, 4 per cent for National Professional Officers and 3 per cent for local-level staff, compared with the approved rates of 7 per cent, 5 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively.

The proportion of female staff remained very low. As at 31 January, the percentage of women in each category of staff stood at 34 per cent for international staff, 36 per cent for United Nations Volunteers, 13 per cent for National Professional Officers and 8 per cent for local-level staff. Between 1 November and 31 December, UNAMA conducted 110 road and 13 air missions, as well as 568 reverse outreach missions, during which district representatives visited UNAMA field offices.

VIII. Observations

56. The current moment represents perhaps the most significant chance to date for a negotiated settlement to the long and devastating conflict in Afghanistan. It is my hope that the ongoing efforts by Member States towards a comprehensive peace process will bring about direct talks between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban. As these efforts continue, I reiterate that a sustainable peace agreement can be reached only through comprehensive intra-Afghan dialogue. I call for the beginning of immediate, direct and substantive talks, towards the hope of ending this conflict and its unacceptable toll in lives.

57. To be durable, any peace process must be inclusive. Finding the path to domestic consensus will require time, vision and faithfulness to the values of life and dignity which underpin all societies. While the eventual cessation of violence itself offers promise, it is not enough: there must be confidence in a shared future through the guarantee of the rights of all Afghans. Any accord will be the stronger in safeguarding such principles as civic and political participation, socioeconomic empowerment, access to health care and education, and protection under the law for all citizens. I call upon all parties to facilitate the meaningful participation of women at all stages of the peace process, at both the local and national levels, and to ensure that any resulting peace agreement guarantees the protection and promotion of women's rights in accordance with the Constitution and international obligations of Afghanistan.

58. It is important for any peace process to provide opportunities for countries in the region to participate. Achieving a regional consensus on stability in Afghanistan will be critical in ensuring the sustainability of any peace agreement. I welcome the expansion over the past years of engagement between Afghanistan and its regional partners, as well as their continued efforts to promote economic and security cooperation and connectivity for the mutual benefit of the wider region. During the current critical period, I encourage Afghanistan and neighbouring countries to strengthen their cooperation towards a more peaceful and prosperous region.

59. Given the many internal challenges facing Afghanistan, there is a true need for a representative and engaged legislature. I stress the importance of finalizing the results of the October 2018 parliamentary elections, to allow for the inauguration of a new parliament. The responsibility for successful elections is shared by political leaders from both Government and opposition parties, as well as the electoral management bodies. Leaders and their supporters should commit to challenging results through legal and peaceful means only. Moving forward, it will be important to draw lessons from the past parliamentary vote and work collaboratively to implement the necessary electoral reforms. As preparations continue for the presidential, provincial council, district council and Ghazni parliamentary elections in July, I call on all political actors to refrain from interference in the ongoing electoral processes and to acknowledge their collective and individual responsibility to ensure that future elections are credible and legitimate, so that all Afghans seeking to exercise their constitutional right to vote are able to do so.

60. I remain profoundly concerned by the impact of the armed conflict on the civilian population, as the United Nations continues to document record-high

numbers of civilian deaths. While 2018 saw continued reductions in civilian casualties from ground engagements, this decrease was more than offset by the record levels of civilian casualties from suicide attacks by anti-government elements and aerial attacks by pro-government forces, both of which increased dramatically last year. Of particular concern is the increased targeting of civilians by anti-government elements, mainly using improvised explosive devices designed, planned and detonated with the deliberate intention of killing and maiming civilians and destroying livelihoods. I urge all parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

61. I am encouraged by measures undertaken by the Government to protect and promote women's rights, which have resulted in increased women's participation at the higher echelons of the civil service as well as in local-level decision-making, particularly through their representation on the community development councils. Nevertheless, the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence and discriminatory practices continues to impede the full participation of women in political, economic and social life. Addressing such issues will require concerted efforts on the part of political and religious leaders, policymakers, judicial officers and security personnel to prevent violence and promptly hold perpetrators to account. I encourage further efforts for the protection of women human rights defenders and for the expansion of access to education for women and girls, to support their full social, economic and political participation.

62. In line with commitments at the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, I encourage the Government and the international community to continue their close collaboration, to ensure the continuity of both essential Government reforms and international financial assistance as the political situation in Afghanistan continues to evolve. In this respect, I welcome the commencement of efforts by the international partners of Afghanistan, in collaboration with the World Bank and the United Nations family, to develop an action plan for the continuing socioeconomic development of Afghanistan following a possible peace agreement.

63. The accountability of the public institutions of Afghanistan can be maintained only through inclusive government processes and active engagement by citizens. The Government's progress in implementing the Access to Information Law marks an important step towards enhancing the accessibility and transparency of the country's governance structure. I encourage the Government to increase its efforts to combat impunity for corruption-related offences, including by strengthening the cooperation between the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre and security institutions to ensure the timely enforcement of arrest warrants. I also welcome the constructive engagement between the Government, civil society organizations and international partners as the Government works to implement the revised Anti-Corruption Strategy.

64. The rising incidence of polio cases in Afghanistan is deeply troubling, as access constraints continue to impede the implementation of site-to-site vaccination campaigns in some southern provinces. Recalling the obligation to allow and facilitate humanitarian access to civilian populations, I call on all parties to allow unimpeded access for polio vaccinators as they carry out their vital work.

