



Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

8587th meeting
Friday, 26 July 2019, 10 a.m.
New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru)

Members:

Belgium	Mrs. Van Vlierberge
China	Mr. Wu Haitao
Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Moriko
Dominican Republic	Mr. Beras Hernández
Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Sipaco Ribala
France	Mr. De Rivière
Germany	Mr. Heusgen
Indonesia	Mr. Djani
Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
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	Ms. Norman-Chalet

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Afghanistan 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: Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and Ms. Jamila Afghani, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Afghanistan section.

Ms. Afghani is joining via video-teleconference from Kabul.

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

I wish to warmly welcome the Deputy Secretary-General, Her Excellency Ms. Amina Mohammed, to whom I now give the floor.

The Deputy Secretary-General: I thank the President of the Security Council for convening today's meeting on women, peace and security in Afghanistan, and the Council for its continued engagement around this issue.

Let me start by expressing my deep condolences to the Government and the people of Afghanistan for the horrific attacks that took place yesterday. Indiscriminate attacks that kill women and children are an affront to our humanity and a crime under international humanitarian law. The United Nations stands with Afghans as they work for lasting peace and security.

I returned this week from a visit to Afghanistan, which I undertook with the Under-Secretary-General for the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Executive Directors of UN-Women and the United Nations Population Fund. This was the third visit of its kind, following visits to Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2017, and to Chad, the Niger and South Sudan last year. We wanted to assess and build on progress since the Secretary-

General visited Afghanistan two years ago and to explore the United Nations support for the women and peace and security agenda. I sincerely thank the Government and the people of Afghanistan for their hospitality and the robust and constructive interactions. I thank the members of the international community who took time to meet us and share their hopes while we were in Kabul. I thank the United Nations system in Afghanistan for upholding our values at great risk.

During our visit, we were privileged to hold talks with His Excellency President Ashraf Ghani, His Excellency the Chief Executive, the First Lady and other senior leaders and religious scholars. We made a field visit to the province of Bamiyan and talked to many extraordinary women leaders and decision-makers, many of them young, working in civil society organizations, in the security sector, as entrepreneurs or as health-care workers.

Afghan women have paid a high price during the conflict that has affected their country for most of the past four decades. Under the Taliban Government, women and girls were denied access to education, health services and protection from extreme violence and could not participate in political or public life. Over the past 18 years, there has been significant progress. Women are in senior roles in the Ministries of Defence, Foreign Affairs and Interior Affairs. Some 27 per cent of the civil service is female, and there are women serving as mayors and provincial governors.

Critical elections are scheduled for September, and the heads of the Independent Election Commission and Electoral Complaints Commission are both women. It is vital for the legitimacy of the political system that all stakeholders, including the Government, political leaders, candidates and parties, contribute to an enabling environment for a credible electoral process. I know that in due course Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo will talk in more detail on this issue.

As we witnessed again yesterday, conflict continues in Afghanistan. In 2018, the country suffered the highest number of civilian casualties since the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan began recording figures in 2009. In the first five months of this year, more than 100,000 people were displaced by conflict, and we know displacement increases the risk of gender-based violence in all areas. In areas where the Taliban have reclaimed control, there are reports of honour killings, stoning and other attacks on women's

rights. Peace, security and economic stability are urgently needed.

During our visit, we heard a strong call from Afghan women for peace — but for peace that safeguards their hard-won rights and does not backtrack on what has been achieved. All the women we spoke to want an inclusive peace centred on women, and, I would say here, on the victims and the survivors over the years. Afghan women, like women everywhere, must play a part in decisions that will affect their future. In Bamiyan, we saw the incredible mine-clearance work that women are doing with the support of the United Nations, risking their lives alongside men to bring safety to their communities.

Inclusivity is not only the right thing to do for women and girls. It is the only way to make durable peace. As one woman told us: “It is an illusion if you think that you are going to give away people’s rights and then have any real peace.” It will take time for peace to be sustainable and it must be inclusive of the whole country, of women and of victims. Building a culture of peace means addressing the violations and divisions of the past. The country needs closure.

Inclusion and consensus are also essential to creating the greatest possible peace dividend, benefiting all parts of the economy and all sections of society. We must continue to support Afghans in rebuilding trust across communities and in addressing stigma and discrimination based on gender, ethnicity or regional differences.

Afghanistan has made great progress for women since the fall of the Taliban. More than 3 million children are back in school, with 9 out of 11 million Afghan children now enrolled. Investments in reducing maternal mortality are saving thousands of lives. Improved infrastructure and power supplies are connecting more remote areas to national economic opportunities, including exports to neighbouring countries. We saw that in Bamiyan, where a provincial hospital dispenses free world-class care to people of Bamiyan and the neighbouring areas. That is possible thanks to the innovative partnership between the Government and the Aga Khan Foundation.

