



Security Council

Distr.: General
3 April 2020

Original: English

Letter dated 31 March 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith copies of the briefing provided by Ms. Ingrid Hayden, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Officer in Charge of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of Belgium, China, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Indonesia, the Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Viet Nam, in connection with the video-teleconference convened on Tuesday, 31 March 2020.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 27 March 2020 by the President of the Security Council addressed to Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council (S/2020/253), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, this briefing and these statements will be issued as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Zhang Jun**
President of the Security Council



Annex I**Statement by Ms. Ingrid Hayden, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Officer in Charge of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan**

Afghanistan appears to be reaching a defining moment. Almost two decades after the start of the coalition intervention, the question for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan now is: can its leaders rally together to engage in meaningful talks with the Taliban to achieve a sustainable peace? The choice is made stark by the all-encompassing threat of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which poses grave dangers to the health of Afghanistan's population and, potentially, to the stability of its institutions.

Afghanistan's presidential election, which took place on 28 September of last year, was a protracted process. The reasons are well documented, but now is not the time for acrimony. The issue at hand is preserving the Islamic Republic and advancing the values its Constitution enshrines.

On 18 February, the Independent Election Commission announced President Ashraf Ghani as the winner of the elections. Mr. Abdullah Abdullah, the declared runner-up, rejected the outcome, unilaterally claimed victory and announced his intention to form his own national Government. On 9 March, President Ghani and Mr. Abdullah held parallel presidential inauguration ceremonies. That prompted serious concerns in many quarters, Afghan and international alike, about the potential for a dangerous miscalculation that could have long-lasting implications for the future of the republic.

As I speak, this impasse continues, despite intensive engagement by key stakeholders, particularly the United States, regional actors and Afghan political leaders, aimed at ending the brinkmanship. The seriousness of the situation is underlined by the decision of the United States on 23 March to immediately reduce assistance by \$1 billion for 2020, and its preparedness to do the same again the year after. Given the State's heavy reliance on donor funding, this could have severe consequences for Afghanistan's fiscal viability, as well as for socioeconomic outcomes in the country. Now, with the onslaught of COVID-19, many donors are likely to turn inwards to meet the needs of their own populations. Afghanistan needs to demonstrate a compelling case for the continued investment of international resources.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is urging all Afghan parties to work together to resolve their differences peacefully for the good of the people of Afghanistan. Now is not the time for divisions; now is the time for statesmanship, accommodation and inclusivity. The interests of Afghans must come first — including the rights of all women, minorities and youth.

A resolution of the conflict depends upon the will of all actors to engage constructively on the fundamental issues at stake. This is a profound responsibility, above all for Afghan leaders. Understandably, grievances are deep-seated and multifaceted and impact on all segments of society. But now may be a rare opportunity to address these issues.

It is therefore heartening that, despite the political impasse, the Afghan establishment has been able to agree on a diverse negotiating team. The team includes representation from all major ethnic groups, and five women members. It is an important recognition that women can and must be involved in reaching any sustainable and lasting peace in Afghanistan. UNAMA has encouraged the Taliban to reciprocate by including women in their delegation with an empowered and

decisive voice at the table; doing so would send a tangible signal that the movement has fundamentally reformed.

All sides are urged to take concrete steps to make the prospect of intra-Afghan negotiations a reality. Having announced its negotiating team, the Islamic Republic now has the weighty task of equipping its negotiators with the necessary skills to help frame its agenda, and the necessary principles to secure and advance the rights of its citizens. It is also incumbent upon the Taliban to demonstrate that they are ready to enter into good-faith negotiations with the Islamic Republic with a view to achieving a lasting settlement to the conflict.

Recent weeks have also seen developments on prisoner releases, which, if carefully managed, could form an important confidence-building measure to start the peace process. Despite the very real logistical challenges imposed by COVID-19, representatives of the Government of the Islamic Republic and the Taliban have now held three video-teleconferences to discuss prisoner releases. UNAMA welcomes this engagement and urges the parties to resolve the prisoner release issue swiftly in accordance with international law.

The signing of the agreement between the United States and the Taliban on 29 February was a landmark moment in the Afghan conflict. The agreement provided for the conditions-based full withdrawal of international military forces from Afghanistan, and the first tranche of this withdrawal is under way. For their part, the Taliban appear to be adhering to their commitment to reduce violence against international military forces. However, the last few weeks have seen conflict-related violence in Afghanistan surge again to previous levels, driven mainly by Taliban attacks against the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. This trend is regrettable, but it is also reversible. The past few months have shown, yet again, that a significant reduction of violence can be achieved, with the genuine commitment of all parties. This was demonstrated in the lead-up to the signing of the United States-Taliban agreement, which saw a significant reduction in violence across the country. It is the hope of UNAMA that this will soon be repeated and sustained as intra-Afghan negotiations make progress. Above all, the international community must not forget what Afghans desire as an outcome from the peace process: a comprehensive end to the conflict that protects their security and advances their rights.

The increased level of violence has had tragic consequences for civilians caught in the conflict. This month alone, we recorded more than 180 civilians killed and many more injured due to the hostilities. During the period, the Taliban was responsible for a high number of civilian casualties, mainly from non-suicide improvised explosive devices and targeted killing. While UNAMA noted fewer civilian casualties attributed to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, I am seriously concerned by the incident of 21 March, when the Afghan air force conducted an air strike in Kunduz. Our initial findings indicate that almost all those killed were women and children.