65. The effects of the drought continue to impact the humanitarian situation, particularly in the western provinces of Afghanistan. Over the short term, drought conditions have triggered large-scale displacement and worsened the conditions of food insecurity already experienced by millions of people, many of them children. Even after the immediate crisis is alleviated, many more millions of Afghans will continue to face loss of livelihood and long-term economic uncertainty. I am grateful to international donors for their generous response to the country's immediate drought-related humanitarian needs, and encourage the Government of Afghanistan,

its international partners and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to continue working collaboratively to improve the living conditions of millions of victims of the drought.

66. I thank all the United Nations personnel in Afghanistan and my Special Representative for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Tadamichi Yamamoto, for their continued dedication under challenging conditions to fulfilling our commitments in support of the people of Afghanistan.

Annex

Progress achieved against benchmarks

I. Security

Benchmark: sustainable Afghan security institutions and processes capable of ensuring peace and stability and protecting the people of Afghanistan

Indicators of progress

Metrics

Increase in the number of national police and national army personnel mentored, trained and operational according to an agreed structure

- In 2018, the Government continued to implement the 2017–2020 Afghan National Defence and Security Forces road map, with the aim of increasing capabilities, developing leaders, ensuring the unity of command and military efforts, and countering corruption.
- In line with the road map, the Afghan National Civil Order Police and Afghan Border Police were transferred from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Defence in 2018.
- Efforts to increase the offensive capabilities of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces also continued in 2018, with the expansion of the Afghan Special Security Forces and the modernization of the Afghan Air Force. In May 2018, the Afghan Air Force commenced operations with UH-60 Black Hawks.
- In 2018, the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces continued to target corrupt and criminal influences in their ranks, referring cases to the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre and other prosecutorial bodies. During 2018, 29 military officials were tried in the Justice Centre. In addition, the national anti-corruption strategy was amended to strengthen anti-corruption measures in the security sector, including the elimination of “ghost” police officers.

II. Peace, reintegration and reconciliation

Benchmark: national dialogue and regional engagement towards pursuing constructive and inclusive processes to foster a political environment conducive to peace

Indicators of progress

Metrics

Development and implementation of inclusive national and regional processes to enhance peace, reintegration and reconciliation efforts

- On 28 February 2018, the Government convened the second meeting of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation. The meeting, organized with technical assistance and advice from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), brought together representatives of 28 countries and organizations. At the meeting, President Ashraf Ghani welcomed unconditional peace talks with the Taliban, and regional and international partners expressed support for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process.
- In 2018, three ulama conferences were held: in Jakarta (11 May), Kabul (4 June) and Mecca, Saudi Arabia (10–11 July). The Jakarta conference issued a declaration in support of the offer by the Government of Afghanistan for unconditional peace talks with the Taliban, and denounced terrorism and violent extremism. The Kabul conference,

attended by 2,000 Afghan religious scholars, issued a fatwa calling on the Taliban to respond to President Ghani's offer of unconditional peace talks, and denounced the practice of suicide attacks, violence against fellow Muslims and terrorism in general. The Mecca conference, hosted by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and attended by 110 religious scholars from 35 countries, including 35 from Afghanistan, issued a declaration calling on all Muslims to cease fighting in Afghanistan and referred to the insurgency as *fitna* (sedition). In line with previous ulama councils, the Mecca declaration also called on the Taliban to reject violence and engage in a direct, peaceful and unconditional dialogue with the Government of Afghanistan.

- From 12 to 17 June 2018, the Government implemented a unilateral ceasefire for Eid al-Fitr. The Taliban also implemented a unilateral ceasefire for three days over the Eid holiday, overlapping with the Government's ceasefire. The Government further extended its ceasefire until 26 June and offered a second ceasefire for the Eid al-Adha holiday in August 2018, but these overtures were not reciprocated by the Taliban.
- On 4 September 2018, Zalmay Khalilzad was appointed as the United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation. In this capacity, Mr. Khalilzad undertook three visits to Afghanistan and the region between September and December to meet with Afghan, regional and international stakeholders. In response to these developments, the Taliban publicly announced that it was also engaging with Mr. Khalilzad. UNAMA engaged with the parties and with regional and international actors to encourage further efforts towards a formalized peace process.
- During the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, held on 27 and 28 November 2018, participants reaffirmed their commitment to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process and agreed to collaborate on the socioeconomic requirements for peace. President Ghani also presented the Government's road map towards peace, including the establishment of a 12-person negotiation team and a national consultative board, the High Advisory Board for Peace. Part of that Board was appointed in December and consists of key political and civil society actors. President Ghani further appointed Mohammed Umar Daudzai as his special representative to the region for peace in December.
- In 2018, the Government continued to provide substantiated, updated and accurate information to the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1988 \(2011\)](#).
- On 30 May 2018, the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted its ninth report pursuant to resolution [2255 \(2015\)](#) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan ([S/2018/466](#)). The report was based, in large part, on information provided by the authorities of Afghanistan.