Afghanistan has done more to invest in women’s leadership than many countries with greater means. Women, especially young women, are rising to reclaim their rightful place in all areas of society, and many are quite simply inspiring. One entrepreneur, who has

created hundreds of jobs for women in a factory and a market, told me: “When we empower a woman, we empower a generation.”

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development holds great promise for the lives of Afghans across the country. Twenty-four United Nations agencies are working in strategic partnership with the Government on issues from food security and clean water to the rule of law, often risking their lives. The reform of the United Nations development system is enabling our country team to work in a more integrated way than ever before, responding to the President’s call to be more effective, efficient and responsive to country-led priorities.

Achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, on gender equality, will be essential to ensuring that women have access to education, health care and decent work and that women are represented in all areas of society and in all political and economic decision-making processes, including in Government and especially the peace negotiations. SDG 16, on peace, justice and strong institutions, will also be essential to holding free, fair and credible elections, to building trust in State institutions and to facilitating reconciliation and the reintegration of former combatants after the signing of any peace agreement.

In the short term, 6.3 million people need urgent humanitarian aid across Afghanistan. Halfway through the year, the humanitarian response plan is only 27 per cent funded. We must increase the level of urgency to provide immediate support and protection to displaced people and those in greatest need.

Afghanistan is at an important crossroads. We welcome the Government’s commitment to peace and to upholding the democratic rights of all Afghans, who have suffered beyond imagination over recent decades. Afghan women play a central role in creating peaceful, inclusive communities with opportunities for women, girls, men, boys, people with disabilities and victims and survivors of the conflict. They need and deserve the support of the entire United Nations system and the international community to invest in building on the gains, while sustaining the peace.

The voices of women, especially the victims, must be heard at the table in the peace process and beyond. I am pleased to say that we are considering a significant investment in preventing and ending violence against women in Afghanistan through our joint Spotlight Initiative with the European Union.

During our visit, my colleagues and I saw enormous grounds for hope. We left with great optimism for a better future for Afghanistan and its impressive people.

I urge the Council to do all in its power to support Afghans in realizing their hopes and aspirations for a lasting peace, stability and prosperity.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Mohammed for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. DiCarlo.

Ms. DiCarlo: This is an important year for Afghanistan as the population marks the 100th year of its independence. As the Deputy Secretary-General just highlighted, the country is at a pivotal juncture with an unprecedented opportunity for peace. While a number of initiatives are ongoing, presidential elections are only nine weeks away.

Allow me to update the Security Council briefly on political developments since the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, briefed the Council on 19 June (S/PV.8555). I will first turn to elections. Our message to the Afghan people is the need for the upcoming presidential election, scheduled for 28 September, to be credible and held on time. We are pleased to once again provide technical assistance for the conduct of the elections.

I am pleased to report that the Independent Election Commission has made steady progress in preparing for the voting. During our recent visit I met with members of the Independent Election Commission and of the Electoral Complaints Commission in order to receive an update on their plans and learn of the challenges that they still face. In addition to a large technical support team embedded with both electoral bodies, the United Nations has also deployed two non-voting members to each Commission. They are experienced former electoral commissioners from Bulgaria, Ghana, Kenya and Nepal, appointed to provide advice to the Commissions. The Afghan commissioners were appointed through a consultative process that included political parties, civil society and presidential candidates.

Regarding the progress made, an election budget of \$149 million has been finalized. The Government has committed to covering a significant portion — \$90 million. The international community has pledged to finance the remaining \$59 million.

The voter registration update exercise was just concluded. More than half a million more Afghans have registered, of whom some 36 per cent are women. This is the first time that citizens were given an opportunity to review and make corrections to the 2018 voter list. The IEC announced a preliminary figure of 9.6 million registered voters for the upcoming elections. The Independent Election Commission is also working to implement biometric voter verification and electronic results transmission technology. If successfully implemented, they will introduce an additional layer of fraud mitigation and address specific post-election challenges observed in 2018.

The security assessment of more than 5,000 polling centres has been completed. Security arrangements for the campaign period are also being put in place. However, security has been a consistent concern in Afghan elections, often infringing on the right to vote, particularly of women and of those living in very insecure areas. We encourage the Afghan Government and the Independent Election Commission to pay attention to the security of all voters, including women, during the process.

Ahead of the campaign, starting this weekend, the Independent Election Commission also issued accreditation letters for the agents of presidential candidates. There are now 18 presidential candidates, three of whom have women as vice presidential candidates on their slates.

Despite the progress, challenges remain. The recruitment of thousands of polling staff needs to be finalized. The training of those staff, as well as observers and candidate agents, is extremely important. The necessary equipment and materials will need to be in place to complete all preparations in a timely fashion and deliver the upcoming elections in a credible and transparent manner. With only nine weeks remaining to the polling and the Commissions working against the clock, there is no room for delays of a technical or political nature. Close collaboration among all actors is critical to ensuring that the remaining steps are completed according to the set electoral calendar.