We are also deeply concerned about the ongoing threat to civilians posed by the Islamic State-Khorasan Province. This was again demonstrated by the inhumane attack on 6 March against a commemoration for a Hazara leader in Kabul, which killed 34 civilians and injured scores more. We were also outraged by the attack claimed by the group on worshippers at a Sikh-Hindu temple in Kabul on 25 March, which killed and injured dozens of civilians. These barbaric attacks against Afghan civilians must stop.

UNAMA has continually emphasized that the best way to protect civilians from conflict and the evolving health crisis is to stop the fighting altogether. I would like to highlight the Secretary-General's call for an immediate global ceasefire so

that the necessary focus and resources can be provided to combating COVID-19. A reduction of violence leading to a ceasefire in Afghanistan would save lives, create a more conducive environment to commence intra-Afghan peace negotiations and enable the Government to focus its efforts on combating the looming health crisis.

The risks to Afghanistan posed by the threat of COVID-19 are extreme. The deadly effects of the virus are of particular concern given Afghanistan's fragile health system and highly vulnerable population. This includes high numbers of Afghans suffering from malnutrition and living in close proximity to one another, including internally displaced persons, prisoners and detainees in the overcrowded penitentiary system, as well as those with specific needs, including physical disabilities and mental-health issues. A particular challenge in Afghanistan is women's access to medical care, which is complicated by the prevailing security situation and entrenched cultural norms.

Along with these public-health issues, we are also concerned about the economic and social impact of the loss of livelihoods on families, particularly given the lack of in-built social-protection guarantees. The pandemic and its economic impact also threaten to exacerbate intercommunal tensions, particularly between migratory populations and host communities. If not addressed in a timely and comprehensive manner, this could have catastrophic consequences for Afghanistan and its people.

To help mitigate this risk, the United Nations in Afghanistan has developed a response plan to support the efforts of the Afghan Government in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. This will require funding of \$108.1 million until 30 June. I would like to extend our profound thanks to donors who have already pledged to contribute to this effort. I encourage other Member States to follow their lead. As the Secretary-General has said, COVID-19 is menacing the whole of humankind, and so the whole of humankind must fight back. Only through the collective action of Member States, in close cooperation with Afghan authorities, can we hope to minimize the impact of this global threat on Afghanistan's vulnerable population.

The confluence of political uncertainty, delays in the commencement of the peace process, increasing violence and the imminent full force of the COVID-19 pandemic makes this a critical time for the people of Afghanistan. Addressing these issues will require joint efforts from all of us, in the interests of the global population. I would like to pay particular tribute to the thousands of brave front-line responders working for the Afghan Government, non-governmental organizations and United Nations and other international humanitarian agencies. They are incurring significant personal risks to protect the people of Afghanistan against the impending threat of COVID-19. I also thank the members of the Council for their ongoing interest in and support for Afghanistan, which has only become more critical with the events of recent weeks. UNAMA remains fully committed to supporting the people of Afghanistan.

Annex II**Statement by Mr. Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve, Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations**

Afghanistan was hit by another devastating and deadly terrorist attack last week, another sad event that prolongs the suffering of the country's civilian population. The 100,000 victims since the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) started counting more than a decade ago testify to the folly of this conflict. The violence adds to the growing concerns over the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the country and its impact on the Afghan population, in particular on the most vulnerable. Recent large-scale movements across borders are likely to put further pressure on the country's health system.

In the context of the pandemic, we echo the call of the Secretary-General for a global ceasefire. The period of reduction of violence was a step in that direction. Unfortunately, hostilities are still ongoing.

We call on the Afghan authorities to display political leadership after the recent announcement of the election results. The Afghan population needs an inclusive Government that enjoys broad support, that is able to confront the pandemic and that seizes the opportunity for peace. We hope the announcement of a diverse and inclusive Government delegation to intra-Afghan negotiations can initiate these talks without delay. An exchange of prisoners can be a way to build trust. We expect that during the negotiations a key role will be assigned to women. It is important that the Council closely follow the process and emphasize the importance of respecting Afghanistan's Constitution and fundamental rights and freedoms.

In the last three months of 2019, 687 grave violations against children were verified. We will continue to look for consensus on Council conclusions with regard to children and armed conflict and count on members' support.

We need a strong voice and clear leadership for the United Nations in Afghanistan. We welcome the appointment of the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and reiterate our deep gratitude for Mr. Yamamoto's service.

Both bilaterally and as member of the European Union, Belgium will continue to support — on the basis of clear conditions and parameters — the peace process and the Government and the people of Afghanistan. Examples of ongoing support include our contributions to the implementation of the national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and to the Afghan National Army trust fund, as well as our participation in NATO's Resolute Support Mission, with approximately 100 military personnel.

Finally, I would like to support the press elements proposed by the co-penholders.

Annex III**Statement by Mr. Zhang Jun, Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations**

I thank Ms. Hayden, Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for her helpful briefing. I also wish to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, former Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, and appreciate the work of UNAMA under his leadership. China also looks forward to working closely with Ms. Deborah Lyons, the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, in the coming days.

The peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan is at a critical juncture. We appreciate the efforts of the parties concerned in promoting the political dialogue and peace process, and welcome the contact made between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban. We also welcome the efforts of the international community and the countries of the region in promoting intra-Afghan negotiations. China firmly supports a broad and inclusive peace and reconciliation process that is Afghan-led and -owned, and fully respects the will of the Afghan people in deciding their future.

We call on all Afghan parties, including the Taliban, to seize this historic opportunity to jointly develop political and security plans that are acceptable to all through intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations. China will continue to work together with the international community, especially the countries of the region, including Russia and Pakistan, to promote the intra-Afghan dialogue process. We would also like to work with the Afghan people to maintain a united Afghanistan. A divided Afghanistan is in nobody's interest and hurts Afghans the most. We should try our best to avoid that.

The security situation in Afghanistan is also at a critical juncture. We appreciate the efforts made to promote security in the country. Nevertheless, the situation remains grim. We urge the international community and the Afghan parties to do whatever they can to strengthen the security capacity of Afghanistan, including supporting the capacity-building of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, in order to help Afghanistan effectively respond to threats such as terrorism, transnational crime and drug trafficking.

We welcome the agreement signed by the United States and the Taliban. As the parties implement the agreement, China calls on them to ensure that the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan be conducted in an orderly and responsible manner in order to avoid a security vacuum and, in particular to prevent the rise of terrorist organizations taking advantage of the situation in Afghanistan.

Ensuring Afghanistan's economic and social development is also challenging. Without a solid foundation, there can be no lasting and sustained peace and prosperity in Afghanistan. Resolution 2513 (2020) calls for the promotion of regional cooperation and connectivity. Recently, Afghanistan and Pakistan started transporting goods through Gwadar Port in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which represents new progress for Afghanistan's integration into the regional economy. We welcome that new development. All Afghans — men, women and children — are members of the same family who share the same future. We will help the Afghan people to the best of our ability by contributing to peace, stability and development in Afghanistan.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic poses a serious challenge to Afghanistan. All efforts should be made to help its Government combat the pandemic. On 20 March, China shared its experience in preventing and controlling the new

pandemic with 19 South-Asian and Eurasian countries, including Afghanistan via video-conference. China has donated anti-epidemic materials, including 30,000 test reagents, 250,000 facial masks and some ventilators to Afghanistan. They will arrive in the country on 1 April. We hope those efforts will help the Afghans to fight the pandemic, and we will continue our efforts in that regard.

Annex IV**Statement by Mr. José Singer Weisinger, Special Envoy to the Security Council of the Dominican Republic**

First, we would like to express our strong condemnation of the 25 March attack on a Sikh-Hindu temple in Kabul. We extend our deepest condolences to the families of the victims.

We also take this opportunity to welcome the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Deborah Lyons, and wish her success in her new role. In addition, we convey our appreciation to Ms. Ingrid Hayden, Deputy Special Representative for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for her briefing.

The situation in Afghanistan continues to be at a critical juncture. The country's peace process, political dialogue, security situation and economic development face great challenges. We therefore urge all stakeholders and the international community to continue to work together to help all parties in Afghanistan meet those challenges.

We continue to be concerned about the volatile security situation, especially in the south, and condemn in the strongest terms all terrorist attacks perpetrated during the reporting period, which have targeted innocent civilians.

The drug crisis continues to be a serious problem for Afghanistan and the entire region, which is why we believe it is highly important to intensify efforts to combat this scourge.

Regarding the dire humanitarian situation, we share the concerns in the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/210) about the increase — from 6.3 million to 9.4 million — in the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection due to the conflict. We therefore ask the parties to strictly observe international humanitarian law as it relates to the protection of civilians. We hope that the humanitarian situation does not worsen during this time of pandemic.

Like the rest of the world, we are deeply concerned about the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), particularly in areas of conflict, and how it could significantly worsen the already critical humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

The Dominican Republic encourages the Government of Afghanistan to continue to include women in the peace processes and to ensure that they assume a leadership role in the negotiations. We believe that there must be full and effective participation, not only of women but also of young people, in all areas of Afghan society.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge the important role played by UNAMA in promoting peace in the country through outstanding contributions in areas such as human rights, particularly for women. That progress must be sustained.

Annex V**Statement by Mr. Sven Jürgenson, Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations**

I would like to thank Ms. Ingrid Hayden, Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for her comprehensive briefing. I would also like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mr. Yamamoto for his significant work of more than five years in a very challenging environment, and I wish Ms. Lyons much success in her upcoming years as the new Special Representative.

Estonia commends UNAMA for its activity and engagement with national, regional and international partners to support Afghanistan on numerous fronts, particularly on the promotion of gender equality, women's engagement in the peace process and the inclusion of civil society. Such work helps to create an environment that is conducive to the intra-Afghan negotiations. Estonia strongly supports those efforts and is always open to options pertaining to ways that the Security Council may further assist UNAMA's endeavours.

We are glad that the Government of Afghanistan has made first steps towards beginning the peace process. That includes the recently approved State Ministry of Peace — an independent Government entity, which also coordinates peace-related issues across all relevant ministries. The Parliament also established a peace committee to support peace efforts, which held its first meeting on 14 January.