Increased ability by the Afghan authorities to gather and provide substantiated, updated and accurate information to the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1988 \(2011\)](#)

Increased public support for the peace process through engagement at the community level and with civil society

- The Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team contributed to two training sessions hosted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on the implementation of sanctions during its visits from 31 August to 20 September 2018 and 5 to 15 December 2018. This training involved Afghan officials from the Central Bank, the Ministries of Finance, Foreign Affairs and Mines and Petroleum, the National Security Council and security organs.
- In 2018, UNAMA facilitated the implementation of 16 local peace initiatives, with another seven in the final stages of development and ready for implementation in 2019. These initiatives provided support to Afghan-led efforts relating to mediation, reconciliation and social cohesion at the provincial and district levels. The initiatives, involving stakeholders from 15 provinces, included conflict resolution initiatives, community dialogues, jirgas and outreach gatherings with *ulama*, tribal representatives, provincial council members, provincial peace committee members, government officials and youth and women activists.
- To mark the Global Open Day on Women, Peace and Security in 2018, UNAMA and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women conducted 11 events between 27 September and 15 November, which attracted 249 participants, including 212 women from 16 provinces. The theme of the dialogues was “Women’s participation in the peace process” and focused on addressing the deep-rooted cultural, traditional and discriminatory practices that hinder the full and meaningful participation of women in peace.

III. Governance and institution-building

Benchmark: extension of government authority throughout the country through the establishment of democratic, legitimate, accountable institutions, down to the local level, with the capacity to implement policies and to become increasingly capable of sustaining themselves

Increased ability of the Afghan authorities and independent electoral institutions to manage and conduct genuine and periodic elections, with due regard to women’s participation and constitutionally guaranteed quotas

- On 13 January 2018, President Ghani appointed Sayyid Hafizullah Hashimi as a commissioner of the Independent Election Commission as part of efforts to address the high vacancy rate, especially at the managerial level of the Commission. On 7 May, eight provincial electoral officers were recruited by the Commission, while Ahmad Shah Zamanzai was appointed as the Chief Electoral Officer and the head of the secretariat of the Commission by President Ghani on 19 July.
- On 21 February 2018, Japan signed an agreement to provide over \$13 million as a contribution towards the holding of 2018 parliamentary and district council elections through the United Nations Electoral Support Project, while on 3 May the European Union signed an agreement with the United Nations Development Programme in Kabul to contribute €15.5 million (approximately \$18.6 million) for the 2018 and 2019 elections.

- On 26 February 2018, the Commission issued a statement to provide assurances that it would provide an opportunity for all eligible Afghans (including internally displaced persons) to exercise their rights to vote and reiterated its commitment to continue to hold consultative meetings with political stakeholders, including women's representatives, through national election forums.
- In 2018, the Commission conducted 64 provincial election forums in 32 provinces. These forums brought together a wide range of stakeholders, including representatives from political parties, civil society organizations, the media, women and youth activists, community elders, religious leaders and relevant Government institutions to share electoral updates and encourage public participation in, and support for, national electoral processes. The Commission also held nine national elections forums with representatives of elections-related civil society organizations, political parties and the Government to discuss various stages of the electoral process.
- On 3 August 2018, the Electoral Complaints Commission indicated that, as a result of the vetting process, 25 persons had been delisted from preliminary lists of parliamentary candidates owing to ties with illegal armed groups. In addition, 37 other candidates had been issued strong warnings and 7 candidates had received an advisory warning.
- On 8 September 2018, the Independent Election Commission signed a memorandum of understanding with the National Institution of Examinations for the recruitment of district electoral officials. Examinations were subsequently held to recruit more than 3,000 district electoral officers, assistant district electoral officers and other electoral field workers.
- On 22 September, 2018, the Commission announced that it had entered into an agreement for the supply of biometric voter verification equipment, and that biometric voter verification would be used for the parliamentary elections, provided that the Commission received the required equipment on time.
- On 20 and 21 October 2018, parliamentary elections were held across the country, except for in Kandahar province, which held the elections one week later, on 27 October. Elections in Ghazni province were postponed to a later date owing to insecurity.
- In the October 2018 parliamentary elections, 35 per cent of the 8.5 million registered voters were women, representing an 8 per cent increase compared with the 2014 presidential election. Of the 2,565 candidates that contested the 249 parliamentary seats, 417 were women. There were 7,429 polling stations for women compared with 11,667 for men, and around 13,000 Afghan women served as election observers.
- On 11 December 2018, the Commission approved the operational plan for the 2019 presidential election, indicating that candidate nomination would commence on 22 December 2018 and end on 20 January 2019.

Establishment of the Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee and development of anti-corruption benchmarks

- On 30 December 2018, the Chair of the Commission, Gula Jan Abdul Badi Sayyad, officially announced that the presidential election would be held on 20 July 2019. Sayyad further stated that provincial and district council elections would be held concurrently with the presidential election in July and that, in addition, the delayed Ghazni parliamentary elections would also be held on the same date.
- On 10 December 2018, the Committee issued a ministry-wide report on vulnerability to corruption in the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, which was the first comprehensive analysis of vulnerability to corruption in the Ministry and across the extractive sector. The report made a total of 189 recommendations to the Minister. The Committee also released seven quarterly monitoring reports on vulnerability to corruption: for the Attorney General's Office in August 2018 and January 2019, the Ministry of Public Health in February and June 2018, the Ministry of Education in June and November 2018 and Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (the national electricity company) in August 2018. The Committee also commenced the preparation of reports on vulnerability to corruption for both houses of parliament and the Ministry of the Interior, which are expected to be completed in early 2019.
- With regard to progress in the implementation of the Committee's consolidated recommendations, 105 of its 299 recommendations had been fully implemented, while 72 recommendations had been partially implemented by the end of 2018.

