



Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

8555th meeting

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Provisional

President: Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait)

Members:

Belgium	Mrs. Van Vlierberge
China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
Dominican Republic	Ms. Batista Díaz
Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Sipaco Ribala
France	Mrs. Gueguen
Germany	Mr. Schulz
Indonesia	Mr. Syihab
Peru	Mr. Duclos
Poland	Mr. Lewicki
Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
South Africa	Mr. Mabhongo
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
United States of America	Mr. Hunter

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2019/493)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2019/493)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Canada, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; and Ms. Sima Samar, Chairperson of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite His Excellency Mr. João Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2019/493, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Yamamoto: One year ago, the people of Afghanistan celebrated an unprecedented three-day Eid ceasefire across the country. Those moments of peaceful celebration gave them a glimpse of a life without conflict and allowed them to direct their gaze towards a more peaceful future. But the ensuing 12 months have also shown how arduous the path to peace is.

Unfortunately, the Eid ceasefire was not replicated this year. Yet the foundations laid over the last year have not been lost. Six weeks ago, thousands gathered to exchange ideas on peace at the consultative peace jirga. Grass-roots movements continued to march for peace. But before I speak further about this progress, allow me to first update the Council on preparations for the presidential election.

The presidential elections scheduled for 28 September will be a key moment to reaffirm the legitimacy of Afghanistan's democratic political structure. Afghan citizens have displayed an enduring commitment to choosing their political leaders through elections in the face of threats and adverse security conditions. The electoral management bodies, State institutions, political leaders, candidates and international partners owe it to them to deliver credible and timely elections and to accept the outcome of this process.

The decision of the Independent Election Commission to prioritize the holding of the presidential elections on 28 September gave much-needed clarity to the electoral calendar. However, timelines remain very tight. Significant operational and technical challenges need to be overcome in order to deliver credible elections as scheduled. The Commission has made important progress in the past few weeks: the operational plan and the budget were finalized, and top-up voter registration started across the country in addition to full voter registration in Ghazni province. However, after last year's highly controversial parliamentary elections and the subsequent dismissals of all electoral commissioners, the most daunting task for the new electoral management bodies is regaining public confidence. The Commission needs to demonstrate that it can address the problems that marred the parliamentary elections and integrate the lessons learned into preparations for the upcoming vote. These preparations must include improved procedures for publishing voter lists in good time, the training of electoral staff, more robust outreach and voter sensitization, and the timely rollout of electoral technology.

The United Nations is working with the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission on all aspects of the electoral preparations, with more than 170 national and international staff. This includes four international non-voting commissioners, two for the Independent Election Commission and two

for the Electoral Complaints Commission, who directly support the Commissions in their task.

The political stakes are high, and the competition is intense. It is the responsibility of all political actors, including presidential candidates, and of security and Government agencies to ensure that the elections are contested on a level playing field. I remind all candidates, and their supporters, of the code of conduct they signed when submitting their nomination papers. I also urge all actors to exercise restraint, to show respect for State institutions, most importantly for the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission, and to refrain from taking any action that could give any candidate an undue advantage.

As my predecessors in this forum have stressed ahead of previous elections, all candidates must have equal access to State resources. Similarly, Government officials must respect the principle of non-interference and refrain from using their position or resources to support a particular candidate. This vital political groundwork needs to be laid now in order to ensure that the vote will be credible and the outcome accepted. Afghanistan cannot afford a contentious and protracted post-election crisis that could result in a presidency with brittle domestic legitimacy. This would also harm the new President's ability to bring the Afghan people together in a meaningful and representative peace process.

Today the minds of the Afghan people and their international partners are more focused than ever on the need to reach a negotiated settlement. This momentum must not be lost. Direct talks between the United States and the Taliban continue, with broad international support. Afghanistan and some of its international partners, in particular Germany and Qatar, are preparing for an intra-Afghan dialogue, which would bring together the voices of people representing a wide spectrum of society. Some prominent Afghan actors have already had the opportunity to exchange views with Taliban representatives in Moscow in late May. All these efforts need to be directed towards one common objective: to start formal negotiations between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban to reach a peace agreement.

I am encouraged by signs of increasing consultations between the countries leading these initiatives in support of a political settlement. The common message to the Taliban is clear: come to the table and negotiate

directly with the Afghan Government. I call upon all those countries with direct contacts with, or influence over, the Taliban to intensify their efforts towards that goal. But, ultimately, there is no substitute for the Afghan people taking ownership and advancing their inclusive dialogue towards a peace process. Government and political leaders must foster consensus and create structured arrangements to effectively represent the interests of all Afghan people in their engagement with the Taliban. Preparations for the presidential elections should not distract from that necessary work.

The pursuit of peace is at the forefront of the work of the United Nations in Afghanistan. We work on a broad spectrum of initiatives to help create the conditions for peace, ranging from support to Afghan grass-roots organizations and dialogue with all parties concerned, including the Taliban, to convening discussions on behalf of the international community. As we know from experience, even if an overall peace agreement is reached, implementation can be derailed by unaddressed local conflicts that have the potential to escalate. UNAMA has been working with local communities to support and strengthen their own mediation mechanisms so that they themselves can resolve their conflicts. As just one example, a 50-year-long dispute over water resources between two tribes in Nangarhar was resolved through local mediation supported by UNAMA. Women played an important role in building bridges across the communities. Initiatives such as these are a vital counterpart to global and regional efforts, where the United Nations comparative advantage of impartiality is of particular relevance.

Only an inclusive peace process involving all those affected by the conflict— including women, youth, victims and business and religious leaders—can lead to sustainable peace. Afghan society will need to confront many difficult questions in a peace process, and much is at stake, such as the preservation of gains over the past 18 years; the role of women; questions of accountability; and how to reintegrate those who carried arms. The United Nations stands ready to support Afghans as they tackle those fundamental issues that run through the very fabric of society. The United Nations is also committed to giving priority to progress in the areas of women and peace and security, which are very important. We know from experience that this is the best and the only way to secure a sustainable peace agreement, and much needs to be done in that regard.

Afghanistan's people have the most to win from an end to the conflict. But they are also the ones who continue to lose most. Afghan civilians lose their lives, children are kept from classrooms and people are deprived from fulfilling their economic potential. In the first quarter of this year alone, almost 1,800 Afghan civilians were killed or injured — less than in previous quarters, but still far too many. I should like to point out here the egregiousness of anti-Government elements deliberately targeting civilians. It is a war crime and must stop. I am also concerned about increasing harm to civilians from search operations, as well as related human-rights abuses. I reiterate the need for more transparency and accountability surrounding such operations.

The impact of the conflict on children is particularly alarming. Attacks on schools almost tripled between 2017 and 2018. Additional schools were closed due to insecurity, leaving almost half a million children unable to exercise their right to education. Schools used as voter registration sites and polling centres will be at enhanced risk in the upcoming electoral period. I urge all anti-Government elements to ensure that schools and health facilities used during the election remain protected from attacks, and the parties to the conflict to take the necessary measures to reduce the impact of the conflict on children and education.

We cannot forget that 80 per cent of the country's people live on less than \$1.25 per day and in extremely precarious conditions marked by climate change and war. The impact of last year's drought is still felt today, with up to 10 million people food insecure. Internal displacement remains high, with the single-largest cause this year being the fighting between the Taliban and the Islamic State-Khorasan Province. I am grateful to all donors who have already generously contributed funding for humanitarian programming this year. However, the response remains underfunded at 23 per cent, and I would ask again for the Council's support to boost funding.

Afghanistan has vast economic potential, yet it remains untapped because of the conflict. The State has made progress in anti-corruption and public-sector reforms. Development partners have started to look beyond immediate needs and are exploring modalities for development assistance in a post-settlement context. But that important work can bear fruit only if a settlement is achieved. The road to peace is still long, but with our united support for Afghanistan's

full ownership of the peace process, I am cautiously optimistic that we are moving in the right direction.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Samar.

Ms. Samar: It is a pleasure to brief the Security Council again on Afghanistan. I would like to thank the Council for supporting efforts towards peace, security and human rights in Afghanistan. I also thank Germany and the other members that facilitated the holding of this briefing.

After 18 years of cooperation and support from the international community, Afghanistan is entering a very important point in its history. Hope and optimism for promoting and protecting human rights and human dignity has never been higher. At the same time, the fear of going back to the time when Afghans, especially women and minorities, were denied their rights and freedoms has never been greater. The talks with the Taliban have ignited a widespread and nationwide debate over lasting peace. The popular demand is that the outcome of talks should conform with human rights and democratic and free-society norms and values. The talks have generated concerns about the commitment of the parties to preserving Afghan progress on human rights, freedom, democracy and economic development.

This year the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission launched a national inquiry on women, peace and security to give voice to the views of women and their expectations of the potential peace deal. The inquiry, which covered 30 provinces and included public hearings, focus groups and surveys of over 3,400 women, was an honest effort to engage women in peace and security. The results from the inquiry displayed the strong and clear understanding of Afghan women, who desire a lasting peace in which they play a role and are able to express their views and put their demands on the table.

Women from all over the country stressed the importance of preserving the bill of rights in our Constitution and demanded that women's rights, human rights and democracy not be compromised or put on the agenda as an item up for negotiation during any political talks. Women also emphasized the need for accountability, social justice and an end to the culture of impunity. They have demanded that strong will for peace be shown by all parties and that they

make commitments to democratic and human rights norms and values. Afghan women were grateful for the remarks made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in support of the role of women in peace and security at joint events that took place in Helmand, Kandahar and Kunduz.

I would like to use this forum today to call for a comprehensive, sustained commitment and strong political will to make it possible for women to continue to make progress and succeed. Women need to overcome the challenges of a traditional and conservative society, in addition to systematic and historic discrimination. I would like to ask the international community to provide long-term support for the promotion of gender equality for sustainable peace and development.

Afghanistan is in conflict. Over 41 years, the people experienced the extreme-left Government of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan and the extreme-right of the Taliban. The people witnessed the disappearance and killing of their loved ones and the destruction of their homes. They were forced to become internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. And their rights and freedoms were violated by the regimes, without any accountability or justice for the victims. Women and other vulnerable groups suffered the most. The people had no role in choosing their Government. After the fall of the Taliban regime, we witnessed some progress on the promotion, protection and fulfilment of human rights. That progress includes reform of laws in accordance with international human rights conventions, progress on the fight against torture, and the realization of the political, civil, economic and social rights of all the people.

Unfortunately, the continuation of conflict and insecurity and the increased level of attacks on civilians, civilian places, mosques and religious minority groups have resulted in high numbers of civilian casualties and IDPs. The number of civilian casualties last year stood at 11,212, which was a 19 per cent increase. The Taliban and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) remain the main groups inflicting civilian casualties; in some cases, the Afghan security forces and their international partners are also involved.

There must be a mechanism in place to heal the pain and wounds of victims. We need strong institutions and measures in place to prevent the reoccurrence of violence and gross human rights violations. Economic development is key to facilitating and maintaining

long-term peace. Economic opportunities must be created and must benefit women, youth and the poor without discrimination. The prosperity and well-being of women and the poor are requirements for lasting peace and stability.

Progress in Afghanistan towards the holding of free and fair elections is also key to stability and security. The presidential election is set to be held in September. The commitment and cooperation of all candidates, political parties and civil society on monitoring, observing and facilitating a free and fair election is very important to the legitimacy of the election. I would also like to call on the Government and the international community to support free and fair elections by refraining from interference, safeguarding voter safety and security and providing financial support for a civic awareness programme. I am happy to say that the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, with the support of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, will monitor political rights through the human rights framework. The Commission will continue to verify rights to the freedoms of expression, association and movement, as well as closely monitor the four principles of impartiality, no interference, no intimidation and no discrimination.

Torture is a serious human rights violation and should not be allowed under any circumstance — against anyone or by anyone. Afghan special forces recently rescued several hundreds of prisoners held by the Taliban. Reports show that the Taliban have systematically tortured, mistreated or killed detainees and prisoners. I condemn torture. The perpetrators of torture should be held accountable. Despite the decrease in the number of torture cases in the detention facilities run by the Government, we still remain concerned about the situation and a lack of accountability in that regard.

Civil society and human rights defenders play important roles in the promotion and protection of human rights, fostering democracy and holding the State accountable. They face enormous challenges, including with regard to security and shrinking space for their activities and programmes. Support for civil society and human rights defenders must be in place and sustained.

I also would like to brief the Council on the situation of justice, accountability, the rule of law and anti-corruption efforts. Despite some improvements, the situation still needs political will, investment,

capacity-building and public awareness. Holding the perpetrators of human rights violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity accountable has been proving hard for our national judiciary mechanisms. The decision of the International Criminal Court to initiate an investigation of the situation in Afghanistan created some hope last year, although that hope faded away when the Pre-Trial Chamber rejected the Prosecutor's request for an investigation. Ending the culture of impunity is key for building confidence between people and the State, which, in turn, is necessary to facilitate the peace process. Access to justice is not a luxury; it is a basic human right.

With regard to accountability for cases of corruption, some progress has been made. Although many officials were successfully prosecuted, the public perception has remained sceptical regarding the progress; there are concerns that prosecutions have been selective and only against those who do not have a strong political base. I hope further actions will be taken to improve the administration of justice and change public perception.

Last year, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission conducted research on racial discrimination. More than 20 per cent of Afghans felt they were discriminated against. It is important to improve the sense of social justice and inclusion so that everyone feels equal and no one is left behind — politically, economically or socially.

The millions of children attending schools is a critical sign of progress in the country. However, many children continue to suffer from being forced out of schools and from child labour and different kinds of abuse. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission's national inquiry on child labour shows that little has been done to protect children from child labour and that they are exposed to violence and harassment. The Taliban and ISIS continue to use children in conflict and to target girls' schools.

Allow me to talk about the millions of people with disabilities or addicted to drugs in Afghanistan. While they constitute a large proportion of the population, they suffer from neglect, a lack of support and social security, and discrimination. We must work towards the full realization of their rights. I would like to call on the Government to allocate an adequate portion of the budget to supporting people with disabilities and addictions so as to rehabilitate and reintegrate them into society.

Finally, while all parties should agree on a ceasefire to end civilian suffering, and while the war must end, healing the wounds and giving attention to the victims of the conflict must be priorities for the Afghan Government and the international community in order to avoid the continuation of revenge and violence. Accountability and justice include not only criminal justice but also the establishment of a realistic mechanism to promote lasting reconciliation.