Although the documented 10,392 civilian casualties in 2019 show a slight decrease compared with 2018, it is still an overwhelming number, of which women and children represent 42 per cent. Estonia remains deeply concerned about the high number of casualties, attributed to the Taliban, the Afghan National Army and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan. In the light of the coronavirus disease pandemic, it is now of the utmost importance to reduce violence and establish a ceasefire, not only to protect the civilian population, including women and children, but also to enable Afghanistan to prepare and focus on the fight against the virus. It is important that Afghanistan minimize the effects of the pandemic, as it could disrupt and delay the start of the intra-Afghan negotiations.

The formation of a team for peace negotiations announced by the Afghan Government on Friday is a very positive development, even more so since the 21-member team includes five women, which attests to women's participation and inclusiveness in the peace process. We regret that the Taliban has refused to cooperate with the appointed negotiating team, claiming that it is not inclusive.

We stress that any efforts pertaining to the peace process should not undermine the fundamental rights and liberties guaranteed by the Afghan Constitution. The political, economic and social achievements of the past 19 years, for which Afghans and the international community have made enormous sacrifices, must be retained and further enhanced.

Annex VI

Statement by Ms. Anne Gueguen, Deputy Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations

I would like to join others in thanking Ms. Hayden for her comprehensive briefing and ask her to transmit my wholehearted congratulations to Ms. Lyons on her appointment as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General. We wish her every success in her new role and I affirm France's unwavering support for the United Nations efforts in Afghanistan.

I will start by stating the obvious and underlining that the current circumstances should push us all to be more united than ever in continuing our support to the people of Afghanistan, a country that has been plagued by war, terrorism, poverty and now a pandemic.

The first crucial form of support is to ensure continued and sufficient humanitarian assistance to deal with the many challenges that lay ahead, in particular the risk of the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. France welcomes the efforts of the United Nations agencies and their partners to respond to the humanitarian needs of the population and to the COVID-19 crisis. Those efforts need to be supported and enhanced. It is also key to ensure safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all those in need.

In that regard, I also would like to recall the obligation for all parties to respect international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians. The recent terrorist attack on 25 March is an appalling crime, which our Council rightly and firmly condemned (see SC/14147). Efforts must be sustained to reduce violence. Attacks against civilians must stop, and the Secretary-General's call for a ceasefire should be heeded and implemented in Afghanistan.

Following the completion of the electoral process in Afghanistan, France calls for the swift appointment of an inclusive and united Government. That is especially critical in view of the start of intra-Afghan talks.

France would like to reiterate its call for inclusive representation, from all sides, in the negotiations. We welcome the announcement of an inclusive Afghan delegation for the peace talks, which includes five women among the 21 members. It is essential that women participate directly and meaningfully in the peace talks at all levels of decision-making. Inclusivity is also critical to ensure that the human rights of every person are safeguarded in the negotiation of this peace process.

The signing of two agreements in February paves the way to peace. Despite the major disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, their implementation must continue, along with the fight against terrorist activities as well as drug and human trafficking. We will closely monitor the progress made in that regard in the light with our security interests.

Before concluding, I would like to underline our strong hope that progress will continue to be made towards lasting peace, the preservation of the unity and integrity of the country, better governance and the effective protection of human rights.

Finally, I would like to express our full support for the elements to the press proposed by Germany.

Annex VII

Statement by Mr. Jürgen Schulz, Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations

At the outset, I would like to thank the representative of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for her briefing and the update on the current situation in Afghanistan, which was extremely helpful. I would now like to comment on a few aspects of the briefing.

First of all, with regard to the recent violence, we find it extremely regrettable that the violence has not subsided. We condemn every one of the recent attacks. The continued Taliban attacks against security forces are very worrisome and violate the spirit of the 29 February agreement reached with the United States of America. As they do not make for an environment conducive to building the confidence necessary for a peace process, these attacks must stop. In our view, now is the time for unity and cooperation and reconciliation and not for continued violence.

With respect to the onslaught of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis, which has also spread to Afghanistan, we cannot estimate the true extent of the crisis there yet, but as a result of the pandemic, an end to the violence is even more urgent. The Secretary-General's call for a humanitarian ceasefire, which was timely and vital, was echoed by German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, who said that the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic must become our top priority.

Medical services and humanitarian aid must not be hampered by conflict. Accordingly, one aspect that we are particularly concerned about and must keep an eye on in the light of the current coronavirus crisis is the return of refugees. Afghan refugees are already leaving Iran for western Afghanistan even though the medical facilities necessary for treating them should they become ill are not in place. The same is likely to happen with Afghan refugees from Pakistan, which is bound to exacerbate the health crisis.

With regard to the peace process, we reiterate the importance of a sustainable peace. Such a peace can be achieved only through a negotiated and inclusive political settlement that is owned and led by the people of Afghanistan. It will require a lot of work and time as well as flexibility on all sides. We welcome the agreement on the joint negotiation team comprising representatives of various political factions, as well as the fact that 25 per cent of the team will be composed of women, which is a vital step towards the start of the peace process.

At the same time, we continue to be concerned about the domestic standoff in the country. We hope that the agreement on the negotiations team will help to overcome the political impasse in Kabul, which remains a great concern for us. Parallel Government structures lead to dysfunctionality. An inclusive political solution has to be found as soon as possible in order to prevent the persistence of a dysfunctional Government, not to mention a possible further escalation of tensions, which might even lead to fractures among the security forces. We urge all sides involved to display maximum flexibility.