Empowerment of anti-corruption institutions to enable them to oversee a whole-of-government approach to anti-corruption

- In December 2018, the Government announced the merger of the Afghan Land Authority with the Ministry of Urban Development Affairs to form the Ministry of Urban Development and Land, in order to save time and costs and to consolidate institutions that had similar terms of reference.
- On 5 September 2018, a new anti-corruption law was adopted by presidential legislative decree, and is pending parliamentary review. In addition to creating an independent anti-corruption commission, in line with the provisions of the United Nations Convention against Corruption, the law also established a solid basis for the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre and the Major Crimes Task Force, which had previously been based on administrative orders.
- On 25 September 2018, the High Council for Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption issued its first semi-annual report on the implementation of the national strategy for combating corruption, which reported major achievements across the five pillars of the strategy. On 25 December, following an implementation review, the High Council adopted a revised strategy for the period 2019–2020.
- Throughout 2018, the High Council for Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption continued to meet regularly. The chairing of the High Council meetings was increasingly delegated by the President to the Second Vice-President and, consequently, the High Council became gradually more technical. Also, decisions on strategic anti-corruption reforms were increasingly taken behind closed doors by the President's immediate team without debate in the High Council.

Indicators of progress

Metrics

Annual publication of the asset declarations of public officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On 18 November 2018, the Open Governance Partnership Forum convened its 4th annual meeting to discuss its mid-year report. The report tracked progress made by the Government, civil society and the private sector towards implementation of the commitments of Afghanistan to the Forum. • In March 2018, following the revision of the Access to Information Law, a new and smaller Access to Information Commission was established. The Commission has five dedicated and paid members, who were appointed for a maximum term of five years. The Commission receives an annual budget from the Ministry of Information and Culture, which is responsible for government-wide implementation of the law.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In March 2018, an amendment to the Attorney General's Office Law transferred the investigation function of the High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption to the office of the newly created Deputy Attorney General for Anti-Corruption. The High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption Law was thus repealed, and the High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption dissolved. • On 25 September 2018, the secretariat of the High Council for Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption reported significant achievements in the registration of assets, including asset registration for 9,153 government officials and employees.
Increased capacity of civil servants at the central, provincial and district levels to discharge functions and deliver services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2018, the Civil Service Training Institute underwent a functional review, which reoriented its training courses to focus on combating administrative corruption. The Institute provided training in Kabul for 1,634 newly recruited civil servants, 38 per cent of whom were women, and trained a further 2,028 civil servants in 15 provinces, 29 per cent of whom were women. The training covered a range of topics, including strategies for the eradication of corruption, strategic communication, strategic leadership and planning, conflict resolution and management, and monitoring and evaluation. The Institute also provided three two-week leadership courses for 84 district governors, 4 per cent of whom were women.
Increased transparency and effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2018, the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission spearheaded amendments to the law on civil servants and the implementation of new recruitment procedures for senior subnational-level civil servants in order to increase the transparency and effectiveness of civil service appointments. The new procedures include computerization of examinations administered by the Commission's newly established examination centre. • In 2018, the Independent Directorate for Local Governance facilitated the appointment of 244 of 377 district governor positions, 20 of 42 deputy provincial governor positions and 30 of 33 provincial-level municipal mayor positions. Of the persons appointed, only two district governors and two municipal mayors were women.

Strengthened civil service reform supported by a comprehensive approach to capacity-building and donor-funded technical assistance

- On 10 January 2018, a new policy was issued to increase the number of women in the civil service from 22 per cent to 24 per cent in 2018, and to 30 per cent by 2020. The policy introduced a quota system, special administrative privileges, workplace protection and better career development opportunities for women in the civil service.

Implementation of the subnational governance policy and development of subnational regulatory, financing and budgetary frameworks

- On 25 July 2018, the Cabinet approved the subnational governance policy entitled “Citizen-centred governance: a road map for subnational reform”. The new policy defines the relationship between national and subnational government institutions.
- In 2018, the Government progressed the implementation of local governance reforms in line with the subnational governance policy, including the revision of relevant legislation. The Municipal Law was amended in September, while the draft law on local councils was finalized and submitted to the Ministry of Justice in December for further legislative processes. On 26 December, a subcommittee on subnational governance was established under the High Council for Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption to support implementation of the subnational governance policy.

Development and publication of criteria for administrative boundaries

- In 2018, one new municipal boundary (Nimroz municipality) was delineated and mapped, bringing the total number of municipal boundaries completed to 27 out of 34 provincial municipalities. Boundaries for 68 urban neighbourhoods (*gozars*) were also mapped during the year.

Establishment of adequate infrastructure for functioning government institutions, especially at the subnational level

- In 2018, construction of provincial council offices started in Ghazni, Farah, Sari Pul, Bamyán, Logar, Nuristan and Laghman provinces and was near completion at the time of reporting. In addition, a total of 275 new vehicles were purchased to enable local government officials to commute to their offices and to facilitate improved outreach with communities.