I would like to call on the Security Council and the United Nations to step up efforts to safeguard lasting peace and democratic and human rights norms in the country. It is necessary to engage all ethnic, religious and civil society groups — in particular women, youth and victims in a meaningful way — in the planning, negotiation and implementation of a peace plan for Afghanistan. No one should feel threatened or left outside of the process, and all realistic and legitimate expectations and concerns must be effectively addressed. Transparency in the peace process is needed to increase the support of the public for the process and reduce suspicion among the different ethnic groups.

We should learn lessons from the Afghan conflict and peace deals over the past 40 years, as well as from other peace processes around the world, including the refusal to sacrifice accountability and justice for a short-term political deal. We need to have patience and a comprehensive strategy for peacebuilding. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission issued a report in 2004 entitled *A Call for Justice*, based on the national consultation on transitional justice. I would like to request that the United Nations support the next stage of the transitional justice process to address the people's desire for peace, justice and reconciliation. Peace, security and sustainable development are not possible without the promotion and protection of and respect for human rights, which are a shared responsibility of Afghans and the international community.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Ms. Samar for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mrs. Raz (Afghanistan): Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, as the representative of the brotherly nation of the State of Kuwait, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of June. We are pleased that Ambassador

Yamamoto is here with us today and would like to thank him for his dedicated efforts in Afghanistan as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. I am glad to see Ms. Sima Samar briefing us today. She is doing important work as the Chairperson of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission.

Today's meeting on the situation in Afghanistan comes at a crucial moment, as we are engaged in the delicate task of carefully steering two important national processes, namely, the election and the peace talks. We wish to end the decades-long conflict by means of a comprehensive settlement, accepted by all Afghans, and a presidential election to consolidate and ensure the continuity of democracy, governance and the rule of law in our society. At this critical juncture, we are confident that both of those objectives can be attained with adequate international support and with patience and commitment.

First, on peace efforts, the National Unity Government has long believed that the prospect of peace can be achieved only through a process that enjoys the support and consensus of all Afghans. The momentum for peace has grown stronger as a result of increased engagement and activities in Afghanistan and abroad. Last month, a consultative *loya jirga* on peace brought together 3,200 elected members from across the country, including members of political parties, tribal and religious figures, women, youth and civil society, to build consensus and create a mandate for peace talks with the Taliban. Women and young people played a prominent role in the *jirga*, as women led 13 of the 50 working committees and comprises 30 per cent of all participants.

The outcome was the adoption of a declaration that created the parameters and a road map for talks with the Taliban. The declaration called for an immediate and permanent ceasefire; respect for the values and essence of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan; the preservation of democratic gains and the constitutional rights of people, especially women; the start of direct peace talks between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban; the preservation and strengthening of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces; the continuation of support from the international community; and a realistic timetable for a responsible withdrawal of international security forces.

Protecting the essence of our Constitution, especially equal rights for men and women and human

rights, is the core element of today's Afghanistan and a strong desire of the Afghan people. Therefore, we should ensure that the outcome of any potential agreement will only retain, expand and strengthen women's right for the purpose of a sustainable and durable peace.

For our part, we continue to stand ready to engage in comprehensive talks that reflect the views and overall position of the people of Afghanistan. We thank all our international partners, from within the region and beyond, for supporting our efforts for a durable, dignified and lasting peace. In that regard, we highlight the efforts of the United States and other partners in support of peace, including the recent decision of the Government of Germany to take a more proactive role in peace efforts and in helping to facilitate direct talks, which we sincerely hope will take place very soon.

The best measure of progress in advancing peace negotiations is not only the extent to which the Taliban reduces its violence, but rather that they cease it entirely through a permanent ceasefire, and their decision to engage in direct talks with the Government. The intra-Afghan dialogue is a good start towards direct discussions.

We also must not forget the important role that the region can play in facilitating direct peace negotiations for a successful agreement. Building a regional consensus for peace has been vital to Afghanistan, and to achieve that the Government has taken various steps in reaching out to the region to build greater engagement and establish the needed consensus.

The commitment of the Afghan Government to peace is clear and genuine. That is demonstrated by the Government's decision to release nearly 900 Taliban prisoners following the Eid religious holiday as part of the demands from the participants in the peace *jirga* and as a confidence-building measure.

Unfortunately, actions taken so far by the Taliban fail to signify even the slightest degree of commitment to peace. Not very long ago, the Taliban announced their spring offensive campaign and started to attack civilians while their representatives were engaged in peace negotiations. That is further evidenced by new attacks during the month of Ramadan against ordinary Afghans, civilians and religious figures who were denouncing violence and spreading the message of peace in different parts of the country.

The Taliban has also attacked and killed many humanitarian aid and medical workers. They have restricted the movement and activities of many aid organizations, including the World Health Organization and the International Committee of the Red Cross, and have vowed to continue their attacks on aid agencies. During the three-day Eid holiday, at least 30 people were killed in approximately 23 Taliban attacks in Logar, Helmand, Baghlan and Kapisa provinces. These attacks unfortunately reconfirm the group's desire to manipulate a genuine offer for a peaceful settlement to the conflict.

We believe that only a dual-track approach of pressure and incentives can ensure a conducive environment for a successful outcome. The attacks represent a violation of international humanitarian law, and any degree of passivity from any of us can lead to the misunderstanding of weakness and space for the group to dictate the terms of the negotiations.

Despite the continued attacks, our security forces have repulsed the Taliban's spring offensive and prevented the group from capturing territory. According to the latest joint Government committee report, from 85 to 90 per cent of productive territory, including natural resources, highways and other infrastructures, are under Government control.

To further deter the extremist elements, our security forces were able to clear the Taliban presence in Deh-Yak and Khwaja Omani districts of Ghazni province over the past several weeks. That was achieved not only due to the professionalism and bravery of our forces but also in part due to the ongoing efforts to reform the security sector to make it more streamlined and effective.

Meanwhile, facing defeat in the battlefield, the Taliban have sought to compensate setbacks with a renewed focus on attacking soft targets, using civilian compounds as shelters, leading to an increase in civilian casualties and the waging of a psychological warfare through terror and destruction. We are documenting changing battle tactics by the Taliban in incorporating a more heinous strategy by planting improvised explosive devices and other explosives in civilian spaces, including targeting schools. A recent example is the ongoing fighting in the Baharak district in Takhar province, where the Taliban have used civilian houses as shields and have prevented people from even leaving their houses.

Civilian protection remains a high priority at the highest levels of our Government. We have taken institutional measures to avoid collateral damage, which include close coordination with the international forces during security operations and accountability for incidents resulting from actions that deviate from standard rules of engagement. We continue to take concrete steps to ensure the physical protection and well-being of children, including preventing any recruitment of child soldiers in our security forces, through our revised penal code, which criminalizes such activities.

The emergence of a democratic political order through a democratic process chosen by the people of Afghanistan is among our most significant achievements over the past 18 years. When using the term "we," I am not referring solely to the people of Afghanistan, but rather I am speaking in the context of the collective efforts and sacrifices that all of us in the Council have made. Less than two months ago, President Ghani inaugurated our new Parliament in the presence of its members and representatives of the international community. Looking ahead, our people's approach to the future includes the expectation that nothing outside of the democratic order can determine our political destiny.

Therefore, despite all the challenges, we will make sure to hold presidential elections in September of this year. We are fully aware that the task will not be an easy one. At the same time, we are confident in being able to fulfil it successfully, with support from the international community and our friends and allies. We have begun security and technical arrangements for the elections and are in discussions with our international partners on various aspects of the process. We welcome the appointment of the United Nations advisers who will serve as international commissioners in the Independent Election Commission to provide technical support. We will spare no effort whatsoever to ensure a credible, transparent and inclusive electoral process to meet the demands of our people and our political stability.

The gains of the past 18 years also include the emergence of a dynamic and committed young generation. This generation is increasingly taking charge of the country's future. The resilient role of Afghan women as agents of change, progress and transformation has been a fundamental part of that new dynamic. Women's contributions and leadership have reached new heights, as public servants across the

Government and in the private sector. For the first time, the heads of the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission are both women.

To consolidate those gains, promote and protect the rights of women and incorporate women's voices in the peace and security agenda, we look forward to working with a broad set of partners through the group of friends of Women of Afghanistan here in New York, which we will soon launch in partnership with the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom. I would like to sincerely thank Ambassador Pierce for her commitment to this cause. We look forward to benefiting from the Council's support for the group's activities.

The new Afghanistan is also starting to emerge as catalyst for economic and regional cooperation. That is best demonstrated by the implementation of several mega-regional projects, under our Afghan-led Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan platform, which will yield economic dividends beyond our immediate region, and the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process. Through increased trade, investment, infrastructure and development, we are moving in the direction of sustainable growth.

To conclude, I would like to quote one of the participants at the consultative peace jirga, who said that "no one wins in war as no one loses in peace." Therefore, securing tangible and durable peace that is acceptable to the people of Afghanistan is an imperative to make sure that our country will move forward, not backwards. Together with our friends and allies, we stand at an important crossroads where a collective and unified approach will enable us to achieve our strategic objectives of a peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to draw the attention of speakers to paragraph 22 of presidential note S/2017/507, which encourages all participants in Council meetings to deliver their statements in five minutes or less, in line with the Security Council's commitment to making more effective use of open meetings.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Schulz (Germany): Let me first thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tadamichi Yamamoto and Ms. Sima Samar for their insightful briefings, as well as the Permanent Representative of

Afghanistan for her statement. We also thank Special Representative Yamamoto and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for their ongoing efforts to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan. We will continue to support those efforts actively.

Special Representative Yamamoto's briefing and the Secretary-General's recent report (S/2019/493) illustrate the challenges but also the opportunities that Afghanistan will face in the next few weeks and months. As second-largest donor and troop contributor, Germany remains firmly committed to Afghanistan. Of course, we also look forward to providing UNAMA with a strong and concise mandate in September.

As Special Representative Yamamoto said, the road to peace is still a long one. However, at the same time, the current momentum in the peace process to find a negotiated settlement creates an opportunity that must be seized. We applaud the courageous efforts of the Afghan Government and the international initiatives in that respect. It is now urgent to move forward to intra-Afghan talks, which must include the Afghan Government and the Taliban, as well as other key Afghan stakeholders, including the sizeable representation of women.

Germany stands ready to contribute to these efforts. In close consultation with the United States and other partners, over the past couple of weeks Germany has explored the possibilities of holding an intra-Afghan dialogue conference together with Qatar in Doha. The aim of that dialogue would be to catalyse a comprehensive intra-Afghan negotiation process. We have received great support for our proposal from the Afghan Government, as well as from other key political actors and civil society representatives in Afghanistan. Obstacles remain, but we will continue our efforts. We are grateful for the support of Special Representatives Yamamoto and the Member States around this table.

A political process in Afghanistan has a chance of success only if the international community acts in unison and sends the clear message to the Afghan parties, including the Taliban, that it is time to talk about a common future. In the end, only Afghans themselves can forge a broad and sustainable agreement. That will require a lot of work, time and compromise on all sides.

The meaningful inclusion of women will remain essential during those talks. In that context, we welcome the participation of women in the loya jirga

and through their own consultative process. We reiterate the importance of increasing the full and effective participation and leadership of women in decision-making, including overall peacebuilding strategies at the national and sub-national levels.

A sustainable peace process must ensure the continuity and stability of State institutions and the Constitution, as well as the protection of human and women's rights and freedoms. The Security Council can play an important role in clearly communicating its expectations in that regard.

I would like to make some brief remarks about the upcoming presidential elections. In order to avoid a constitutional vacuum, it will be important that presidential elections are held in a timely, fair and democratic manner. It is crucial to draw the right lessons from the parliamentary elections in that context.

I have two final comments on issues that were raised in the earlier presentations and briefings.

First, the effects of climate change continue to hit Afghanistan in a very severe way. Be it droughts or flash floods, they are all symptoms of a larger problem that affects all of us. But, in a country hit by violent conflict and poverty, its consequences can be even more devastating and further aggravate the security situation. On 4 June, Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Zaman took part in the Berlin Climate and Security Conference and underlined the importance that Afghanistan attaches to the problem.

Finally, as mentioned by both the Special Representative and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan anti-corruption measures should be expanded in line with the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework and the post-Geneva process. The recent UNAMA report on Afghanistan's fight against corruption outlined some welcome steps and remaining challenges in terms of law enforcement in that regard.

Mr. Syihab (Indonesia): We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Ambassador Tadamichi Yamamoto, as well as Ms. Sima Samar, Chairperson of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, for their briefings. Let me also welcome the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan and thank her for her statement.

We also commend the entire UNAMA team for its indispensable work in supporting the Government and the people of Afghanistan in their pursuit of progress with regard to development, the rule of law, human rights and the political, security and humanitarian fronts. As UNAMA has shown, it is crucial that the support of the United Nations and other partners be in line with the aspirations of Afghan people. Indonesia wishes to emphasize three main points in response to the very important matters raised by the briefers.

First, a free and fair presidential election should be held without further delay. The presidential election in September will renew the hopes of the people, who must determine their future freely and fairly in a moment of unity. We are happy to note that the preparations for the presidential electoral process are at the centre of the priorities of the Government of Afghanistan and UNAMA's activities. Although there have been delays, we are pleased that, for the first time since 2011, a new Parliament was inaugurated. The Secretary-General's report (S/2019/493) contains numerous encouraging milestones, one of which is that both the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission elected women as Heads. Indonesia applauds the greater and more meaningful participation of women in various nation-building processes in Afghanistan.

Secondly, improving security and stability in Afghanistan is imperative. Even though there was a decrease in security-related incidents as compared with the same period in 2018, the security situation remains volatile. It is regrettable that the Taliban announced their annual spring offensive in the midst of an ongoing peace process. Indonesia has always believed that a military solution is never an option for ending conflict, as it only further victimizes innocent civilians and disrupts sorely needed stabilization efforts from taking root. It is therefore essential to hold safe elections and ensure that all Afghans are involved in taking their country forward. That would be in the interests of the Taliban as well. We underline that Afghanistan must not be used by violent extremist groups to jeopardize regional stability.

Thirdly, everyone must work hard for the success of the peace process. There has been a robust international effort to support peace in Afghanistan, but in the end peace will be possible only if all Afghans own those efforts and exercise their political will for a democratic

and united Afghanistan. That will require an Afghan-led and -owned peace process with intra-Afghan dialogue.