In times such as these, international consensus must be maintained. The Security Council must therefore remain united and unwavering in its support. The Council demonstrated this unity when it unanimously adopted resolution 2513 (2020) on 10 March, endorsing the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the United States of America and the Taliban (S/2020/184, annex).

As the second-largest donor and troop contributor, Germany remains firmly committed to Afghanistan. We will do our utmost to contribute to the facilitation of intra-Afghan talks and work closely with all sides involved. Even if the current

COVID-19 crisis makes in-person meetings impossible, we now have to lay the institutional groundwork for talks to happen soon.

Any dialogue, talks or negotiations must ensure that there is no rollback of what has already been achieved, and the meaningful inclusion of women must also be ensured. Moreover, women must be able to fully and effectively participate in all spheres of Afghan society, including the political sphere. The remarkable progress that has been achieved in the last two decades in this regard must be secured and built upon. We commend the Government of Afghanistan for its commitment to that end, and we will continue to provide our support.

I would like to add a few words about UNAMA. We commend the important role that UNAMA is playing in monitoring the situation on the ground. The Council should continue to provide its support for this vital Mission. Germany firmly supports the UNAMA mandate, which was adopted by consensus. Let me also say, now that Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto's turn at the helm of UNAMA has ended, that we thank him for his years of very distinguished service. We welcome as vital at this crucial moment the appointment of his successor, Ms. Deborah Lyons, as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNAMA, and we wish her all the best, offering our full support for the Mission and for the future of the country.

As the security situation remains volatile, Germany urges all parties to the conflict to refrain from using violence against civilians, in particular women and children. The conflict has caused immeasurable pain to these individuals, the most vulnerable members of society. Over the last 10 years, more than 100,000 people have fallen victim to the conflict. We reiterate that all parties must respect their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law and take immediate measures to prevent civilian casualties.

Other important topics to keep on our agenda for Afghanistan are climate and security and the fight against corruption, particularly in the light of the fact that the 2017 Afghan anti-corruption strategy expired on 31 December 2019. We now urge the Afghan Government to pass a successor strategy with all due speed.

Before concluding, I would like to say, with regard to the economic and social aspects of the situation in Afghanistan, economic development and job creation remains essential and has taken on even greater importance since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. Afghanistan needs continued and reliable international assistance to tackle the related economic challenges and reverse the current troubling trend of dramatically increasing levels of poverty. The 2020 Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, co-hosted by Afghanistan and Finland at the United Nations in Geneva, will be crucial for maintaining continued support for Afghanistan.

The international community must remain engaged and continue to support Afghanistan in accordance with its commitment to the ongoing transformation decade of 2015-2024. Continued funding is vital if we do not want to imperil the progress made in Afghanistan, all the more so when we take into consideration how the economic aftermath of COVID-19 will strain national budgets. Such a commitment will be based on the joint understanding that Afghanistan will continue on its path of reform.

Finally, let me also refer to the elements of a draft press release that the co-penholders — Indonesia and Germany — have circulated. We very much hope that the Security Council can express itself on this important topic today.

Annex VIII

Statement by Mr. Dian Triansyah Djani, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Indonesia to the United Nations

As co-penholder on Afghanistan with Germany, Indonesia would like to thank all Security Council members for their continued focus and support on Afghanistan and for their support to us. We also thank Ambassador Yamamoto for his service and dedication in leading the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and welcome the announcement of Ambassador Lyons as the incoming Special Representative and Head of UNAMA. We thank Ms. Ingrid Hayden for her briefing and welcome Ambassador Adela Raz to this video-teleconference (VTC) meeting.

The dynamic situation in Afghanistan saw the hope of peace following the recent peace process agreements. That was marred by the brutal attack by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant last week, which claimed 25 innocent lives. We have condemned that attack in a press statement. Furthermore, the number of people affected by coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is rising in Afghanistan, making the efforts towards peace and humanitarian relief all the more difficult. We also express our concern over that situation.

The role of the United Nations, along with that of the regional and international entities, remains critical at this time. However, the Afghan parties also need to come together on a comprehensive peace agreement and to ensure robust action against the challenges confronting ordinary Afghans. Ultimately, peace will depend on the willingness of Afghans to place their faith in a collective trajectory to shape their country's future. An Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process is crucial. In that regard, we would additionally underline the following points.

First is the political situation and the peace process. We humbly call on the political leadership to set aside their differences, be flexible and put the interest of the people of Afghanistan first. As Ms. Hayden mentioned, now is not the time for division. Negotiations will not be easy, but with persistence, good faith on all sides, political wisdom and a reduction in violence, we are confident that concrete progress can be made. We hope that the intra-Afghan negotiation will be convened once the COVID-19 crisis is over. Indonesia stands ready to host it. In addition, we welcome the formation of an inclusive negotiating team for the upcoming intra-Afghan negotiations, in particular the inclusion of women, as an important element to achieving long-lasting peace.