Establishment of credible and accessible judicial and penal systems that respect and uphold the human rights of all citizens

- On 14 February 2018, the new Penal Code came into effect. The Ministry of Justice, with the assistance of donors, printed and distributed 3,000 copies of the Code to justice institutions across the country; however, printing of additional copies of the Code was delayed while the Code was being reviewed by the parliament. In September, a new Military Penal Code was endorsed by the President and added as an annex to the Penal Code.
- In 2018, the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre tried 20 cases involving 75 accused persons, which resulted in 56 convictions and 19 acquittals. The accused included three former deputy ministers, one provincial council member, two former mayors and four generals. This represents a decline in both the output of the court and the number of high-ranking officials prosecuted compared with the previous year.

IV. Human rights

Benchmark: improved respect for human rights of Afghans, in line with the Afghan Constitution and international law, with particular emphasis on the protection of civilians, the situation of women and girls, freedom of expression and accountability based on the rule of law

Indicators of progress

Metrics

Reduction in the number of incidents of unlawful use of force and intimidation of civilians, through compliance of relevant actors with international law

- In 2018, UNAMA continued to document high levels of civilian deaths and injuries and other conflict-related harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure, with a total of 10,993 civilian casualties (3,804 deaths and 7,189 injured) documented. UNAMA attributed 63 per cent of these casualties to anti-government elements and 24 per cent to pro-government forces (comprising the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, pro-government armed groups and international military forces). Ground engagements between anti-government elements and pro-government forces for which responsibility could not be attributed to a specific party to the conflict accounted for 10 per cent of civilian casualties. The remaining 3 per cent resulted from other incidents, including explosive remnants of war that could not be attributed to any party to the conflict. The conflict continued to kill and injure women and children. UNAMA recorded 3,062 child casualties (927 killed and 2,135 injured, a decrease compared with 2017). The Mission documented 1,152 women casualties (350 killed and 802 injured), a decrease compared with 2017.
- In 2018, the Government continued to implement the national policy on the prevention and mitigation of civilian casualties through directives issued by various entities of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. The Government-run civilian casualty tracking mechanism, within the Tawheed Centre in the Office of the National Security Council, continued to improve its functionality under the guidance of Resolute Support Mission advisers.
- The revised Penal Code of Afghanistan entered into force on 14 February 2018 and includes provisions that criminalize bacha bazi, the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and the falsification of national identification cards.
- In 2018, the Ministry of the Interior, with technical and financial support from UNAMA and the United Nations Children's Fund, completed the establishment of child protection units in the Afghan National Police recruitment centres in all 34 provinces. Through this mechanism, 327 underage applicants (325 boys and 2 girls) were prevented from enlisting in the ranks of the Afghan National Police, compared with 294 boys in 2017.
- In November 2018, 55 conflict-related child detainees were transferred from the National Directorate for Security to the Juvenile Rehabilitation Centres, following the continued engagement of UNAMA with the Office of the Attorney General and the National Directorate for Security, along with advocacy relating to the rights and needs of child detainees.

Improved awareness by Afghans of their rights and by the Government of its obligations

- In 2018, UNAMA released eight public reports, highlighting civilian deaths and injuries, analysing key trends and making recommendations to all parties to the conflict. These reports included the annual report on the protection of civilians, three quarterly updates on the protection of civilians, a special report on early elections violence (May 2018), a special report on airstrikes in Dasht-e Archi (May 2018), a special report on improvised explosive devices (October 2018) and a special report on 2018 elections violence (November 2018).
- In April 2018, Afghanistan ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which requires the Government to establish an independent national preventive mechanism for the prevention of torture and other forms of ill-treatment within one year of accession.
- In April 2018, Afghanistan withdrew its reservation to the Convention against Torture, thereby recognizing the authority of the Committee against Torture to conduct confidential inquiries into allegations of torture on its territory.
- In June 2018, the Government submitted its follow-up report to the concluding observations of the Committee against Torture ([CAT/C/AFG/CO/2](#)), outlining progress made in the implementation of some of the Committee's recommendations.
- In October 2018, the Anti-Torture Law was published in the Official Gazette. The Law sets out provisions on redress for victims of torture to bring legal claims before criminal and civil courts.

Improved impact of, and support for, legal and policy measures to combat violence against women and girls

- On 3 March 2018, Presidential Decree No. 262 was issued, amending the Penal Code of 2017 to enable the Elimination of Violence against Women Law of 2009 to remain applicable following the removal of the entire chapter on violence against women from the revised Penal Code by the Government in August 2017. The decree was necessary to ensure continuing legal protection for women and girls from crimes of violence against women.
- In April 2018, the Ministry of the Interior issued a countrywide verbal directive prohibiting law enforcement entities from forcing female detainees to undergo gynaecological tests. The directive was issued following the criminalization of forced testing of females in the Penal Code.
- On 29 May 2018, UNAMA released its report entitled "Injustice and impunity: mediation of criminal offences of violence against women". On 17 July, it convened a national conference that brought together 40 high-level representatives of Government, civil society, the international community and United Nations partners, aimed at fostering joint action for the implementation of the recommendations of the report. Between June and November 2018, UNAMA organized over 23 advocacy meetings with State and non-State partners on the implementation of the recommendations. Following advocacy by UNAMA, in October 2018, the Office of the Attorney General established a directorate on alternatives to imprisonment, tasked with developing a policy on non-custodial sentencing options, in line with the 2017 Penal Code. The Ministry of Women's Affairs also began reviewing the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women of 2009.