Indonesia stresses the need for the meaningful involvement of all Afghans, including women and youth. The more the different segments of Afghan society can come together in nation-building, the stronger their prospects for a united, prosperous and peaceful future. In that connection, Indonesia will continue to offer its concrete support to Afghanistan, including through multifaceted capacity-building and training programmes, as well as meetings of religious scholars that disseminate how terrorism has no place in religion. Indonesia has also reiterated its readiness to host direct talks between the different Afghan parties. We will continue to make efforts to spawn an intra-Afghan peace dialogue.

Let me conclude by underlining the responsibility of everyone to play their role responsibly and fully to help Afghans carve out the promising future that they so deserve.

Mr. Mabhongo (South Africa): Please allow me to begin by thanking Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and Ms. Sima Samar, Chairperson of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, for their briefings. We also acknowledge the presence of the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan.

South Africa expresses its full support for Mr. Yamamoto and commends the efforts of the men and women of UNAMA, who have been vital in supporting efforts for achieving peace and security in Afghanistan, particularly by strengthening the capabilities, capacities and professionalism of Afghanistan's electoral and monitoring bodies. In that regard, my delegation welcomes the recent inauguration of the new Afghan Parliament.

During this meeting, I would like to address three issues — first, the election process; secondly, national and international initiatives; and, lastly, the increased violence in Afghanistan.

We look forward to the presidential elections that will take place in September and encourage all parties to work together to ensure that the elections commence as planned and mandated by the Afghan Constitution. South Africa reiterates its support for the electoral

reform process in Afghanistan, as that will ensure that the upcoming elections are credible, timely, inclusive, fair and free, and safe and transparent for all the people of Afghanistan. The elections are an essential step towards renewing the trust of the Afghan people and towards a stable, peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan.

With regard to national and international initiatives, my delegation welcomes the recent efforts towards reconciliation and dialogue. The *loya jirga*, which brought together politicians, tribal elders and other prominent people with the unified goal of finding a path towards peace talks with the Taliban, was encouraging. We hope that the 23-point plan will deliver on the aspirations of the people of Afghanistan.

The participation of civil society and women's groups is particularly useful in ensuring that all sectors of Afghan society have a voice in an inclusive peace process. We wish to reiterate that only with full and inclusive participation can there be long-term sustainable peace in Afghanistan and the region as a whole. We hope that all-inclusive talks among all the relevant national stakeholders will continue.

The third point I would like to raise is our concern about the high level of violence and terrorist attacks in parts of Afghanistan, in particular the indiscriminate attacks against civilians, including the use of improvised explosive devices, suicide attacks and assassinations. Lingering violence could undermine the progress already made in the security and political spheres, especially following the *loya jirga* and in the run-up to the presidential elections. The violence also aggravates the already fragile humanitarian situation.

Restrictions to humanitarian access and attacks against health and educational facilities are of particular concern. That particularly affects the most vulnerable in Afghan society — women, children and people living with disabilities. In that regard, South Africa also calls on all parties to ensure the protection of women and children, particularly from sexual and gender-based violence. My delegation continues to condemn the unlawful recruitment and use of children in armed forces and groups, and calls for their release and reintegration into Afghan society. All parties to the conflict must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

In conclusion, South Africa welcomes all international engagement in support of a long-lasting,

durable peace in Afghanistan. However, we believe that all efforts in that regard should be well-coordinated and complementary to the current Afghan processes in order to find a lasting solution. We remain convinced that the only long-term solution for the situation is a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and -owned political process towards the peaceful resolution of the conflict and an inclusive political settlement.

Mr. Hunter (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his remarks today. Under his leadership, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continues to provide vital support to Afghanistan. I also want to thank Ms. Samar for her informative briefing today.

The United States is committed to sustainable peace in Afghanistan that ensures that it will never again be a platform for transnational terrorism. Special Representative Khalilzad is working in close coordination with President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah and other Afghan leaders, as well as Special Representative Yamamoto and Security Council members. Special Representative Khalilzad looks forward to briefing the Council soon. Today I would like to update the Council on the progress that has been made towards peace.

As the Council is aware, in January the United States and the Taliban reached an agreement in principle that any comprehensive peace agreement must address four interconnected issues — counter-terrorism, the presence of foreign troops, an intra-Afghan dialogue leading to intra-Afghan negotiations, and a permanent ceasefire. Regarding terrorism, we have made progress and may soon be in a position to conclude a draft text outlining the Taliban's commitments to ensuring that Afghan soil is never again used for international terrorism. Of course, we have to be mindful of the implementation and enforcement of those counter-terrorism commitments.

In the light of the progress on ensuring that Afghan soil is not used for international terrorism, the time will soon come to begin discussions with the Taliban on the issue of the foreign military presence, which will continue to be based on conditions. The United States has made it clear to the Taliban that it is prepared to reduce its forces. However, we have not agreed to numbers or a timeline with the Taliban. The final disposition of foreign forces will be determined with the post-peace Government. In parallel to our

discussions with the Taliban, we are conducting detailed discussions with the Afghan Government. We are fully aligned in our approach, including on the importance of the Taliban committing to a reduction in violence leading to a permanent ceasefire. The Afghans demand and deserve an end to the violence. Let me outline what we see as a way forward.

First, all parties agree that finalizing a United States-Taliban understanding on terrorism and the foreign-troop presence will open the door for an intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations. To that end, we welcome Germany's commitment, together with Qatar, to convene an intra-Afghan dialogue in Doha in early July, which will be an opportunity for Afghans to endorse the urgent need for intra-Afghan negotiations. Simultaneously, the United States is laying the groundwork for intra-Afghan negotiations to begin as soon as possible. Their objective is for the Afghans to agree on a timeline and a political road map for reaching a comprehensive peace agreement. The United States joins other countries in supporting Afghans' desire for a peace that sustains the social and human rights gains of the past 18 years. We insist, and indeed we should all insist, that women, minorities and other groups be represented in those talks. Additionally, the United States is consulting with the region on how it can support peace. The trilateral consensus issued by the United States, Russia and China and the principles issued by the United States-Europe group are important steps forward.

The United States claims no monopoly on the diplomacy of peace. We thank Ambassador Djani and the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) for supporting a temporary travel-ban exemption for select individuals, and a corresponding limited asset-freeze exemption, in order to facilitate the intra-Afghan talks. We encourage Member States to fully implement their sanctions obligations in support of peace in Afghanistan.

Peace remains our priority. At the same time, we believe that election planning must go forward as we pursue the peace that Afghans deserve. Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission has announced that the presidential election will be held on 28 September. We urge the Afghan Government, the Election Commission and all political stakeholders to take the necessary steps to ensure that the election is credible. The preparations for it include completing voter registration, refining the voter list, printing ballots and

recruiting and training poll workers. The United States is providing financial and technical assistance through the United Nations Development Programme and other partners to the Election Commission and will continue to do so.

Lastly, the United States views the United Nations Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB) as an important tool for coordination between the Afghan Government and donors. We call on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the Afghan Government to ensure that the JCMB maintains a robust performance and accountability component. We also request that UNAMA and the Afghan Government prepare a report on performance and accountability ahead of the September Security Council meeting on Afghanistan, which should include an overview of the JCMB discussions on anti-corruption, Government accountability and ongoing efforts to ensure fair and credible elections.

I want to repeat once again that peace is our highest priority. Thanks to the efforts of many Security Council members, that goal is within reach. Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, and the peace process will end only when Afghans reach a comprehensive understanding on a political road map to end the war. We are committed to providing future updates.

Mr. Lewicki (Poland): I thank Special Representative Yamamoto, Ms. Samar and Ambassador Raz for their contributions.

Poland is of the view that the interests of all Afghans, including women, young people and minorities, should be taken into account in the cause of the peace process. We also strongly believe that peace should not come at the cost of the progress that has been made in the area of human rights, particularly women's rights, in the past few years.

The coming months will be essential to addressing the shortcomings of the electoral process and the lessons learned in order to ensure credibility and transparency and preserve the inclusivity of the political process during the preparations for the presidential elections. Strong measures that will preserve the safety, transparency, accountability and credibility of the ballot must be taken, and taken swiftly.

We remain deeply concerned about the security situation in Afghanistan. We reiterate our call to all parties to protect the civilian population, especially

women and children. Conflict-related violence must not destroy another generation's livelihood, homes and property, displacing families and limiting access to education, health care and other services. We were very pleased to hear from Ms. Samar about the progress that has been made with regard to persons with disabilities.

We support and participate in the NATO Resolute Support Mission, aimed at providing further training, advice and assistance to the Afghan security forces and institutions.

As other delegations mentioned, we believe that the fight against corruption must continue and must deliver concrete results, which will help maintain and increase people's confidence in the Afghan State and institutions. The same applies to the protection of human rights, with a particular focus on areas such as the elimination of violence against women, the protection of children and the prevention of torture and ill treatment.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm Poland's acknowledgement of the crucial role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and all the relevant United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people. Poland remains committed to supporting the Afghan people, UNAMA and international partners in achieving a democratic and self-sustaining Afghanistan.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting. We thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing and his analysis of the processes currently unfolding in Afghanistan. We also listened carefully to the statements by Mrs. Raz, the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, and Ms. Samar. We share the Ambassador's assessments and listened attentively to Ms. Samar. We agree with many of the opinions in the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/493), and would like to make the following points.

We support the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and believe it has an important role to play in coordinating the international humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. We greatly appreciate the work and selfless efforts of United Nations personnel in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. We hope that in the future the United Nations evaluations of the situation in the country will continue to be based on the principle of impartiality and an accurate identification of the country's current

challenges, first among them being terrorism. It is unacceptable to pass over that in silence or to try to embellish the reality.

We are concerned about the ongoing increase in terrorist activity, the continued presence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Afghanistan and its ability to survive even after various defeats in the north, indeed on the contrary to strengthen its ranks by recruiting foreign terrorist fighters fleeing Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq, as well as members of other terrorist groups, of which there are more than 20 in Afghanistan. We can see that the Islamic State has not only refused to abandon its expansionist ambitions but is consistently working to realize them, including by establishing branches and sleeper cells, and including in northern Afghanistan. That poses a real threat to the security of our friends in Central Asia and the southern regions of Russia. Against that background, the consensus decision of the Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities, chaired by Indonesia, to list ISIL-Khorasan Province was timely. Although an important step, it is not sufficient on its own and should be followed by practical measures within the United Nations to eradicate that terrorist threat. And we are naturally very concerned about the major terrorist acts that regularly occur in various cities in Afghanistan, including the capital. Besides civilians, including women and children, Afghan soldiers and police officers are dying every day at the hands of terrorists. We pay tribute to their heroism and courage.

We are especially focused on the fight against drug trafficking in Afghanistan. The drug threat continues to be a serious problem for the region, for peace and for Afghanistan itself. The revenue it generates provides terrorism with significant financial support. We believe it is extremely important to continue to strengthen international efforts to combat this scourge. As with any global threat, overcoming the challenges presented by narcotics requires broad collective cooperation, including through specialized entities. We remain committed to helping to comprehensively combat this threat, with the participation of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, among others. Our practical steps are also in line with that approach, including through regional authorities such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). We will continue to contribute

to training narcotics police from Afghanistan, Pakistan and the countries of Central Asia in cooperation with many States around the world, including Japan.

Russia has consistently supported the desire of the Afghan people to entrench lasting peace in their country. This year Russia and Afghanistan are celebrating the centenary of their establishment of diplomatic relations. Our countries are indeed linked by a rich history of mutual respect, good-neighbourliness and cooperation whose foundation was laid back in 1919. As was the case 100 years ago, today we are driven by the desire to help Afghanistan become a peaceful, independent State, free from terrorism and drugs. We intend to continue to work with our Afghan friends on eliminating security threats, particularly from ISIL and Al-Qaida, and strengthening the capacity of civil, security and anti-drug structures.

We are sincerely interested in seeing a national reconciliation process, and the country's subsequent stabilization, take place as soon as possible, led by the Afghans themselves. We believe firmly that everyone — Afghanistan, its neighbours in the region and the world at large — wins when there is peace, stability and national reconciliation. We are ready to continue our full cooperation in furthering the process of national reconciliation, and that purpose is what guides us in implementing our own efforts in that area. With that in mind, we held a second meeting of the Moscow consultations format, with major participation by interested parties.

We support a policy of making the upcoming peace process in Afghanistan as inclusive as possible, involving all the country's social and political forces, including the opposition. We believe that a broad dialogue is key to achieving peace in Afghanistan. In that regard, we support the continuation of the inter-Afghan dialogue launched in Moscow in February, especially since the meeting displayed all Afghans' genuine interest and desire to achieve peace and reconciliation. We assume that the various international actors who have decided to showcase their efforts in the area of national reconciliation in Afghanistan will play by the same rules and take into account of the gains already made in the Moscow format and the trilateral dialogue between Russia, the United States and China. What is needed is cooperation, not artificial competition, and that is what Afghanistan wants, too.

We want to point to the world's growing understanding of the importance that the regional context also has for an Afghan settlement, and the need in that regard to harness the potential of proven bodies, particularly the CSTO and the SCO. We want to highlight the revived mechanism of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group. We were pleased that Afghanistan participated as Chair in the Contact Group's meeting in Bishkek this spring. We see good potential for strengthening the cooperation between Afghanistan and the CSTO. After years of conflict, the efforts to reach a settlement in Afghanistan require engagement and constructive dialogue among all its neighbours, and there should be no exceptions. We believe there is no alternative to that, for only good-neighbourliness, collaboration and cooperation will make it possible to resolve the acute problems of Afghanistan today. It will be vital to ensure that the international and regional efforts are aligned.

The quest for peace in Afghanistan requires strategic patience in order to ensure that the formula for a final settlement, designed to result in a comprehensive agreement, not only promotes national reconciliation among all patriotic political forces, but also unites them on a platform of reconstruction for Afghanistan and collective opposition to terrorist entities, of which the country has more than 20, including the Islamic State and Al-Qaida. We are confident that once Afghans are united they will be able to end that threat and put the country on a path to sustainable development, which has to be the basis for the prosperity of all its citizens, including women, as well for strengthening the democratic foundations of Afghan society.