Secondly, the humanitarian and security situation must improve. Even before the unfolding of COVID-19, an estimated 9.4 million Afghans required humanitarian assistance, up from 6.3 million last year. Indonesia calls on all parties to fully exercise their role to ensure the smooth delivery of humanitarian support. Similarly, as over 10,000 casualties, including children, have been documented for the sixth consecutive year, Indonesia calls upon the parties to the conflict to stop harming civilians. Echoing the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, we implore all parties in Afghanistan to also end violence against civilians. As we approach the holy month of Ramadan, it is time for the cessation of hostilities and for peace in the land.

Third is the role of women and human rights. Any political settlement must not sacrifice the gains made, including for the rights of Afghan women. Indonesia reiterates its support for the women, peace and security agenda in Afghanistan. Last year, we hosted a dialogue on the role of women in building and sustaining peace, in Jakarta. In follow up, an Afghanistan-Indonesia women solidarity network was launched in Afghanistan this month, whose vision will be pursued through the unity

of Afghan women and a time-bound action plan. Our Foreign Minister is personally reinforcing that effort.

Let me close by stressing our full support to Afghanistan's march towards the dawn of its peaceful and prosperous era. Indonesia will continue to walk the talk on Afghan women's active participation in their country's progress, along with our other efforts to foster peace there. As mentioned by our co-penholder, Germany, we have presented press elements for your consideration and support. Like previous VTC meetings of the Security Council over the last few days, we do hope that colleagues will also agree on those press elements.

Annex IX**Statement by Mr. Abdou Abarry, Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations**

I would like to echo my predecessors and condemn in the strongest possible terms the recent terrorist attacks on a Sikh temple in Kabul on 25 March and to extend our heartfelt condolences to the victims, their families and the people of Afghanistan, while hoping for a smooth recovery for those injured. Let me reiterate the message in our press statement issued just days ago on that matter — terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security and we ought to bring any and all of its perpetrators to justice.

I would like to thank Ms. Hayden for the comprehensive briefing and to recognize the good work that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is doing in promoting peace, good governance and development for the benefit of all Afghans. We hope that she will continue to improve coordination between all United Nations entities and other humanitarian actors in order to maximize effectiveness as we deal with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. My delegation would also appreciate it if Ms. Hayden could give us more insight into the possible impact the current pandemic will have on the peace and political processes.

As the Council has stated on many occasions, there is no alternative but a political solution in Afghanistan. In that regard, we welcome the recent positive developments, particularly the agreement between the United States and the Taliban, and hope that it serves as a foundation on which to build momentum towards inclusive intra-Afghan talks sooner rather than later. We trust that such future peace initiatives will be an opportunity to showcase the rich diversity of Afghanistan through the meaningful participation of women, youth and minorities. The Niger supports such inclusiveness as history has shown that any time those stakeholders are engaged and given a meaningful place at the table, lasting peace and sustainable development follow. We must support the Afghan Government in not only fostering and enhancing the rights of women and other groups but also in solidifying the gains made in the past two decades, as mentioned by the Secretary-General in his report, so that their vision for the future of Afghanistan is fully taken into account.

The peace process should result in the cessation of violence. The Niger remains, however, gravely concerned by the current political impasse and the high number of civilian casualties, of which 42 per cent are women and children. Furthermore, we would like to highlight and condemn gender-based violence and unacceptable grave violations against children and call on all parties to strictly respect humanitarian law.

The Niger would like to recognize the role played by neighbours, friends, allies and donors in helping Afghanistan as it slowly but surely regains its place on the international stage. Sustained donor commitment, such as at the pledging conference, will no doubt help consolidate current and future peace dividends for sustainable stability in Afghanistan.

To finish, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on a job well done, especially at a trying moment like this. We would not have been able to accomplish what we have without your patient advice. The Council is able to continue its business thanks to the alternative and innovative working methods we agreed on with regard to COVID-19, and I have no doubt that those strides will be carried over and improved during the Dominican Republic's presidency.

Annex X

Statement by Ms. Isis Gonsalves, Political Coordinator of the Permanent Mission of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations

I thank Ms. Ingrid Hayden, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Officer in Charge of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for her comprehensive briefing today.

The increasingly complex global security landscape continues to challenge us all. The dire humanitarian consequences of conflict in Afghanistan necessitate urgent action. In addressing the sociopolitical and economic arrangements underlying this crisis, the international community must work together. There is no alternative to multilateralism.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines remains concerned about the volatile security situation in the country. We condemn, in the strongest terms, all forms of terrorism and violence against civilians, including the recent killings at the Sikh Temple in Kabul. We are deeply saddened by these deaths and express our deepest condolences to the bereaved families. We reiterate the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

We support an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned process to ensure lasting peace and stability. In this context, we encourage all parties to fulfil their commitments under the joint declaration and agreement signed on 29 February.

We commend UNAMA for its engagement with national, regional and international stakeholders to advance intra-Afghan negotiations. We also welcome the efforts to support women's leadership roles in the Government and future intra-Afghan negotiations. In this regard, we continue to stress the importance of the political inclusivity of all stakeholders to create a more just and equitable society for the benefit of all Afghans.

In closing, let me welcome the appointment of Deborah Lyons as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Afghanistan and Head of UNAMA and encourage her to continue dialogue with representatives of the Taliban in order to resolve all outstanding issues related to the peace process. We reiterate our full support to the people of Afghanistan as they lay the foundations for a peaceful and prosperous future.