- In 2018, the number of prosecution units for the elimination of violence against women that were headed by women expanded from 25 to 31 of the 34 provinces. The number of courts on the elimination of violence against women increased to 22 in 2018 compared with 15 in 2017, with 92 judges deployed to these courts, including 25 women, most of whom remain in Kabul owing to security reasons.
- On 31 July, the Government launched its second progress report on the implementation of the national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), on women and peace and security, covering the period from September 2016 to September 2017. The report noted an increase in the percentage of women in national security sector institutions, from 1.3 per cent in 2015 to 2.5 per cent in 2016 for the national army, and from 0.5 per cent in 2015 to 0.6 per cent in 2016 for the national police.
- In 2018, UNAMA continued efforts to increase the participation of women in the Afghan civil service, in political and social spheres of life and in peace negotiations. Such efforts included the dialogues to mark the Global Open Day on Women, Peace and Security held between 27 September and 15 November. The dialogues focused on the participation of women in peace processes.
- In 2018, 4,424 Afghan women and girl survivors of violence with 712 accompanying children had access to justice and used lifesaving multisectoral essential services, including psychosocial support and vocational skills development, through 11 women protection centres, 5 family guidance centres and 17 provincial commissions on the elimination of violence against women. The 4,424 cases involving violence against women registered by the aforesaid centres in 2018 was significantly higher than in 2017, when there were 1,809 recorded cases. This increase is attributed to either increased reporting as a result of awareness-raising among communities, or more specific reporting mechanisms and data collection tools that were put in place in 2018. The database on the elimination of violence against women is functional and supporting improved reporting of cases and is monitored by both the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Ministry of Justice. The commissions for the elimination of violence against women continued to play a critical role in following up and making referrals for cases of violence against women in 17 out of 34 provinces. Support provided by development partners also enabled the commissions to conduct outreach in the provinces and to track cases that have not been addressed by the police and other law enforcement mechanisms.
- As part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence global campaign, between 25 November and 10 December, UNAMA, jointly with partners, organized 13 events around the global theme "Orange the World: #HearMeToo". The campaign focused on crimes of violence against women and girls, particularly harmful traditional practices, underreporting of specific crimes and improvements to criminal justice services to ensure effective accountability.

Improved awareness of, and support for, legal and policy measures related to combating impunity and furthering transitional justice

- In 2018, UNAMA actively engaged with civil society and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission to promote civil society space and protection for human rights defenders, end impunity for human rights violations, support efforts to end discrimination and promote inclusive peace and reconciliation processes. UNAMA also supported efforts to promote the centrality of the human rights of women, girls, minorities and other vulnerable groups in peace processes.
- In 2018, UNAMA continued its engagement with the civil society-led Transitional Justice Coordination Group promoting justice-based peace and reconciliation processes, which conducted seven coordination meetings and organized an event in Kabul on the national day of war victims on 10 December 2018.
- On 30 April 2018, UNAMA published a compilation of 34 provincial road maps for peace. This was followed by 20 advocacy events and dialogues to launch the road maps in 20 provinces, with the participation of approximately 616 Afghans, including local authorities and civil society and media organizations (460 men and 156 women). The dialogues offered opportunities for developing a consensus, politically negotiated solution to the Afghan conflict through inclusive and just peace processes.

Government fulfilment of reporting requirements on international human rights covenants and conventions and implementation of the recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review of Afghanistan under the auspices of the Human Rights Council

- In October 2018, the Government submitted its national report to the Human Rights Council, noting progress on the implementation of recommendations of the universal periodic review in advance of the third-cycle review of Afghanistan on 21 January 2019. The Government and UNAMA also agreed on a time frame for the provision of technical assistance for implementation of the recommendations of the review, and to establish a national mechanism for reporting and follow-up.
- On 5 November 2018, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed UNAMA that the drafting process was under way for several reports, namely to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Increased capacity and commitment of the Government of Afghanistan and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, as the Afghan national human rights institution, to respect, protect, fulfil and promote human rights

- In 2018, UNAMA continued engagement with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and conducted regular coordination meetings aimed at sharing information, conducting advocacy on the rights of religious and ethnic minority groups and following up on violence against journalists, media workers, civil society activists and human rights defenders. UNAMA also provided technical assistance to the Commission for the documentation of civilian casualties.
- On 9 May 2018, the Commission organized a national conference on accountability, human rights, justice and peace in Kabul to promote accountability for victims of the armed conflict.
- On 26 June 2018, UNAMA delivered training on the preparation of stakeholder reports by civil society as part of the third-cycle universal periodic review scheduled for 21 January 2019.

Indicators of progress

Metrics

- UNAMA, jointly with the Commission, organized 39 round-table discussions, workshops and seminars to promote civil society space and engagement in rights-based peace processes and to enable civil society activists and human rights defenders to monitor, report on and advocate with regard to human rights.

V. Economic and social development

Benchmark: government policies, supported by the international community, that promote sustainable economic growth and contribute to overall stability

Indicators of progress

Metrics

National priority programmes are designed and implemented with international support and endorsement

- As at November 2018, all 10 national priority programmes had been finalized and approved by the relevant development councils and were at different stages of implementation.