We firmly believe that the defining criterion for all peace initiatives and for the elections planned for September must be the goal of uniting the entire country and all Afghans, without exception. Without it, the conflict will only worsen. The task is to maintain a united and indivisible Afghanistan where tolerance prevails and its many ethnic groups coexist in peace and harmony. Based on those principles, and those principles alone, we are open to cooperate with regional and international partners.

Ms. Batista Díaz (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we would like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto and Ms. Samar for their valuable briefings, and to welcome the Ambassador of Afghanistan to this debate.

Events relating to the elections and the peace process have dominated the political situation in Afghanistan. In that regard, we welcomed the conclusion of the parliamentary elections, which have enabled a new Parliament to be inaugurated for the first time since 2011. We hope that the instability resulting from the various complaints and irregularities that were seen during the elections will be overcome. It will be crucial to ensure that the next elections are credible and legitimate and that all stakeholders involved take to heart the lessons learned during the parliamentary elections.

With regard to the security situation, we are concerned about the increase in both the number of victims of aerial and search operations and the use of improvised explosive devices by anti-Government elements. The announcements of offensive operations by both the Government and the Taliban are also alarming. We urge both the Government and the Taliban to continue with initiatives such as the unilateral ceasefire of last June, which raised hopes for peace among the Afghan people, as well as the April consultations of the *loya jirga* on peace, which laid a foundation for peace talks without preconditions, a ceasefire, respect for human rights and the right of women to participate in the peace process, among other positive initiatives establishing a road map for future negotiations.

We applaud the initiatives of international and regional actors in calling for an intra-Afghan dialogue and encourage the continuation of the talks that have been held in Moscow, Doha, London and Washington, in support of a process led and defined by the Afghans. We also welcome the upcoming meetings in the context of this process that are scheduled to take place shortly in Germany.

We wish also to acknowledge the progress that has been made in bolstering the level of participation of women in the peace process, in particular the holding of the national conference of Afghan women for peace and the degree of participation of women in the aforementioned *loya jirga*. We would like in particular to underscore the holding of a separate *loya jirga* in Shirzad district under the auspices of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, in which, for the first time, women played an active role in a *jirga* process in Afghanistan, leading to the adoption of regulations on water distribution.

As the Permanent Representative of Germany pointed out, also of concern is the humanitarian situation

resulting from the conflict and natural disasters. In Afghanistan more than 10 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, many of whom, like Tila, the mother of four children and a widow, survive thanks to the financial assistance provided by non-governmental organizations in the field, as well as those who have left their villages as a consequence of the conflict and the severe drought.

We wish also to reiterate our deep concern about the persistence of sexual violence against women and girls. We urge the Afghan authorities to promote measures that prohibit and punish these practices and to initiate investigations into such cases, including those in which the perpetrators are from the police or the military.

In conclusion, Afghanistan is at a critical juncture: on the one hand, an electoral process and emerging peace negotiations, and, on the other, a possible withdrawal of troops and a worsening of the security situation.

All efforts must be deployed so that the Afghan people can put an end to the instability and violence to which they have subjected for years. It is our duty to support them in this process, which must be Afghan-led and feature the participation of all social actors, especially women and young people.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): Allow me in turn to thank Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto, Ms. Sima Samar and Ambassador Adela Raz for their very enlightening briefings and their commitment to their respective roles in the promotion of peace and of the rights and respect for the freedoms of all Afghan men and women.

France aligns itself with the statement to be made later on behalf of the European Union.

I will make three observations.

The primary and fundamental urgent need is to redouble efforts to protect civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel, and to respond to humanitarian needs. The number of casualties, although it has decreased slightly compared with last year, is of particular concern. With 11,000 deaths in 2018, Afghanistan has the most civilian casualties of any conflict-affected country. The number of attacks against aid workers increased by more than 150 per cent in one year, and schools are also being targeted. This is unacceptable. It is imperative that all parties to the conflict respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, and France welcomes the efforts

undertaken by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in support of the Afghan authorities to limit the number of civilian casualties and minimize the impact of operations on civilians and their infrastructure.

France welcomes the laws and action plans adopted to protect children, which must be fully implemented and provide protection against the six serious violations. This must also be the case more broadly with regard to laws on the protection of women and children from violence, including sexual violence. It is vital that the capacities of the judiciary be strengthened in that respect.

As the Secretary-General notes in his report (S/2019/493), we must meet the growing humanitarian needs of the 6.3 million Afghans requiring assistance and ensure safe and unhindered humanitarian access throughout the country.

Secondly, our priority must be, now more than ever, to ensure the success of efforts to achieve a negotiated and lasting peace in Afghanistan. I commend the work carried out by several partners, including the United States, Qatar and Germany, which have engaged in discussions with the Taliban with a view to bringing them to engage in peace talks with the Afghan Government. France calls on the Taliban to immediately and concretely demonstrate its commitment to peace by accepting direct talks with the Afghan Government and declaring a ceasefire.

As the Special Representative recalled, the peace process must be inclusive, led by and for the Afghan people. It is crucial in this regard that women participate directly and meaningfully in peace talks at all levels of decision-making. The preservation and strengthening of the achievements made in the areas of justice, the rule of law and respect for rights and freedoms must remain a top priority, particularly concerning respect for the rights of women, respect for fundamental freedoms in particular, the freedoms of opinion and expression and the protection of journalists. Sacrificing those achievements could jeopardize the support, including financial support, of the international community for the ongoing process.

Finally, the third priority is to ensure the holding and smooth conduct of the presidential elections of 28 September, which must be free, transparent and inclusive. The weaknesses identified in previous elections must be remedied and preparations intensified.

The Independent Election Commission must continue to work to enable the widest possible participation of the people in the elections, including that of women as candidates and as voters.

Given the high level of threat, including in Kabul, poll security will also be a determining factor. We reiterate our full support for the Afghan security forces, whose efforts during the legislative elections were notable.

Allow me to conclude by recalling the vital role of the United Nations in continuing to support Afghanistan. In this regard, I wish to commend the outstanding work of UNAMA and of the various United Nations agencies in Afghanistan in a particularly difficult security context. In reviewing the mandate of the Mission, which we will be doing soon, we must not lose sight of the crucial work that it does on a daily basis. It is imperative that the international community, in particular the Security Council, remain united in supporting Afghanistan's journey towards peace, democracy and economic and social development.

Mrs. Van Vlierberge (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I should like in turn to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Yamamoto, for his briefing and for his tireless efforts to achieve a lasting peace in Afghanistan. I thank Ms. Sima Samar for her briefing and for her commitment to the promotion of women's rights in Afghanistan, and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for her statement.

Belgium aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

I will focus my remarks on three points: the peace process; elections; and the importance of the promotion and protection of human rights in Afghanistan.

First, concerning the peace process, Belgium welcomes the intensification of national and international efforts aimed at ending the lengthy and devastating conflict in Afghanistan. We believe that a lasting peace agreement can be achieved only through a comprehensive and inclusive intra-Afghan dialogue. To that end, we reiterate our call on the Taliban to engage in direct peace talks.

In particular, Belgium calls on all parties to promote the meaningful and equal participation of women at all stages of the peace process. Lasting peace begins with the appointment of a representative and inclusive negotiating team. In addition, we would

stress that any future peace agreement must preserve the political, economic and social gains of the past 18 years, especially concerning the rights of women, children and minorities.

We are fully aware of the fact that peacebuilding is a long-term process. For an agreement to be lasting, the international community must be united in its support. We call on all international partners to closely coordinate their efforts in order to launch an intra-Afghan dialogue and achieve an Afghan-directed and Afghan-led peace process.

My second point concerns the presidential elections announced for September 2019. Belgium stresses the need to learn from the elections held last year. Given the tight timetable, we call on all parties to work to restore confidence in the electoral process.

Elections are a responsibility shared by all political actors. I emphasize the importance of creating a favourable environment by avoiding political interference in the decisions of the election management bodies and engaging constructively so that the presidential elections are free, transparent and credible.

My last point concerns the human rights situation in Afghanistan. We listened carefully to the recommendations made by Ms. Samar. Belgium is deeply concerned by the impact of the armed conflict on the civilian population and in particular by the high number of civilian casualties. Belgium urges all parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and to take immediate steps to avoid loss of life.

With particular reference to the situation of violations of the rights of children, the Council awaits the submission of the country report to the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict later this year. Persistent violence against journalists and human rights defenders is also unacceptable. All parties to the conflict must comply with international standards for protection. We are further concerned by the reports of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the treatment of detainees linked to the conflict. Nearly one-third report credible accounts of torture or ill-treatment in detention. We welcome the steps taken by the Government in response and call for stronger accountability measures.

With regard to demining efforts, Belgium welcomes the Government's efforts to align national standards for the clearance of improvised objects that were abandoned with international best practices.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate my delegation's full support for the Afghan people and our strong commitment to an Afghan-led and Afghan-led peace process.

Mr. Sipaco Ribala (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and Ms. Sima Samar for their briefings and personal contributions to the achievement of peace and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Despite ongoing efforts at the national, regional and international levels towards a negotiated peace agreement, Afghanistan continues to face multiple and complex difficulties in terms of security, stability and development. Civilians continue to be the main victims of the high level of instability and violence affecting the country, and although the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/493) identifies a 23 per cent reduction in civilian victims compared with the same period in 2018, we still worry about the high number of civilian victims claimed by large-scale attacks perpetrated by anti-Government forces and terrorists, including those perpetrated with improvised explosive devices and suicide bombings, although there were fewer of the latter during the reporting period. Similarly, we are dismayed by the ongoing recruitment and kidnapping of and sexual violence against children, as well as attacks on schools and medical institutions, during the period covered by the report.

In that context, we condemn in the strongest terms the deliberate attacks throughout the holy month of Ramadan, during which civilians were deliberately attacked by anti-Government elements. We also condemn the 8 May attack on the staff of non-governmental organizations in Kabul; the 24 May murder of a religious scholar in a place of worship; the incidents of 27 May and 3 June, respectively, directed at civilian servants; and the attack of 2 June on Shiite students. We express our solidarity with the people and Government of Afghanistan for those losses. In that same vein, we echo the words of the Secretary-General's call on all parties to comply strictly with their obligations under international law and international

humanitarian law to take all possible measures to prevent attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure and the limitation of humanitarian access.

My delegation welcomes all efforts and initiatives of the Government of Afghanistan to make progress in the peace process, such as the formation of a leadership council for peace and a negotiating team that includes representatives of the political opposition and women, and the convening of a *loya jirga* for peace in Kabul on 29 April, among others. We encourage the Government of Afghanistan to pursue its efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace process, through direct talks between the parties involved, and inclusive and comprehensive talks among Afghans, with the participation of countries of the region. Likewise, we fully support the efforts of the international community, the countries of the region and UNAMA to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan in difficult conditions. As has always been pointed out in this Chamber, the strengthening of regional cooperation in all spheres, including in the political, economic, social and security spheres, is of vital importance and benefits the entire region.

We hope that the new composition of the electoral commissions — the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission — will enjoy the support of all involved and interested parties. After the lessons learned from the parliamentary elections held in October 2018, it is now a priority to ensure that the presidential elections of 28 September are transparent, credible and inclusive.

We have taken note of the progress made in achieving the meaningful participation of women, and we take this opportunity to celebrate the milestone of the election of two women as heads of the two electoral bodies. We have no doubt that with the support they deserve, they will do an excellent job. In that vein, we hope that the Government will continue to implement policies that guarantee the elimination of any persistent obstacle to the participation of women in all spheres of public and political life, and that their inclusion will be a non-negotiable priority.

In conclusion, allow me once again to express our full support for the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan to find lasting peace and stability, and to express our well-deserved praise and support for the important role that the personnel of UNAMA are playing, and in particular to Mr. Yamamoto for his

dedication to the promotion of peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes this briefing and thanks Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his comprehensive briefing on the activities of UNAMA and recent developments in the political and security situation in that country. We also thank Ms. Sima Samar, Chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, for her informative briefing.

My delegation notes with satisfaction the completion of the candidacy verification procedures by the Independent Election Commission, approximately three months before the presidential election in Afghanistan. We encourage the Independent Election Commission to continue to diligently register voters on the electoral lists with a view to organizing the election planned for 28 September, and to step up its efforts to raise the awareness of voters and political actors on the instructions for use and the guarantees offered by voting machines in order to avoid the malfunctions observed during the parliamentary elections of 20 October 2018.

My delegation believes that the progress made must be strengthened by the commitment of all stakeholders to creating an environment conducive to a free, transparent and credible presidential election. Côte d'Ivoire notes with concern the ongoing threats and deadly attacks by the Taliban and the local branch of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, which could have a negative impact on the turnout rate, as seen during the parliamentary elections. We therefore call on the international community and the troops of the Resolute Support Mission to be vigilant and take preventive security measures during this crucial electoral period for the country's future. Côte d'Ivoire also urges the candidates to refrain from any action likely to lead to tensions that could jeopardize the electoral process.

My country welcomes the appointment of women to head the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission by President Ashraf Ghani. It encourages the Afghan authorities to continue their efforts to increase the participation of women in institutions and the peace process, in accordance with the outcomes of the national conference held in Kabul on 12 December 2018.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the establishment of a leadership council for peace, whose task is to contribute to the restoration of stability in Afghanistan. The leadership council, together with the loya jirga consultative forum, should serve as crucial tools for strong national ownership of the process to emerge from the crisis.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes all initiatives aimed at facilitating dialogue among all Afghan parties. We would also like to stress the importance of the support of UNAMA and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for negotiations with the Taliban with a view to involving them in the peace process. My delegation also welcomes the efforts of the United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad, to initiate peace talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban.

My country remains concerned about the security and humanitarian situations in Afghanistan, where the widespread use of explosive devices and the systematic obstruction of humanitarian assistance in the Taliban-controlled provinces represent real challenges. To that end, my delegation welcomes the assistance that the United Nations and its partners are providing to the affected populations and urge the international community to continue its humanitarian financial support for Afghanistan.

The complexity of the multifaceted challenges facing Afghanistan, including the fight against corruption, terrorism and drug trafficking, requires the continued attention of the international community and significant support for the Afghan Government. Côte d'Ivoire also calls for the continued presence of the troops of the Resolute Support Mission and for the funding pledges for the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces until 2024 to be met.

The latest developments in the situation in Afghanistan give us reason to believe that political and security instability is not inevitable and that peace in the country is possible. That will be as a result of the will of the Afghans themselves to write a new page of peace and prosperity in their history.