Annex XI**Statement by Mr. Jerry Matjila, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations**

We would like to thank Ms. Ingrid Hayden, Officer in Charge of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for her briefing. I would also like to extend our congratulations to Ms. Deborah Lyons on her recent appointment as Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Afghanistan and Head of UNAMA. I would further like to express our gratitude to Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto for his contribution and efforts in supporting the work of the Secretary-General and the Council in Afghanistan.

South Africa extends its condolences to the families of the victims of the recent attack on a Sikh temple in Kabul. We strongly condemn this and all violent attacks, especially those targeting innocent civilians. Terrorist acts, whatever their motivation, can never be justified.

South Africa fully supports the important role of UNAMA and its contribution to laying the foundations for sustainable peace and development in Afghanistan, while noting the challenging environment in which it operates.

The continuing levels of violence in Afghanistan, in particular the indiscriminate attacks perpetrated against civilians, women, children and the elderly, remain of concern and risk derailing the ongoing efforts to deliver lasting peace in Afghanistan.

South Africa encourages all Afghan stakeholders committed to the nation's peace talks to renew their efforts to rebuild trust and work towards peace and reconciliation, as well as to promote national unity and cohesion with a view to achieving a lasting political solution.

My delegation welcomes all efforts to find a long-term solution to the conflict in Afghanistan and hopes that the recent signing of agreements between the United States and the Afghan Government and the Taliban, respectively, will be an important first step from which intra-Afghan negotiations can be launched.

It is also important to acknowledge the role that women have played in Afghanistan's peace process and we must all encourage their continued participation in peace talks and post-conflict efforts. The vast gains made in women's and girls' rights should be protected.

Importantly, the peace process should be Afghan-owned and -led. In this regard, we call on all Afghan stakeholders to resolve their differences and work together in order to establish a peaceful and stable environment for all Afghans.

Annex XII**Statement by Mr. Jonathan Allen, Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations**

I thank Jun very much, as well as Ingrid for her briefing.

Let me begin, as others have done, by welcoming the appointment of Deborah Lyons as Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and by thanking Special Representative Yamamoto for all his work.

Let me start by addressing the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), an issue, I think, of concern for us all, and with regard not just to Afghanistan but to a number of the issues — or, indeed, all of the issues — on the Security Council's agenda. So we are, of course, concerned globally, but also in Afghanistan in particular.

For our part, we are looking at our options of scaling up humanitarian action in response to the pandemic. We will work closely with our partners in doing so. But it makes it even more important that, first, the Taliban cease its attacks, in line with the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire to confront the spread of the disease; and, secondly, that Afghan political leaders come together so that the Government can lead the necessary response. I am going to say a bit more about both of those point later on. But also, I have a question for later for Ingrid. She talked about some of the concerns and the risks in Afghanistan, but it would be interesting to hear from her what actions she thinks the United Nations should be taking, as the United Nations family, and how members of the Council can support that.

Moving on to the political side, I think it is vital that we see quick progress towards intra-Afghan negotiations and ensure that momentum is not lost. We have seen some positive moments, including talks between the Afghan Government and Taliban on prisoner releases and the announcement of an Afghan negotiation team, but challenges clearly remain. While it is for Afghans themselves to work out the structures and formats of intra-Afghan negotiations, the United Nations and the international community should be flexible and ready to support, however required. The Taliban must negotiate with the Afghan Government team in good faith. Only a negotiated and inclusive settlement will bring peace and the Taliban must end violence. That is a clear demand from all Afghans. But we are disappointed that leaders in Kabul have been unable to unite ahead of negotiations with the Taliban. Now is the time for them to follow through on their promises, set aside their differences and form a genuinely unified Government. The Afghan people expect and deserve nothing less, and their political leaders must not squander this moment. In particular, we want to ensure that we protect and build on the gains made in the lives of women and girls over the past 18 years.

Let me finish my remarks by saying a few words on the Afghans' development needs. We know that the conflict in Afghanistan is one the deadliest ones in the world, with more than 10,000 casualties recorded in 2019. Years of displacement and hardship arising from conflict and severe drought and flooding, as well as sluggish economic performance, have left more than 80 per cent of Afghans below the international poverty line. Over 14 million people are in crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity, and that adds to the vulnerability to COVID-19. The United Kingdom has committed in this financial year \$362 million. We are ready to work with Finland as co-hosts and other international donors as we look forward to the 2020 pledging conference in Geneva. The coordination between development, security and political actors is more crucial than ever.

Let me sign off by saying that we have a tendency, all of us, to talk about the fact that we are at a critical moment in many situations on our agenda, but it seems to me particularly true now and particularly true of Afghanistan. There are many risks ahead of us and around us, but we need the key decision-makers in Afghanistan from all parties, from all areas, to hold their nerve and to do the right thing and to come together for peace and for the people and to tackle the pandemic.

Annex XIII**Statement by Mrs. Kelly Craft, Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations**

Afghanistan has now suffered through 40 years of war. The United States remains committed to helping the country achieve a political settlement to end this constant state of conflict. That is why the Trump Administration is making efforts to create the conditions for Afghans to begin intra-Afghan negotiations, which we believe can result in a durable peace. Recent developments reflect the promise of peace as well as the critical challenges that must be overcome to realize that promise and end a conflict that claims the lives of Afghans every single day.