More equitable distribution of development assistance and government expenditure throughout Afghanistan

- In 2018, financing agreements and other similar arrangements were in place for all donor projects that were financed through on-budget modalities. For off-budget projects, however, progress was mixed. In 2018, financing agreements were available for only an estimated 44 per cent of contributions, made by 23 donors that provide part of their development assistance through off-budget modalities.
- The participation of women in local development decision-making increased by 49 per cent in 2018, with women accounting for more than 49 per cent of the 200,000 elected community development council members and 50 per cent of council leaders nationwide.
- As at January 2019, the Citizens' Charter programme had reached nearly 10 million people from more than 11,000 urban and rural communities in 34 provinces. To date, more than \$100 million in community grants has been disbursed to communities and more than 4,000 projects are under implementation. These projects will help provide 63 million litres of water per day to 2.5 million people, irrigate nearly 1 million *jeribs* of land (200,000 ha), provide 5,500 kilowatts of energy and build 900 km of roads.

Increased revenue collection and sustainable growth based on Afghan resources

- By the end of 2018, the five revenue-generating ministries, namely, the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, had shared quarterly anti-corruption progress reports on their respective official websites and with donors. Owing in part to these measures, by December 2018 revenues had recovered from 8.3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) to 12.3 per cent of GDP over a three-year period.
- Government revenues strengthened in 2018 and the scores and overall ranking of Afghanistan improved in the World Bank's *Doing Business 2018* report. The Government's fiscal position is stable, with significant increases in domestic revenue collection, which exceeded the projected annual growth rate of 12 per cent. For the 2018 fiscal year, the Government was on track to meet its International Monetary Fund revenue target of Af 173.5 billion.

VI. Regional cooperation

Benchmark: sustained and effective regional coordination in support of prosperity, peace and stability

Indicators of progress

Metrics

Improved coordination of regional bodies and increased regional investments

- On 17 March 2018, President Ghani met with the National Security Adviser of Pakistan, Nasser Khan Janjua, in Kabul, to discuss the peace offer made by the Government of Afghanistan to the Taliban and the launch of State-to-State dialogue with Pakistan.
- The Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan: Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Connectivity, was held in Uzbekistan on 26 and 27 March 2018 and concluded with a joint declaration that strongly supported the National Unity Government's offer to launch direct talks with the Taliban, without any preconditions. Conference attendees included President Ghani, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the United States Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Russia, China, and Turkey.
- On 6 April 2018, President Ghani met with the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, in Kabul to discuss bilateral relations, including peace and reconciliation, counter-terrorism, the return of Afghan refugees, bilateral trade and regional connectivity. They also agreed to operationalize the five working groups under the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, as they provided a useful framework for broad-based and structured engagement on all issues of mutual interest.
- On 17 April 2018, the first ambassadorial coordination meeting for the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan was held in Kabul. During the meeting, participants agreed to the establishment of a "Friends of the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan" mechanism to further promote and support regional economic cooperation for Afghanistan, which held two meetings in 2018.
- On 19 April 2018, a meeting of senior officials of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process was held in Istanbul. The meeting, which was co-chaired by the Deputy Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan and Turkey, assessed the achievements resulting from the cooperation and developed a strategy for the way forward.
- On 14 May and 22 July, the Deputy Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan and Pakistan met in Kabul and Islamabad, respectively, to finalize the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, a framework for strengthening mutual trust and deepening bilateral engagement through the establishment of six thematic working groups, as well as joint problem solving.
- On 28 May 2018, the second meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Afghanistan Contact Group was held in Beijing to discuss the situation in Afghanistan and the wider region, Afghan peace and reconciliation processes and the role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as well as measures for enhancing cooperation between the Organization and Afghanistan

- From 20 to 22 June 2018, the regional technical group for disaster management confidence-building measures under the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process was held in Islamabad.
- On 2 July 2018, a meeting of ambassadors under the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process was held in Kabul and was co-chaired by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan and the ambassador of Turkey to Afghanistan. The meeting assessed progress in the implementation of the recommendations made by participating States during the meeting of senior officials in April.
- On 27 August 2018, the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process regional technical group for culture and education confidence-building measures met in Tehran.
- On 6 September 2018 in Astana, Kazakhstan hosted a regional conference on women's empowerment in Afghanistan, with the participation of women from the Central Asian countries, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, the United Nations and the European Union.
- On 11 September 2018, the first tripartite meeting between Afghanistan, India and Iran (Islamic Republic of) was held in Kabul. The meeting, which was chaired by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan and attended by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of India and the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, discussed the implementation of the Chabahar port project and other issues, including ways to deepen cooperation with regard to countering terrorism.
- On 12 September 2018, during a special session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Afghanistan, the Organization's Secretary-General emphasized the need for joint efforts to attain a sustainable peace in Afghanistan and called for greater support and cooperation from countries in the region.
- On 15 September and 14 November 2018, two regional technical group meetings on counter-terrorism confidence-building measures under the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process were held in Kabul and Abu Dhabi, respectively.
- On 20 September 2018, a Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process regional technical group meeting on confidence-building measures relating to trade, commerce and investment opportunities was held in New Delhi.
- On 28 September 2018, a meeting of senior officials under the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process was held on the sidelines of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly. Participants discussed progress in the implementation of confidence-building measures in the region and specific measures taken by countries to fight terrorism. The finalization of the regional strategy for fighting terrorism was also discussed.
- On 31 October 2018, a Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process regional technical group meeting on counter-narcotics was held in Moscow.