In conclusion, my country expresses its support for the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the UNAMA staff, the United Nations specialized agencies, regional and international organizations and all partners working to restore peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would first like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his briefing and express our appreciation for his efforts and those of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I also thank Ambassador Raz, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, and Ms. Samar, Chairperson of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, for their statements.

China congratulates Afghanistan on the 100th anniversary of its independence and wishes the country stability and development as soon as possible and lasting peace in the future.

The situation in Afghanistan is now at a critical juncture. The general elections and the peace and reconciliation process are intertwined. The country's security situation is a cause for concern and its humanitarian situation remains challenging. The international community should earnestly fulfil its commitment by continuing its strong support for Afghanistan.

First, we should support Afghanistan in holding a safe and successful presidential election in September. We hope that the electoral institutions will learn from the experience and lessons of last year's parliamentary elections and make orderly preparations for the upcoming election. UNAMA must provide strong support in that regard. We hope that the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces will plan their deployment arrangements in advance to ensure security and stability in the election period. All political parties in Afghanistan should strengthen cooperation and resolve their differences related to the elections through dialogue.

Secondly, we should support the Afghan-owned and Afghan-led reconciliation process. Recently, the international community and countries of the region have made efforts to actively promote direct dialogue between the Afghan Government and the Taliban. The *loya jirga* consultations also yielded positive results. We call on all parties in Afghanistan to act for the greater benefit of the country and its people and to seize this significant opportunity for political reconciliation. We hope that UNAMA will support the Government's efforts to promote political dialogue and encourage the Taliban to promptly return to the negotiating table. The international community should push for an intra-Afghan dialogue as soon as possible.

Thirdly, the international community must support Afghanistan in building its capacity for combating terrorism and maintaining stability. Recently, the number of civilian casualties caused by the conflict in Afghanistan has decreased compared to the same period last year. However, the number of civilian deaths attributed to air strikes and search operations has increased while terrorist groups remain active.

China, the Russian Federation and the United States have recently reached trilateral consensus on the peace process in Afghanistan, calling for the orderly and responsible withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan. We hope that UNAMA will continue to help Afghanistan strengthen its security capacity. The international community should strengthen coordination and cooperation to support Afghanistan in its counter-terrorism efforts to effectively respond to terrorism, transnational crime and drug trafficking, among other threats.

Fourthly, we must effectively help to improve the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. Recently, conflict and natural disasters have led to a significant increase in the number of newly displaced people in Afghanistan, while millions of drought-affected Afghans still need humanitarian assistance. UNAMA should coordinate with the United Nations agencies in Afghanistan to help the Afghan people and Government eradicate poverty and improve people's livelihoods. The international community should honour its assistance pledges, help the people of Afghanistan seriously affected by natural disasters, improve the humanitarian situation of the Afghan refugees in the neighbouring countries and support their return to their homeland at an early date.

From 13 to 14 June, the 19th meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was held in Bishkek, the capital of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan. Afghan President Ghani attended the meeting. The SCO member States have always supported the efforts of the Afghan Government and people to rebuild peace and promote stable economic development. They reiterated their readiness to support the Afghan-owned and Afghan-led political reconciliation process bilaterally and as part of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group.

At the SCO summit, Chinese President Xi Jinping met with President Ghani. The two Heads of State had an extensive and in-depth exchange of views on

issues such as the reconciliation process, development of the Belt and Road Initiative and counter-terrorism cooperation and reached many important agreements. China and Afghanistan are old friends, close neighbours and strategic partners. China has consistently supported the Afghan reconciliation process and will continue to use channels such as the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group, the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' dialogue and the China-United States-Russian Federation consultations on Afghanistan to actively promote peace and encourage dialogue to help the Afghan people achieve intra-Afghan dialogue.

China actively supports Afghanistan's reconstruction and integration into regional economic development. From 25 to 27 April, the second Belt and Road Summit Forum for International Cooperation was successfully held in Beijing. The Afghan Government sent a delegation to the forum. In recent years, China and Afghanistan have continuously increased cooperation within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative and have achieved fruitful results.

China will continue to work with Afghanistan to further implement the Sino-Afghanistan Memorandum of Understanding on Joint Promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative and advance results-oriented cooperation across all sectors.

Lastly, I reaffirm that China stands ready to work with the wider international community to contribute to the security, stability, development and prosperity of Afghanistan.

Mr. Duclos (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Special Representative Yamamoto, Ms. Samar and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for their valuable briefings.

Peru has been keeping a close eye on the situation in Afghanistan, particularly the peace process, which has the potential to define the country's future in the medium and long terms, especially with respect to strengthening democracy. We therefore consider it crucial that the solution to the current crisis be engaged in the framework of the intra-Afghan dialogue and Afghan leadership. We agree that direct negotiations must be held between the Taliban and Government representatives. As the Special Representative reminded us, there is no substitute for the Afghan people.

In this context, we consider the recent convening of the *loya jirga* for peace in Kabul to be another

meaningful step, which brought together more than 3,000 delegates from across the country, including tribal leaders, and enjoyed the participation of a significant and commendable number of women. Its outcomes demonstrate the aspirations of the Afghan people and form the consensus-based framework for action aimed at achieving sustainable peace, the restoration of the rule of law, respect for human rights and the continuation of the reforms undertaken to date.

It is vital that the presidential elections scheduled for next September take place in a spirit of dialogue, tolerance and mutual respect. As Mr. Yamamoto explained, this is a shared responsibility. Given the existing technical and security difficulties, we must avoid any additional setbacks caused by political motivations or actions that cast doubt on the legitimacy of the electoral process.

We wish to express our deep concern about the precarious security situation. The deaths resulting from air strikes by forces linked to the Government have reached record levels, adding to the pain caused by ongoing indiscriminate terrorist attacks on civilians. We are particularly concerned by the presence of militants associated with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province who, given their association with drug trafficking, represent an additional example of the link between terrorism and organized crime, which can be classified as a regional threat. We consider it essential to intensify international efforts to combat these scourges, in close coordination with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

Likewise, it is imperative that all parties to the conflict respect their obligations under humanitarian law and the protection of civilians. We also underscore the importance of transitional justice and accountability in the current peace process, as highlighted by Ms. Samar. The unscrupulous actions of criminal groups must not go unpunished or be forgotten.

In another vein, Peru commends the recent headway made by the Government in the fight against corruption, as well as reforms in the justice sector and progress in the area of women's empowerment. In that regard, we welcome the steps taken to implement the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan and the election of two women as respective heads of the most important electoral bodies in Afghanistan. We are confident that women's participation, together with that of young people, in the political life of the country will

contribute to strengthening Afghanistan's capacities for prevention, peacebuilding and peacekeeping and the vital entrenchment of democracy in Afghan society.

I conclude by thanking Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto, as well as all United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan personnel, for their work, which we fully support.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): We welcome the Special Representative of the Secretary-General back to the Council and thank him for his briefing. We also thank our Afghan colleague for hers. I am very pleased to welcome Ms. Samar back to the Council; I knew her well when I was in Kabul two years after she became the first civil society briefer on Afghanistan. I think it is now more important than ever that we hear the very strong voice of civil society, and we thank her for all her work on this vital dossier.

The Afghan Ambassador already announced the joint initiative that Afghanistan and the United Kingdom have undertaken to launch a group of friends of women in Afghanistan. We are very proud to be part of this, as it is a very good joint initiative, if I may say so. The group will bring together women ambassadors and senior United Nations figures to work to highlight and protect the gains that Afghan women have achieved over the past 18 years. It is also a very good vehicle to give meaningful practical expression to resolution 1325 (2000) and to promote the participation of women in peace efforts and in public life.

As we all know, there are two main themes of today's debate: peace and elections. We, the United Kingdom, share the interest of other Council members in reiterating that a political solution is the only way to end the conflict. The ongoing efforts of the Afghan Government and the United States — in particular the United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad — are making important progress towards a sustainable peace process.

The United Kingdom fully supports all efforts to convene a genuine political process to give Afghans the chance to decide the future of their country. This will, naturally, require the full support of the region as well as the international community. I therefore hope we can stay united in a call for intra-Afghan peace negotiations without delay and with the full involvement of both sides to the conflict, and the legitimate Government of Afghanistan in particular.

I would like to echo what the Special Representative of the Secretary-General said about calling on Member States to use their influence to encourage the Taliban not only to show the leadership and foresight required to engage in talks, but also to take the practical steps that are undoubtedly required on the path to peace.

We have talked a little bit about women's participation. There is a lot of evidence of how important this is and, as efforts progress, we encourage women's involvement in all forums, whether they involve local or State-level negotiations in Kabul.

Turning to the elections, as many other speakers have highlighted today, these are crucial for future political stability. We know that the atmosphere is already charged, three months ahead of election day, so I would like to call on all political actors to behave responsibly and constructively for the sake of Afghanistan's stability. We encourage the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to redouble its efforts, with the Special Representative at the helm, to support and advise the election management bodies.

I would also like to take this opportunity to urge the Independent Election Commission to continue its work to deliver timely and credible elections on 28 September. As the Special Representative highlighted, the timeline is tight, meaning we need a sustained effort by everyone. We welcome the commitment to securing elections that Afghanistan Ambassador was able to set out today, and we urge the Afghan security forces to do their utmost to provide the conditions to allow the Afghan people to exercise their right to vote in safety.

A number of speakers have mentioned civilian casualties. We share the concern at the high level of civilian casualties, which underlines the human cost of the conflict. All parties need to take immediate measures to avoid the killing of innocent civilians, including women and children. The United Kingdom will continue to support the Afghan security forces in improving their capacity to provide security for the population and to implement the national policy on civilian casualty mitigation.

In conclusion, I would just like to reaffirm the United Kingdom's commitment to supporting the Government and people of Afghanistan in order to achieve a peaceful and prosperous future.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I will now speak in my national capacity.

At the outset, I would like to join other speakers in thanking Mr. Yamamoto and Ms. Samar for their briefings. I also thank the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for her contribution to our deliberations earlier in the meeting.

The State of Kuwait highly appreciates the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the vital role played by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Yamamoto. We also appreciate the contribution of all United Nations staff in Afghanistan, who make dedicated efforts to support the people of Afghanistan in difficult circumstances. We further commend the important role of the bodies and institutions of civil society in Afghanistan and their contributions in such areas as human rights and the fight against corruption.

We reiterate our congratulations to Afghanistan and its courageous people on the first parliamentary elections to be held since 2011. The Afghan people have faced many challenges and made major sacrifices in order to choose their representatives in Parliament, demonstrating their attachment to their political rights. We support the friendly Afghan people and encourage them to pursue the democratic process by holding presidential elections during this year. We are fully confident that the presidential elections, for which preparations have been diligent, will be crowned with success.

I fully agree with those who have spoken before me concerning the importance of the current political process, which requires all the wise and political leaders in Afghanistan to work in the national interest rather than for partisan gain in order to ensure that all Afghans enjoy a safe and dignified life following decades of war and conflict. We hope that the preparatory work for the presidential elections will include more meetings and consultations with all parties so as to ensure that the right candidate is chosen as President of Afghanistan for the upcoming period. We in the Council must step up our efforts to support the political process and UNAMA, as well as to encourage the holding of the presidential elections in September.

With respect to security, like the Secretary-General we are concerned by the instability in Afghanistan, although the number of civilian casualties has slightly declined compared with last year. The incidence of

suicide attacks targeting electoral facilities during the parliamentary elections has fallen by 72 per cent. Fighting between Afghan security forces and their adversaries has continued throughout the country, accounting for the majority of security incidents. That demonstrates the difficulty of the task facing the Afghani Government and the international community, especially in light of the fact that the Taliban and Da'esh continue to launch terrorist attacks on villages and unarmed civilians. We urge all parties to the conflict to honour their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law and to take immediate measures to avoid civilian casualties.

Addressing the political reconciliation process and security situation in Afghanistan requires us to consider the vital regional and international role in these two basic issues. We have followed with satisfaction the participation of Afghanistan at all levels in bilateral meetings with many countries of the region so as to reach understanding and ultimately improve the security, economic and political situations. We also welcome the efforts of many countries to promote the political reconciliation process in Afghanistan by sending their representatives and envoys, including the efforts made by Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad, United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, who has held many bilateral and multilateral meetings with parties to the conflict and others at the international level in order to strengthen the process of political reconciliation.

The State of Kuwait has followed the issue of humanitarian assistance and displaced persons because we believe in its importance. Continued fighting and acts of violence, in addition to drought and natural disasters, led to the displacement of more than 110,000 people between 1 January and 16 May. We are more alarmed by the fact that 58 per cent of those displaced were children. It is regrettable that those figures are the result of increased attacks on health facilities and medical staff, in addition to restrictions on conducting vaccination campaigns against polio.

The State of Kuwait believes that peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region will be the result of a negotiated diplomatic settlement, and that the time is right for achieving a comprehensive political settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan involving all parties in a constructive manner and participating in diplomatic efforts to attain a lasting peace in that country.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto and Ms. Samar for their briefings, and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Raz, for her statement. We also thank the Secretary-General for his enlightening report (S/2019/493).

The increasing engagement of the international community in achieving peace in Afghanistan is important. It is critical to seize the momentum and build on the achievements of the past 18 years. This will be sustained and enhanced only through joint efforts.

Over the past two decades, Afghanistan has gone through an unprecedented transformation. Improvements in the fields of security, democracy, governance, economic development and human rights should be commended. These achievements are not yet at the point of no return and major challenges remain to be tackled. As indicated by the Secretary-General in his report, the security situation remains volatile, with a consistently high number of incidents. The stability of Afghanistan, and subsequently that of the region, will depend on improved security. Turkey remains committed to standing by the Afghan people in this transition process, including in the fields of security and development.

At this critical juncture, any attempt towards peace should be designed with the active participation and contribution of all segments of the Afghan society. Sustainable peace is possible only with genuine reconciliation. The Afghan people cannot sacrifice the achievements they have made at high cost. For instance, since 2001 the status of women has changed profoundly. Now, Afghan women are rightly adamant in calling for a peace process that protects their gains. Some 2.5 million of the 8 million students enrolled in Afghan schools are girls. None our efforts towards the empowerment of girls and women should be wasted. Ensuring women's participation in elections, peace negotiations and overall engagement in governance and Government will help preserve the gains that we have made to date.