The 26 March announcement of the formation of an inclusive negotiating team for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan — a team that includes the Afghan Government, political leaders and civil society — is an important milestone for talks with the Taliban. We also commend the progress made towards an exchange of prisoners. During constructive technical meetings, representatives of the Taliban and the Afghan Government agreed that the exchange of prisoners was an important confidence-building measure as the sides prepare for the immediate launch of intra-Afghan negotiations.

However, obstacles to progress remain. To enter negotiations, the Afghan people will need an inclusive Government that can both provide security and participate in the peace process. On 23 March, Secretary Pompeo visited Kabul to urge Mr. Ghani and Mr. Abdullah to set aside their differences and form a Government that could do just that — stabilize their country and advance the peace process, as well as tackle the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). As Secretary Pompeo said, we are disappointed that Afghanistan's leaders have failed to form such a Government. Afghan leaders demonstrated commendable commitment to peace this week by establishing a negotiating team and adopting practical steps to releasing prisoners; they should extend that commitment to the challenge of Government formation.

The United States Government is preparing to adjust our spending in Afghanistan, including by immediately reducing assistance by \$1 billion this year. Should Afghan leaders choose to form an inclusive Government that can provide security and participate in the peace process, the Trump Administration is prepared to support these efforts and revisit the assistance review initiated this week. As we adjust our aid on the decisions of Afghanistan's leaders, we are maintaining our support to the Afghan people, as demonstrated by our announcement of \$15 million in assistance to help combat the spread of COVID-19 in Afghanistan. We hope that other donors will join us in helping to address the threat that the virus poses in Afghanistan.

Secretary Pompeo also travelled to Doha to meet with the Taliban on 23 March to press the Taliban to comply with its commitments on reducing violence. The recent attacks waged by the Taliban are not in keeping with its stated commitments to achieving a negotiated peace process. We call on the Taliban to immediately reduce the levels of violence. We remind it that the United States maintains its commitment to defend the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces.

As we look toward this opportunity for peace, we are mindful of the progress that has been made in Afghanistan over the past 19 years in expanding the rights of women and girls. The Trump Administration will work to preserve those gains. No future Afghan Government can expect the support of the international community, donors or businesses if women's rights and participation are revoked or ignored. As we pursue peace, the United States is in the process of drawing down 8,600 troops and remains committed to ensuring that terrorist organizations are never again able

to use Afghanistan as a safe haven. Any further reduction in troop levels will be strictly conditions-based and coordinated closely with NATO.

Finally, the United States recognizes the important work that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan is doing in supporting the Afghan people and congratulates Ambassador Deborah Lyons on her appointment. We look forward to working with Ambassador Lyons to advance peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Annex XIV**Statement by Mr. Pham Hai Anh, Deputy Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations**

I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this timely discussion. I would also like to thank Ms. Ingrid Hayden, Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for her briefing. Viet Nam commends and reiterates its full support for the work of the Mission. We also express our gratitude to the former Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his tremendous efforts over the past five years, and look forward to working closely with the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Deborah Lyons.

Viet Nam is closely following the situation in Afghanistan. It is a historic moment and critical time for the people of Afghanistan. Resolution 2513 (2020), adopted unanimously by the Council, has laid the foundation for the pursuit of long-term peace for the country. However, the situation on the ground continues to see worrying developments. We strongly condemn the continued attacks of the Taliban and other terrorist groups in Afghanistan, which resulted in more than 10,000 civilian casualties in 2019 and have claimed hundreds more since the beginning of 2020. We are also concerned about the increasing spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and its impact on security, peacebuilding and socioeconomic development in Afghanistan.

Allow me to emphasize the following points.

First, the most important issue now is to continue implementing resolution 2513 (2020), particularly as it relates to starting negotiations towards a permanent ceasefire. Viet Nam reiterates its support for the Afghan-led and -owned inclusive peace process, and welcomes the Government's efforts, including the announcement of an inclusive peace negotiations team. We look forward to the increasingly active participation of women in this process. We call on the Government of Afghanistan and the opposition party to continue to strengthen unity and set aside their differences in this difficult time. We also emphasize the importance of strengthening international support for intra-Afghan negotiations. In that regard and given the current situation, the international community should lend additional technical support for facilitating remote dialogue.

Secondly, it is also vital to improve the deteriorating security situation. Despite the agreement to a nationwide reduction of violence, the Taliban has continued to carry out attacks on the Afghan people, many of whom are women and children. We are concerned by the attack perpetrated just yesterday by the Taliban, which resulted in the death of 27 Afghan soldiers. In the light of the spread of COVID-19, Viet Nam urges the Taliban and all other terrorist groups to immediately stop fighting and targeting civilians, and to allow unhindered access to humanitarian aid and health care in the country.

Thirdly, as stated in the UNAMA report (S/2020/210), the economic and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan continues to face many challenges. Long-term peace and stability also require strong economic development and the sustainable livelihood of its people. Viet Nam calls on the international community to continue assisting Afghanistan in eradicating poverty, fostering post-conflict reconstruction and overcoming the challenges resulting from natural disasters. We also call on its international partners, as well as UNAMA and the relevant United Nations agencies, to further provide training, funding and technical support to Afghanistan in order to counter cross-border crime and drug trafficking.

In conclusion, Viet Nam once again emphasizes its support for the independence, sovereignty and stability of Afghanistan.