- On 9 November 2018, the second round of the Moscow format consultations on Afghanistan was held, involving deputy ministers for foreign affairs and special representatives from the Russian Federation, China, Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as Taliban representatives. The Government of Afghanistan was represented by the High Peace Council, and India and the United States attended as observers.
- On 14 November 2018, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan participated in the eighth meeting of the deputy ministers for foreign affairs of Central Asian States, hosted by Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek. Discussions focused on enhancing Central Asian and Afghan relations, as well as security and economic cooperation in the region.
- On 15 November 2018, a ministerial conference of the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Programme was held in Ashgabat to discuss expanding regional trade and promoting economic diversification.
- On 13 December 2018, the Lapis Lazuli Corridor was inaugurated by President Ghani in Herat. This overland route will enable Afghanistan to send its products to Europe and other parts of the world.
- On 15 December 2018, the second trilateral Afghanistan-China-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue was held in Kabul, in which participants agreed to hold further discussions to strengthen security, peace and political cooperation between the three countries.

VII. Partnership between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community

Benchmark: coherent support by the international community for Afghan priorities within an Afghan-led coordination framework

Increased proportion of aid aligned with the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and government priorities

- In 2018, on-budget grants accounted for more than half of the Government's total budget expenditure, with the security sector being exceptionally dependent on grant support. Off-budget security grants continued to cover a large proportion of total security expenditures, equalling around 14 per cent of GDP.

Improved accountability of procurement and contracting on behalf of the Government and the international community

- In 2018, the contracts for five major energy projects (Kajaki phase II, two contracts for Kandahar solar, Shibirghan and Mazar-e Sharif Gas-to-Power) were approved through an open and transparent process by the National Procurement Commission.
- The National Procurement Commission's compliance with the requirement for the publication of high-value or above-threshold contracts exceeded the 75 per cent target set for 2018.

*Indicators of progress**Metrics*

Strengthening of the Joint Coordination Monitoring Board in support of the Kabul process and as a means of facilitating a regular review of progress on Afghan priorities and mutual commitments

- By November 2018, an online system for monitoring the progress of contracts had been developed by the National Procurement Authority in line with international standards and norms. This online system provides a means for disclosing all information related to procurement contracts that have been approved by National Procurement Commission.
- By the end of 2018, information on a total of 936 contracts had been disclosed through the National Procurement Authority's website and documentation for 1,096 contracts had been uploaded to the central procurement management system.
- The 21st meeting of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board was held on 18 July 2018 to review progress on government reforms and the six deliverables the Government had committed to implementing before the 2018 Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan. The event provided a platform for Government officials, international community representatives, civil society and the private sector to share perspectives on key achievements and challenges, as well as proposed ways forward for Afghanistan.
- On 27 and 28 November, the United Nations and the Government of Afghanistan co-hosted the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, attended by delegations from 67 Member States and 40 international organizations. The Conference provided an opportunity for the international community and the Government to review the Government's reform agenda and to reaffirm the commitments that the donor countries have made to Afghanistan. The Government demonstrated that progress that had been made over the previous two years following the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan in 2016 in the broad areas of rule of law, constitutionalism, and rights and participation in governance. Despite the progress made, the Government stated that the ongoing conflict, high levels of poverty, limited access to education and limited infrastructure continued to undermine its efforts.

VIII. Counter-narcotics

Benchmark: sustained trend in the reduction of poppy cultivation, narcotics production and drug addiction

*Indicators of progress**Metrics*

Decrease in poppy cultivation, narcotics production and addiction rates

- In 2018, the area under opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan was estimated at 263,000 ha, a decrease of 20 per cent or 65,000 ha compared with 2017. Despite this decrease, the 2018 level exceeds the third-highest level in 2014 by 17 per cent, or 39,000 ha. Opium production in 2018 was estimated at 6,400 tons, a decrease of 29 per cent from 9,000 tons produced in 2017. The reduced production was a result of decreases in both the area under opium poppy cultivation and opium yield per hectare.

Increase in effective interdiction and counter-trafficking efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The number of poppy-free provinces in 2018 remained at 10 out of a total of 34 provinces, the same number as in 2017. Nuristan Province regained its poppy-free status but Takhar Province, which had been poppy-free since 2008, was found to have areas under poppy cultivation.• In 2018, Afghan law enforcement authorities, supported by UNODC, conducted a total of 3,540 counter-narcotics operations, leading to seizures of 5,058 kg of heroin, 17,576 kg of morphine, 27,276 kg of opium, 182 kg of methamphetamine, 177,538 kg of hashish, 79,302 kg of cannabis, 24,587 tablets of 3,4-methylenedioxymetamphetamine (MDMA), known as K-tablets in Afghanistan, 63,627 kg of solid precursor chemicals and 104,252 litres of liquid precursor chemicals. The operations resulted in the dismantling of 33 heroin manufacturing laboratories, the destruction of 28 drug stockpiles and the arrest of 4,083 suspects. Furthermore, those operations led to the seizure of 602 vehicles, 533 weapons, 3,563 mobile phones and 20 radios. During the operations, five Afghan National Defence and Security Force personnel were killed and 11 wounded.
Increase in licit agriculture and related private capital investment in areas previously used for poppy cultivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In 2018, UNODC alternative development projects targeted 26,785 households (5,145 of which were headed by women) in 35 districts of 18 provinces of Afghanistan, which brought 402 ha of land under licit cultivation, created 8,531 full-time jobs and generated \$4.22 million in income. In addition, 4,070 community-based small and medium-sized enterprises were established.