We can achieve lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan only with the support of neighbouring and regional countries. The continued constructive

engagement of the international community with regional actors is essential to enable an atmosphere conducive to genuine cooperation. The region has demonstrated on various occasions its readiness to resolve its own issues and to transform common problems into areas of mutual benefit. Started in 2011, the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process is a unique platform bringing all regional countries and international stakeholders together. We are pleased to host the next senior officials meeting of the Istanbul Process on 25 June in Ankara.

Increased trust and cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan are also imperative to the stability of the region. As announced by President Erdoğan, we are ready to deploy efforts for the next Turkey-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Summit.

The holding of inclusive elections and the conduct of a truly representative peace process will be a litmus test for all of us. We should make sure that any decision to withdraw from the country does not give the impression that the international community is disengaging. We cannot afford to leave Afghanistan in a power vacuum. At the same time, we should all support the efforts of the Afghan Government to make peace with the Taliban while protecting democracy and individual rights, especially the rights of women. The desire of the Afghan people for peace and democracy should prevail.

Before concluding my remarks, I would like to repeat what has been said many times in the Chamber. An Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process is central to achieving long-lasting peace in the country. Turkey will remain in solidarity with the Afghan people and will continue to contribute to a secure, stable and prosperous Afghanistan, as it has done for many decades.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): Australia welcomes the significant momentum for peace in Afghanistan. The Government of Afghanistan has taken important steps towards bringing the long-running conflict to an end. The recent peace jirga, sponsored by the Government of Afghanistan, was a significant opportunity for Afghan community representatives to focus on what peace means to them. Securing such buy-in of people from across Afghanistan is essential to reaching a sustainable political settlement to the conflict. We

encourage the Afghan Government to persevere with its efforts to build a national consensus on the terms of a settlement.

Australia also welcomes the efforts led by United States Special Representative Khalilzad to engage in meaningful negotiations with the Taliban. The progress made has been important and we hope that the momentum developed will continue towards a comprehensive agreement. While those negotiations were never going to be easy, we are disappointed that the Taliban continues to resist direct talks with the Afghan Government. We do not believe that a sustainable political settlement is viable without such talks and call on the Taliban and other parties to immediately begin discussions without preconditions.

We encourage the Afghan Government to continue its efforts to ensure that the people of Afghanistan can vote freely and fairly in credible presidential elections on 28 September, without the threat of violence, and call on the Taliban to respect and engage with that process.

Australia stands firm in its support for peace in Afghanistan, as part of a committed international community. We were pleased to hear today about the formation of a group of friends of women in Afghanistan and look forward to participating in that important initiative. We appreciate the role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, under the able leadership of Special Representative Yamamoto, in leading and coordinating United Nations efforts in Afghanistan, and we remain committed to the NATO-led international coalition and its effort to support Afghanistan's security and development.

While the outlook for peace is promising, we must not forget the millions of Afghans who continue to struggle in the face of a protracted humanitarian crisis. Australia is helping respond to a range of needs, including lifesaving food and nutrition assistance. We encourage humanitarian partners to continue to find better ways of coordinating to meet the needs of the Afghan people.

In conclusion, we know that Afghans are ready for peace. Australia stands ready to support them and we look forward to working with the Afghan Government and other partners to help secure a sustainable political settlement and contribute to the post-peace economic action plan and development agenda.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Blanchard (Canada) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his informative briefing on the situation in Afghanistan. His analysis helps us all to better support Afghanistan during this critical period ahead of the presidential elections. I was fortunate to have received a more detailed briefing from the members of the Group of Friends of Afghanistan, which was very useful.

Let me also express our sincere thanks to the entire staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for their ongoing commitment and work in the country. I would like to thank Ms. Sima Samar for her briefing. I also welcome and thank Her Excellency Ambassador Adela Raz, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, for sharing the views of her Government.

Today I will address two important and long-standing issues for Canada: first, the upcoming presidential elections and, secondly, the inclusion of women in the peace process.

First, with regard to the upcoming presidential elections, the holding of transparent and fair elections in September is essential for building on the gains already made. We welcome the decision of the Independent Election Commission to postpone the Ghazni provincial council and parliamentary elections in order to focus on the presidential elections. Furthermore, we welcome the fact that Afghan electoral authorities are applying the lessons learned from the October 2018 parliamentary elections, in particular with respect to the use of biometrics. Canada supports the continuation of the constitutional Government until elections are held and encourages all parties involved to show restraint ahead of the elections.

(*spoke in English*)

We are concerned about the increased number of attacks on Afghan schools as a result of their being used as polling centres. Education is not a privilege; it is a right. Schools should be places where all students, regardless of where they live, can learn and thrive in peace. To minimize the negative impact of the elections on education and children, we urge the Government of Afghanistan to seek alternative venues for polling stations, when possible. We underline the importance of providing security to voters as a prerequisite to

ensuring that women are able to safely and meaningfully participate. Both the elections and the peace process will be flawed if women are not effectively engaged at each step.

That brings me to my second point. The research is clear — when women are involved in peacebuilding, peace negotiations and peace talks, outcomes are better and last longer. Nearly 30 per cent of participants at last month's consultative *loya jirga* for peace were women, and although that is an important step, more work is needed to ensure that women's voices are not just heard but listened to. An agreement that does not bring peace to all members of society is not peace. Men need to stand in solidarity with women to reach a settlement that benefits all Afghans.

Afghan women are not willing to sacrifice the hard-earned gains in their rights for a political settlement with the Taliban. To ensure that women's rights, democracy and the Constitution are not only preserved throughout the peace process, but also extended to women and girls living in Taliban-controlled areas, women must play a substantive role in all peace negotiations. That is why Canada is working with partners to equip women's organizations with the skills they need to negotiate effectively and advocate for their seat at the table. Through our support to the International Civil Action Network, Canada is providing grants to women's organizations to build women's capacity to be more involved in local and national peace processes, forming youth peace circles and helping to reintegrate former fighters.

We have also contributed \$8.4 million to the Women's Voice and Leadership project in Afghanistan. That initiative supports the empowerment of women and girls through capacity-building, advocacy and the strengthening of networks among women's rights organizations. We are delighted to hear about the new initiative undertaken by the Afghan and United Kingdom Governments and look forward to learning more.

At the same time, we remain acutely aware that the challenges faced by Afghan women are not limited to civic life. The rates of violence against women are among the highest in the world and justice for victims remains utterly inadequate, despite the efforts of the Government to curb that practice. Canada opposes the use of mediation in cases of violence against women and encourages the Government to demonstrate greater due diligence in ensuring gender equality before the law.

Canada continues to support Afghan-led efforts towards peace and democracy and will continue to advocate for the inclusion of women and girls in both of those endeavours.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): Let me too begin by thanking Special Representative Yamamoto and my good friend, Ms. Sima Samar, for their briefings.

The situation in Afghanistan remains a source of concern to the international community. Persisting conflict, instability and turmoil and a fragile economy continue to compound the suffering of the Afghan people. That is also the message of the Secretary General's report (S/2019/493). We share his regret with regard to the continued fighting and its heavy toll on the civilian population. We are also concerned about the aggravating humanitarian situation.

But there are also grounds for hope. After decades of war, there is reason now to be cautiously optimistic about the prospects for peace. Several rounds of direct talks between the United States and the Taliban have opened up a real opportunity for progress towards peace in a country that has been ravaged by conflict and violence for more than a generation. The international community had long reached a consensus that a negotiated peace was the best, and indeed only, hope for securing durable peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan.

That has also been my country's consistent position and recommendation. For almost two decades, Pakistan argued that there was no military solution to the conflict and that the only sustainable path to peace in Afghanistan was through dialogue. We are therefore gratified that this is the path that is now being seriously pursued.

Apart from Afghanistan, there is no country other than Pakistan that has suffered more from the four decades of war and foreign interventions in Afghanistan. There is no other country that will gain more from peace in Afghanistan. In his very first address to the nation after his election last year, Prime Minister Imran Khan reaffirmed Pakistan's support for peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan, and we have played an active role in the pursuit of that goal.

My Government responded positively to United States President Donald Trump's request to Prime

Minister Khan last year for help in the Afghan peace process. We have not only called for a reduction of violence on all sides, as well as a ceasefire, but have taken whatever steps we could to contribute to that objective. Our consistent efforts helped to overcome the decades-old political impasse on the commencement of a peace dialogue.

Our contribution to the launch of direct United States-Taliban talks in Doha, after the initial round in the United Arab Emirates, has been widely acknowledged. As the next step, Pakistan released Taliban leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar at the request of our international partners. During the six rounds of talks between the United States and the Taliban, Pakistan maintained a close liaison with the process and fully supported those peace efforts, with the endorsement of those at the highest levels of the progress that has been made.

Pakistan will continue to play whatever role it can to help promote a political settlement that can end the long suffering of the Afghan people. The path to peace will not be easy. Hurdles remain. Many challenges lie ahead before a comprehensive agreement can be reached and accepted by all the parties. Together with the other international partners, we feel that there is now an urgent need to take the next important step — the initiation of an intra-Afghan dialogue. We urge all sides, including the Taliban, to commit to that. We also hope that the seventh round of United States-Taliban talks, expected early next month, will be able to kick-start a genuine and inclusive intra-Afghan dialogue process. That could lead potentially to the most decisive phase in the peace effort.

Cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan is a vital component of the endeavour to realize peace and security within Afghanistan and the entire region. Strengthening bilateral relations is a priority for my Government. My Foreign Minister visited Kabul three times last year, sending a strong signal of our desire to work closely and meaningfully with the National Unity Government. At the invitation of Prime Minister Imran Khan, President Ashraf Ghani will visit Islamabad later this month.

We are confident that the visit will provide impetus to further strengthening our bilateral relations. The combined potential of Pakistan and Afghanistan is considerable. Expanded trade, energy cooperation and the implementation of the various transregional

economic projects already identified can greatly enhance peace and prosperity for the entire region. We stand committed to working with Afghanistan to promote our shared political and economic objectives.

Let me conclude by recalling that the great philosopher and poet of the East, Muhammad Iqbal, who first conceived of Pakistan as an independent State and also described Afghanistan as the heart of Asia, declared more than a century ago that, if there is instability in Afghanistan, all of Asia will be unstable, whereas peace in Afghanistan will bring peace and prosperity to the entire region. Today, we look hopefully to a future where the restoration of peace in our neighbouring country will lead to the realization of stability and security that has for so long eluded our region.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mrs. Zappia (Italy): The report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/493), for which we are grateful, highlights the rapid changes that we are witnessing in Afghanistan. At the outset, I wish to underline how crucial the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan remains to the stabilization and development of the country. Italy thanks Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto and his staff for their laudable commitment.

The attainment of peace is the most formidable of the many challenges facing Afghanistan today. The latest diplomatic developments, with the efforts of the United States Special Representative to set up the groundwork for peace negotiations, as well as the trend towards greater regional cooperation, are opening a window of opportunity that must be seized. All stakeholders should do their part in order to achieve that goal, with the United Nations playing a leading role, in order to ensure that all positive initiatives and contributions feed into a unitary and coherent design.

Persistent security threats continue to entail very high costs, draining precious resources and energy away from addressing other urgent needs, such as institutional consolidation and economic and social development. Italy expresses its deep gratitude to the National Unity Government and its Afghan National Defence and Security Forces for the sacrifices made in the daily fight against terrorism and violent extremism. We stand by their side and remain determined in our support for strengthening the Forces' capabilities, first

and foremost through our contribution to the Resolute Support Mission.

The prospects for peace in Afghanistan have never been more tangible than they are today. Italy expresses its full support for those diplomatic initiatives that can concretely facilitate the launching of a reconciliation process in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the lion's share of the work that must be done in order to seize this opportunity lies in the domestic sphere. Only a process that encompasses extensive and inclusive participation, and where there is true Afghan ownership and leadership, can ensure such an outcome.

Women, in particular, must be empowered to play an active role in the process in order to protect their rights, as enshrined in the Constitution, and to safeguard the broader civil and social gains achieved in the course of the past 17 years. I welcome the joint Afghanistan-United Kingdom initiative for establishing a new group of friends on women's rights, and Italy stands ready to join and contribute to the group.

We wish to reiterate our deep appreciation of President Ghani's commitment to peace and reconciliation, beginning with his generous offer made in February 2018 to negotiate with the Taliban without preconditions, which was renewed in Geneva last December. The determination to achieve peace also found its expression in the consultative *loya jirga* that was convened at the end of April.

The presidential elections scheduled for next September will be a litmus test for Afghanistan. The organizational and procedural difficulties of last October's parliamentary elections must serve as a lesson learned in order to ensure that the upcoming presidential elections will be credible and transparent. It is vital that they be held without delays or shortcomings. The credibility of Afghan institutions depends on that. We invite all presidential candidates, from the current President to members of the opposition, to commit to a responsible approach that will ensure that those institutions are protected.

The importance of the upcoming vote should not distract our attention from seeking peace. Electoral considerations should not prevail over the urgent need to promote dialogue among all components of Afghan society and make the necessary compromises in order to reach a peace agreement. Italy fully joins in the appeals to distinguish between the electoral track and the peace track, pursuing each one independently of the other.

In conclusion, I would like to express my country's unwavering support for all sincere efforts to restore peace and stability to Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Tajikistan.

Mr. Mahmaminov (Tajikistan): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Kuwait on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and express my appreciation for the convening of today's debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his efforts and valuable observations, Ms. Sima Samar for her detailed briefing and my colleague the Ambassador of Afghanistan for her statement.

Among the countries of the region, Tajikistan has a special relationship with Afghanistan. It is based on our common historical, spiritual and cultural values.

With regard to the current political situation in Afghanistan, we all equally feel the growing security deficit in the region and beyond. That is due primarily to the continuing threat of international terrorism, religious extremism and illicit drug trafficking. Our particular concern is the trend of the propaganda activities and subversion being carried out by representatives and supporters of the Islamic State in Afghanistan. The activation of the supporters and militants of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province is happening against the backdrop of a significant flow of drugs, weapons and human resources. The further aggravation of the political situation in Afghanistan poses a real threat to the security of the entire region and will affect the functioning of the main transit routes through Afghanistan in the direction of Central Asia.

The world community has been making substantial efforts to free Afghanistan of terrorism and extremism and to help it launch the phase of sustainable development. In that context, Tajikistan supports the implementation of the international strategy for the comprehensive solution and further reconstruction of Afghanistan. It is necessary to support the Government of Afghanistan, especially during the decade of reconstruction of Afghanistan, from 2015 to 2024.

It is our view that international assistance should first and foremost meet the most basic needs of the people of Afghanistan to enjoy a decent life, education,

their rights, social security and employment. That assistance should bring hope and constructive power to the people of Afghanistan so that they themselves become more committed to ensuring peace and stability and the socioeconomic revival of their country. In our view, the United Nations could play a stronger and more effective role in making further progress in that regard.

We support the Afghan Government in its efforts to start an effective peace process as soon as possible. At the same time, we emphasize the need to stop the armed opposition groups from committing violence and break their ties with Al-Qaida and the Islamic State. The peace process is a key factor for the long-term stability and unity of Afghanistan. The security of Afghanistan and the region as a whole cannot be achieved without the eradication of terrorism and radicalism. The countries of the region need to restrict the physical movement of terrorists in their territories and destroy their sources of financing.

To tackle the issue of countering terrorism and its financing, Tajikistan, in cooperation with the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Union, hosted a high-level conference entitled “International and Regional Cooperation on Countering Terrorism and its Financing Through Illicit Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime” in Dushanbe on 16 and 17 May. More than 500 participants from 52 countries and 29 international and regional organizations, as well as representatives of the diplomatic corps, civil society and academia, attended the conference. The objective of the Dushanbe conference was to promote strengthened international and regional cooperation and identify effective methods of countering the current challenges and threats.

Last week, on 14 and 15 June, the capital city of Dushanbe hosted another significant event: the fifth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia (CICA). Speaking at the opening ceremony of the Summit, the President of my Republic, His Excellency Mr. Emomali Rahmon, expressed concern over the difficult situation in neighbouring Afghanistan and called for taking effective measures and the further coordination of the efforts of the international community, including CICA member States, in that area.

One of the lessons we learned from the history of Afghanistan over the past two decades is that terrorism and extremism cannot be eradicated through

military means alone. Socioeconomic expansion and Afghanistan’s integration into the regional economy are therefore one of the ways to eliminate the foundations of terrorism and extremist phenomena.

In conclusion, let me reiterate Tajikistan’s long-standing support for the constructive initiatives of the world community to ensure sustainable peace and the economic revival of Afghanistan, as well as its willingness to further strengthen cooperation with the Government of Afghanistan and international partners in the future. Moreover, we wish Afghanistan every success in holding peaceful, inclusive and transparent presidential elections this year.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I wish to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his informative briefing and tireless efforts on behalf of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). Let me further express my appreciation to Ms. Sima Samar for her briefing, and Ambassador Adela Raz of Afghanistan for her valuable input.

Japan welcomes the finalization of the results of the parliamentary elections held last October, as well as the inauguration of the first Afghan Parliament since 2011. With the newly elected Independent Election Commission and based on the lessons learned from the elections, it is very important for the upcoming presidential elections to be credible, so that the results are widely accepted.

Japan commends the efforts of the Afghan Government to achieve peace with the Taliban, including the holding of the consultative peace loya jirga from April to May, as well as the ongoing preparations for the Kabul process meeting. Dialogue among the Afghan people is fundamental to realizing sustainable peace in Afghanistan. Japan hopes that the efforts made by the relevant groups towards peace, including the dialogue between the United States and the Taliban and the trilateral dialogue among the United States, Russia and China, will help lead to a successful intra-Afghan dialogue.

Meanwhile, Japan expresses its deep concern about the continuing terrorist attacks in Afghanistan. Japan hopes that positive developments in the peace process will put an end to violence, bring a comprehensive

ceasefire and, eventually, lead to lasting peace. Japan will seek to cooperate with the international community to advance the peace process.

The participation of women in the peace process in Afghanistan is fundamental. Japan has been organizing workshops for women in Afghanistan to enhance their response capability towards gender-based violence. We shall continue those efforts.

Japan remains committed to supporting a self-reliant and stable Afghanistan. In March, Japan announced new assistance of approximately \$96 million to Afghanistan. That has since been disbursed to projects, including efforts to provide assistance to refugees and respond to drought, as well as demining and counter-narcotics initiatives. In addition, in March Japan provided emergency relief goods in response to flood damage. Japan will continue to cooperate hand in hand with the Afghan people, including through such short-term humanitarian assistance.

Enhancing regional cooperation between Afghanistan and neighbouring countries is also important. When the Foreign Ministers of Japan and the five Central Asian countries gathered in Dushanbe in May for a ministerial meeting of the Central Asia plus Japan dialogue, Afghanistan also participated as a guest country. Japan will remain committed to the countries of the region, including through supporting the enhancement of border controls.

I would like to conclude my statement by emphasizing the important role of UNAMA in achieving peace and prosperity in Afghanistan, and Japan commends and supports the efforts made by Mr. Yamamoto and his team.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this debate. I also thank Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and Ms. Sima Samar, Chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, for their briefings. I would also like to express my appreciation to Ambassador Adela Raz, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, for sharing her perspectives on the recent developments in her country.

By all accounts, this is a crucial year for Afghanistan. While Afghanistan gears up to have its fourth presidential elections later this year, all of us need to be mindful of the gains that the Afghan people have made in the past 18 years. They have strengthened democracy in their country, established a constitutional order, uplifted the status of women, protected the status of minorities and youth, built a strong army and sturdy security forces, and created stronger regional links. They have also excelled in the sporting arena and are among the elite group of 10 teams that are vying for the Cricket World Cup currently under way. The Afghan people have done all of that while confronting and warding off the threats posed every day by terrorism. While there may be perceptions of threats of transnational terrorism from Afghanistan, in reality it is the Afghan people who have long been victims of transnational terrorism.

Even while the violence in Afghanistan continues, the gains of the Afghan people are visible and tangible. Support for the preservation and consolidation of those achievements is the only available option. Reversal and roll-back are not options that can be considered. The international community needs to continue to support the painstakingly achieved institutional gains in Afghanistan.

The concluding communiqué of the loya jirga convened by President Ghani on 29 April called, among other things, for a ceasefire, talks without preconditions, a Taliban office to be opened in Afghanistan, a responsible withdrawal of international forces, the formation of an inclusive negotiating team, continued support from the international community and the preservation of human rights, particularly women's rights. Those provisions, agreed by the Afghan people, are long-standing and supported by several countries in the region.

Opportunities created by recent international efforts are welcome. However, we see that some may be driven by a sense of urgency and have timelines that are, perhaps, not intrinsic to the needs of the Afghan people. We need to be cognizant that it is the Afghan people who will have to implement and sustain these agreements. The dignity and sustainability of the gains made by the people of Afghanistan should be the paramount factor in determining what outcome will best suit the country and be implementable in a sustainable and dignified manner. We support an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled inclusive peace

and reconciliation process that promotes and protects the unity, sovereignty, democracy, inclusiveness and prosperity of Afghanistan.

As the way forward is chalked out, we cannot ignore the fact that groups enjoying support and safe havens carry out violent and terrorist activities from across borders. They cannot be allowed to negotiate from a place of advantage. The sanctuaries and safe havens provided to terror networks have to be addressed for the sake of genuine and sustainable peace. The terrorist activities of the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, Da'esh, Al-Qaida and its proscribed affiliates, including Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, need to end. Experience with the Hizb-e Islami shows that a peace settlement within the rubric of the current constitution is possible both politically and socially.

India has age-old historical, cultural, civilizational and economic ties with Afghanistan. We are working closely with our Afghan partners in implementing development projects and will continue to do so. Building reliable connectivity for land-locked Afghanistan is a key component of our partnership. We are mindful that all such projects must respect State sovereignty and territorial integrity and be based on universally recognized international norms, transparency and principles of financial responsibility, ecological and environmental protection and preservation standards. It is in that spirit that we are engaged in various connectivity projects in the region, including the Chabahar Port project and the direct India-Afghanistan air-freight corridor, which have been successfully operationalized.

The people of Afghanistan have come very far since 2001. India will continue to assist the Afghan people in fulfilling their desire for a peaceful country that can focus on development and build on the gains in their journey towards greater prosperity and higher achievements. The conduct of transparent, credible and timely presidential elections during the year will assist in that endeavour.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kyrgyzstan.

Mrs. Moldoisaeva (Kyrgyzstan): Let me thank Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and Ms. Sima Samar for their detailed

briefings on the current situation in Afghanistan. I also thank Ambassador Adela Raz for her statement.

We stress the central role of the United Nations in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan and express appreciation and strong support for all the efforts of the Secretary-General and UNAMA, in accordance with resolution 2405 (2018). We welcome the achievements of the National Unity Government in political, economic, governance and social reforms, in the management of the transition, as well as in the organization of the parliamentary elections in 2018. We hope that the presidential elections in Afghanistan in September will be another important step towards democracy in the country.

Unfortunately, despite the positive changes that have been made, the political situation in Afghanistan remains unstable. First of all, it is characterized by the continued activities of armed anti-Government and international extremist and terrorist groups, and illegal human, arms and drugs trafficking. We are also concerned about the situation in Afghanistan and the region with respect to foreign fighters and terrorists returning from conflict zones. In that regard, Kyrgyzstan welcomes the steps taken by the Government of Afghanistan to promote peace through the offer of talks, and expresses full support for its peace initiatives aimed at establishing stability in Afghanistan.

On the other side, Kyrgyzstan is ready to contribute to the development of the peace process in Afghanistan within the United Nations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Moscow format, the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, the Kabul Process and other international platforms. The Kyrgyz Republic is interested in a peaceful and stable Afghanistan and calls for further cooperation with Afghanistan and the development of regional cooperation and confidence-building measures to resolve the situation in the country.

As mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2019/493), the meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Afghanistan Contact Group, held in Bishkek in April, was co-chaired by Afghanistan. Participants discussed cooperation with Afghanistan, as well as progress on the Afghan peace process,

and reviewed the Contact Group's draft road map for further action.

My country hosted the eighth annual meeting of the Deputy Foreign Ministers of the Central Asian countries and Afghanistan in November 2018 in Bishkek. The meeting was organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of my country and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA). We are pleased that representatives of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan also participated in the meeting. During the meeting, the joint efforts of the Central Asian States and Afghanistan to respond to threats and challenges in the region on both a bilateral and a multilateral basis and within the framework of cooperation with UNRCCA were reviewed. In addition, the participants discussed potential opportunities for cooperation between Central Asian States and Afghanistan and various joint initiatives that will contribute to the economic development of the country.

The Kyrgyz Republic is promoting initiatives to establish a trilateral Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan agro-industrial consortium and the international centre for Afghan research and regional cooperation in the city of Bishkek. We also express our readiness to consider the possibility of teaching Afghan students in educational institutions of our country with financial support from foreign donors.

In conclusion, I would like to note that we support the commitment of all Central Asian States to long-term cooperation with Afghanistan. Along with our international partners, we are ready to fully cooperate to solve the tasks before us.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Ibragimov (Uzbekistan): First of all, I would like to commend you, Mr. President, for convening this quarterly debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. I thank Ambassador Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and Ms. Samar for their informative briefings and Mrs. Raz, Ambassador of Afghanistan, for her statement.

In Uzbekistan we continue to closely follow the situation in Afghanistan because the prospects of stable and sustainable development in Central Asia are directly intertwined with the achievement of a durable

peace in that country. Uzbekistan traditionally pursues towards Afghanistan a policy based on the principles of mutual respect, equality and non-interference in each other's internal affairs of and fully supports a Government elected by the Afghan people. Given such circumstances, engagement in the process of finding an ultimate solution to the current situation in Afghanistan and the maintenance of good-neighbourly relations with that fraternal nation are among the top foreign policy priorities of Uzbekistan. Tashkent's principal position stems from the firm belief that the Afghan Government should be the main party to any peace process, which should also encompass all political forces and ethnic groups of the country. Only an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political process can lead to a peaceful settlement of the current conflict.

For its part, Uzbekistan continues to render assistance to Afghanistan in launching such a peace process. As a practical step in that direction, in the past year the Uzbek side met with representatives of the Qatar-based Taliban Political Commission both in Tashkent and in Doha. During those meetings the Uzbek participants underlined the importance of enforcing a ceasefire and its extension to the operation of delivering humanitarian assistance and to large-scale economic projects to be implemented in the country. The Taliban movement has welcomed Uzbekistan's efforts in settling the situation in Afghanistan.

We should emphasize that Uzbekistan closely coordinates all its contacts with the Taliban with the Government of Afghanistan. In particular, we conduct prior consultations with the Afghan authorities on our upcoming meetings with the Taliban and brief them on the outcomes.

Uzbekistan also actively participates in various international negotiation formats on Afghanistan, such as the Kabul process, the Moscow format, the International Contact Group, the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process forum, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Afghanistan Contact Group and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA). Our main objective from such participation is to support the international community's efforts to find a workable solution to the Afghan conflict.

In that regard, I would like to cite the President of Uzbekistan, His Excellency Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev,

who, in his address at the high-level conference on Afghanistan held in Tashkent last year, said:

“We stand ready, at any stage of the peace process, to create all necessary conditions for organizing on the territory of Uzbekistan direct negotiations between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban movement.”

That statement clearly shows the strong commitment of Uzbekistan to facilitating the peace process in Afghanistan by creating conditions for direct negotiations between the Government and the Taliban movement without any preconditions.

Uzbekistan is also rendering practical assistance to Afghanistan in rebuilding its social and economic infrastructure and transport links by training local personnel and involving the country in regional projects.

In the autumn, in Tashkent we are planning to host next meeting of the RECCA, which will be another excellent opportunity to discuss issues of the rehabilitation of Afghanistan. As the President of Uzbekistan said at the recent Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia held in Dushanbe, the settlement of the situation in Afghanistan and the implementation of large-scale infrastructural projects in the country would open up new strategic opportunities for the whole continent.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that Uzbekistan will continue its efforts to support the earliest launch of the peace process between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban movement, aimed at creating a peaceful future for all people of Afghanistan. In that regard, Uzbekistan remains committed to continuing close cooperation with the Government of Afghanistan, the United Nations and other stakeholders in bringing long-awaited peace to the country.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I thank the Kuwaiti presidency for convening this debate on the situation in Afghanistan. I also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan Tadamichi Yamamoto for his detailed and informative update. We are very glad to see Ms. Sima Samar, Chairperson of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, and Ambassador Adela Raz, Permanent Representative

of Afghanistan, here in the Chamber, and I would like to thank them for their valuable interventions.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/493) provides a realistic assessment of and important insights into the situation in Afghanistan, with which we concur. It also highlights the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, which deserves the full support of the international community.

Despite the sincere and effective measures taken by the Afghan Government and the international community, the security situation in the country remains fragile.

Kazakhstan is concerned about the increase in the number of civilian casualties due to the large-scale attacks by anti-Government forces and terrorists, especially using improvised explosive devices and suicide bombers. We are alarmed by the worsening humanitarian situation due to conflicts and natural disasters, which led to an increase in the number of temporarily displaced persons. Unfortunately, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant continues to recruit new adherents, which poses a threat to all the countries of the region.

Taking into account the upcoming presidential elections in late September, we consider it important to draw lessons from the ballot in the autumn last year so as to safeguard credible elections and the legitimacy of the political system. A successful electoral outcome will have a profound impact on the future positive dynamics of Afghanistan's development.

We welcome the efforts of the stakeholders to advance the peace process and conduct relevant negotiations with the Taliban. At the same time, a speedy direct dialogue between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban is of vital importance.

The difficult economic situation in Afghanistan is of great concern to all of us. In that regard, it is necessary to further develop regional cooperation and enhance Afghanistan's economic integration with neighbouring States in implementing infrastructure development, trade, investment, transit and transport projects. Those numerous initiatives will clearly create new jobs and help to reduce youth recruitment into terrorist activities.

We believe that it is important to closely coordinate United Nations efforts to assist in the peaceful reconstruction of Afghanistan and provide humanitarian

assistance. It is key for us that Afghanistan's interaction with the States of Central Asia becomes a practical and tangible model of partnership, based on best practices, for peace and sustainable development for other regions, as well as around the world.

We also call on donors to increase their contribution to peace and development in and around Afghanistan. To that end, Kazakhstan is continuing to work to establish in Almaty a interregional hub for the Sustainable Development Goals under the auspices of the United Nations. That structure will contribute to coordinated support for countries in the region and beyond in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Last month, in Almaty we opened the House of International Organizations, where 16 United Nations agencies are now housed under one roof. It will contribute to the overall United Nations reform process on the ground through close regional and interregional coordination and collaboration based on a One United Nations, whole-of-system approach.

Kazakhstan is deeply committed to giving women and youth a central place throughout the entire cycle of conflict — from prevention to resolution to peacebuilding and recovery. In this regard, we welcome the continued efforts of the Government aimed at promoting and protecting the rights of women and their participation in the peace process. This is best exemplified by the second phase of the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan. For its part, together with the European Union and other partners, Kazakhstan continues to co-finance the education programme for Afghan citizens.

In conclusion, I would like to pledge that Kazakhstan will continue to work to assist our brotherly country in all forums of the United Nations, in particular the General Assembly, in regional organizations and also bilaterally.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the head of the Delegation of the European Union.

Mr. Vale de Almeida: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 28 member States. The candidate countries Turkey, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement, of which a complete version will be made available to the Secretariat.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General and the briefers. I wish to offer special words of thanks to the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan and to Special Representative Yamamoto, with whom we have closely cooperated and with whom we have the clear intention to continue to work very closely, as well as with the Secretary-General.

The European Union commends the United Nations, not the least through the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for the continuous important efforts carried out and deployed both in Kabul and at the international level aimed at supporting Afghanistan on its way towards improved security and prosperity and also in implementing the commitments made at the 2018 November Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan. We reiterate our full support for these ongoing efforts and pledge to strengthen EU-United Nations cooperation on Afghanistan and elsewhere.

The first half of this year has been important for EU-Afghanistan bilateral relations: High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini paid a visit to Kabul in March, and the EU held several bilateral meetings in the framework of the EU-Afghanistan Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development. In all these discussions, the peace file held a prominent place, as we looked at how the EU could help the peace process to really materialize. The EU Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Mr. Roland Kobia, has frequently visited Kabul and the region to support the peace process. The EU strongly believes that all international partners need to strengthen efforts and coordination in the coming weeks and months to capitalize on the current momentum towards peace.

On 8 April the EU Foreign Affairs Council discussed Afghanistan and approved important Council conclusions, reiterating our commitment to playing an active role in Afghanistan's peace process and setting out in detail the EU's position and expectations on the process. On that occasion, all of our 28 Foreign Ministers endorsed the offer that Federica Mogherini had made at the 2018 Geneva Ministerial Conference, namely, first, helping the Government to make the peace process more inclusive; secondly, supporting post-conflict reforms, including security-sector reform; thirdly, assisting the reintegration of ex-combatants; fourthly, setting up a possible EU role as guarantor of the peace process; and, fifthly, supporting cross-border trade and infrastructure as well as regional connectivity.

It is in that framework that the EU is engaging in dialogue with the Afghan Government and international partners. The EU strongly believes that any future peace agreement must preserve the political, economic and social achievements of the last 18 years, in particular the rights of women, children and minorities. Work must also continue to enhance these achievements.

We support and appreciate the ongoing efforts of all international and regional actors, in particular United States Special Representative Khalilzad, aimed at bringing the conflicting parties to the negotiating table. Dialogue between the Government and the Taliban is a priority and should start as soon as possible. Current negotiations between the Taliban and the United States should be integrated into intra-Afghan consultations. Peace can be sustainable only if it is shaped and accepted by all Afghans, including women and minorities, and anchored in the communities across Afghanistan.

A sustainable settlement requires compromises on all sides, including on how to set up and begin a dialogue. The EU is ready to facilitate such a consultation process and a dialogue that will contribute to inclusivity by involving Afghan civil society, including women's and youth groups.

The EU supports the active participation of women in line with the resolution 1325 (2000). Inclusivity means addressing difficult but necessary issues relating to the peace process at the outset. Management of grievances and justice should not be overlooked but should be dealt with at the right moment.

A peace agreement is not peace in itself. Peace will take time. The implementation phase of the peace agreement will be the key for achieving lasting peace. The EU stands ready to continue its long-term commitment to Afghanistan after a peace agreement has been signed. If there are expectations that the EU will provide substantial financial, political, diplomatic and development support after the successful conclusion of a peace agreement, the EU needs to be involved at all stages of the peace process.

There is a continued need to strengthen Afghan ownership and leadership of the peace process, including intra-Afghan negotiations. The recent consultative *loya jirga* could be seen as a useful contribution to achieving this objective, especially if further consultations are enlarged to additional constituencies and endorsed by major political and civil society actors. Such

intra-Afghan formats should be able to contribute to the current regional track 1 negotiations.

We call on the Afghan political class — both the Government and members of the opposition — to prioritize peace and remain constructively engaged when it comes to the needs of the peace process. We strongly urge political actors in Afghanistan not to allow their differences on other issues to divide them on the core question of peace. For the sake of sustainable peace, all political stakeholders in Afghanistan must do their utmost to achieve unity as regards ongoing efforts to end the conflict. In particular, elections and peace should remain two separate processes.

Despite the current ongoing efforts to start a peace process, the conflict in Afghanistan continues, and insecurity is affecting the lives of the Afghan people. During the past month, we have witnessed a sharp increase in terrorist attacks in both Kabul and other regions of the country. The number of internally displaced people is on the rise and humanitarian needs are increasing, with 6.3 million people in need of assistance.

The European Union remains deeply concerned about the high level of civilian casualties that the conflict is producing. According to UNAMA reported findings, the situation, where one-third of overall casualties were children, is deplorable, and the need to protect civilians is of crucial importance. In this context, we reiterate once again our calls on all parties to protect the civilian population, especially women and children. Conflict-related violence must no longer destroy another generation's livelihood, homes and property, as that displaces families and limits access to education, health and other services.

I mentioned earlier the bilateral meetings the EU recently held in Kabul. We had comprehensive discussions covering many subjects, but I would like to stress the outcome of the discussion on human rights and good governance, which are areas of particular interest for the European Union. The need for the legislation in force on human rights and democracy to be properly implemented was widely recognized in the discussions. It is only in this way that Afghan citizens will reap the full benefits of a democratic system. Moreover, in the context of peace efforts, there was agreement on the importance of preserving the constitutional order of Afghanistan, guaranteeing the protection of human rights and ensuring women's inclusion at all stages

of the peace negotiations and peace process. We took note of the results of the consultative forum Afghan Women's National Consensus for Peace. There is a need for an effective and credible platform to achieve a unified women's voice in the future peace process and ensure their participation.

Promoting the rule of law and ending impunity for corruption will also be core elements of a future of sustainable peace. The European Union intends to organize in the near future the fifth anti-corruption conference in Kabul, aiming at a realistic discussion of what has been done in this area and what concrete steps are still needed for the full implementation of the national strategy against corruption and related legislation.

Migration and forced displacement were also part of our recent discussions. We have a good implementation of the EU-Afghan Joint Way Forward on migration. At the same time, the local and regional dimensions of migration are high on the European Union's agenda. The sustainable reintegration of Afghan internally displaced persons and returnees from the neighbouring countries, including lately from Turkey, remains a big challenge for Afghanistan and is an area where the EU will continue to enhance its support. Sustainable reintegration is also important in the context of future peace efforts, where any lessons learned on successful reintegration will have good added value.

The pursuit of peace must not be done at the expense of Afghanistan's democratic development. Peace will be lasting only in a democratic and prosperous environment. In that context, holding fair and transparent presidential elections on time — that is, on 28 September — is essential to strengthening the legitimacy of State institutions, as well as the democratic development and political stability of Afghanistan. The Afghan authorities have an obligation to ensure a level playing field. All candidates must take part in the elections in good faith. The EU sees no alternative to the holding of credible presidential elections in September. Afghans should face the elections as if there were no peace process and the peace process as if there were no elections.

The European Union will continue its coordination with the Afghan stakeholders and the international community, providing support — more than €18 million — to address some of the technical difficulties of the previous parliamentary elections in October 2018. We are a strong development partner

for Afghanistan and our development cooperation responds to the officially defined and presented Afghan Government's priorities.

The EU will continue its strong commitment to on-budget support, based on Afghan progress and impact in the implementation of its policies. We are currently starting to work on the next programming cycle for Afghanistan to cover the period from 2021 to 2027, and the potential priorities in the context of a peace agreement. In that context, the EU would like to thank once again the United Nations for its good cooperation in the preparation of the Geneva conference in November 2018 and its donor coordination efforts.

In conclusion, the European Union believes that the following months will be crucial for a peace process to succeed, but any peace negotiations and agreement will be viable and accepted by the population only if they support and maintain the values and achievements of the past two decades. The democratization of Afghanistan should continue, along with better protection of the rights of all Afghans and safeguarding the country's democratic institutions.

It is in that spirit that the European Union will increase its efforts and support for peace, in coordination and cooperation with Afghanistan and the United Nations, as well as regional and international partners.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Takht Ravanchi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this meeting. Our thanks also go to Mr. Yamamoto and Ms. Samar, as well as Ambassador Raz, for their valuable contributions to the work of the Council on the situation in Afghanistan.

In its search for peace, stability and prosperity, Afghanistan is now passing through a critical juncture. Tired from years upon years of invasion, occupation and foreign military presence, as well as a vicious cycle of terror, insecurity and instability, the people of Afghanistan from all walks of life are calling for peace. This call has never been as loud and strong as it is today. Now, peace is the main, most serious and strongest demand of all Afghans. This call must be heard and this demand has to be realized. This is imperative for Afghanistan itself and for regional and international peace and security.

To be durable, peace must be established by the Afghan people and for the Afghan people. This means that it cannot be dictated to them and that the real concerns and genuine interests of all Afghans cannot be ignored. What the regional and international players are expected to do in this regard is only to support the realization of the long-standing aspiration of that great nation to peace. This must be done by facilitating an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled peace process, as the right to determine the future of Afghanistan belongs exclusively to Afghans themselves.

In this context, and underscoring the need for further consolidation of the foundations of democracy and the rule of law, we welcome the recent convening of the consultative peace *loya jirga*. By reaffirming a commitment to Islamic principles and national values, as well as safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity, the *loya jirga* stressed that establishing and strengthening peace in Afghanistan must uphold the integrity of the Islamic Republic system and the current Constitution, as well as other achievements that are the results of many years of sacrifice and struggle by the people of Afghanistan.

It is unfortunate that the United States, instead of acknowledging the positive role that Iran plays in preserving peace and stability in Afghanistan, is accusing Iran of fomenting insecurity in that country. The sole purpose of this unfounded claim is to cover the United States failed policy in Afghanistan over the past 18 years.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, which has always supported the realization of the aspirations of the people of Afghanistan, stands ready, in close cooperation and coordination with the Government of Afghanistan, to fully and genuinely support and facilitate the peace process in order to establish and consolidate an inclusive, just and sustaining peace in this neighbouring country.

While the time-bound and responsible withdrawal of all foreign forces is a strong national demand, this should be complemented through the preserving and

strengthening of the defence and security institutions and forces of Afghanistan. This is essential, taking into account the existing security challenges in the country, in particular those emanating from the presence and criminal activities of dangerous terrorist groups, such as Da'esh, which has been helped in the transfer of its elements from Syria and Iraq to Afghanistan. Da'esh is not only destabilizing Afghanistan, but represents a serious threat to certain central Asian countries.

The strengthening of Afghanistan's defence and security forces is also necessary to counter another major challenge facing this country, namely, opium poppy cultivation and illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs, with all its adverse socioeconomic and security impacts, which destroy the fabric not only of Afghan society, but also that of neighbouring countries. It fuels terrorist and other criminal activities as well.

Furthermore, proper socioeconomic conditions can also greatly contribute to the preservation and consolidation of peace and stability. Therefore, due consideration must also be paid to the development of Afghanistan's economy, the realization of which requires continued strong regional and international support. In addition to the promotion of peace and tranquillity, conducive socioeconomic conditions are also required for the reconstruction of the country and the return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Iran, for its part, is hosting 3 million of Afghans refugees and fighting narcotic drugs that are heading mainly to Europe, without proper and meaningful international assistance. It is high time for the international community to shoulder its responsibility to assist Afghanistan in this regard.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is further expanding its trade and economic relations with Afghanistan, including by providing our port facilities, and is determined to continue supporting the fraternal people and Government of Afghanistan in all areas in their search for the peace and prosperity that they deserve.

The meeting rose at 6.50 p.m.