However, successful elections are not determined by only technical matters. Maintaining a level playing field among all candidates is key to credible elections. The United Nations urges all actors to exercise restraint and show respect for the independence of the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral

Complaints Commission. We also encourage both Commissions to regularly engage with a broad range of stakeholders and ensure that the public is kept fully informed during the process.

Similarly, we expect the candidates and other stakeholders to assume their important responsibility for the credibility of the electoral process. The overriding responsibility for a successful election lies with the political leaders themselves. Credible presidential elections are vital in order to give the newly elected President the authority needed to bring the country together in the peace process.

Let me now turn to the peace process. As the Deputy Secretary-General stated, all Afghans we met made clear their desire for peace now and view recent events as an unprecedented opportunity to achieve peace after so many decades of conflict. Direct talks between the United States and the Taliban continue. The first intra-Afghan peace conference, co-hosted by Germany and Qatar, took place from 7 to 8 July in Doha. While delegates, including Government officials participated in their individual capacities, this was an important step forward towards one common objective — to start formal negotiations between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban to reach a sustainable peace agreement. Additional intra-Afghan conferences are being planned.

Regional engagement to support the Afghan peace process has also intensified. From 10 to 11 July, representatives of China, Russia and the United States held their third consultation on the Afghan peace process in Beijing. Pakistan joined the consultation. On 19 July, the fifth round of the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Practical Cooperation Dialogue took place in Islamabad.

Our interlocutors stressed that peace cannot come at any cost, particularly the democratic gains of the last 18 years. I was heartened to see women-representatives participating in the Dialogue in Doha. As the Deputy Secretary-General stressed earlier, women need to fully, effectively and directly participate in peace talks and negotiations for a peace process to be sustainable.

A political solution to the conflict in Afghanistan remains more relevant than ever, as civilians continue to bear the brunt of the conflict. All too often, civilians are either injured or killed, including when caught in the crossfire, struck by explosive weapons or deliberately targeted. We call on all parties to the conflict to

respect international humanitarian law, ensure access for humanitarian agencies to provide life-saving assistance, and distinguish between combatants and civilian targets to protect civilians from hostilities.

Afghans deserve peace and the right to choose their representatives. The United Nations remains committed to assist Afghanistan in its efforts aimed at attaining peace, stability and prosperity. As the Deputy-secretary General said, we urge the Security Council to do the same.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. DiCarlo for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Afghani.

Ms. Afghani: I am Jamila Afghani, President of the Afghanistan section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, a feminist and pacifist organization working for peace through equality, justice and demilitarization. I also serve as Executive Director of Medica Afghanistan, which provides psychosocial and legal services to approximately 2,000 victims of sexual and gender-based violence per year.

In my 22 years as a feminist religious leader, I have trained as human rights defenders and advocates more than 6,000 imams and 10,000 women activists, focusing on the principles of moderation, social justice, tolerance, gender equality and social participation. My statement today will focus on three key issues: the gendered impact of the conflict, the importance of free and fair elections and the need for Afghan women's meaningful participation in the current peace talks.

The conflict in Afghanistan has resulted in civilian deaths, casualties and displacement, with more than 2 million refugees living outside the country. In the first quarter of 2019 alone, 110,000 people were reported newly displaced. Undoubtedly, the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan remains serious and requires immediate attention.

Women are also adversely impacted by gender-based violence, armed violence, and unequal access to education and poverty alleviation. Women live under the constant threat of insecurity, with profound limits on their political, civil, social and cultural rights. Their ability to freely access education and work — to safely travel to school and jobs — is affected by attacks on schools and places of work. The situation is worse for women and girls in rural areas.

Gender-based violence against women and girls by State and non-State actors continues. More than 60 per cent of women have experienced violence. The targeting of schools and education personnel, night raids on households, the abduction and recruitment of boys for armed violence, acts of violence against journalists, media workers and health-care facilities, torture of conflict-related detainees, the abduction and assassination of religious leaders, and sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls continue to characterize the human rights situation in Afghanistan.

Yet despite the fact that women are affected by the conflict, and even though women and youth comprise the majority of the Afghan population, they are minor players in political life and the economy. Women remain sidelined in the current peace talks.

After four decades of war, Afghanistan is today at a critical juncture. Two important tasks lie ahead of us: the peace process and the upcoming presidential elections,

Free, fair and secure elections will be important for the intra-Afghan peace talks and formal negotiations between the Government and the Taliban to be successful. In earlier elections, polls indicated that approximately 4.2 million out of the 8.8 million registered to vote actually voted. Many Afghans appeared to have stayed at home instead of going to the polling stations owing to fears of violence. Voting was also marred by technical obstacles and corruption throughout the country. The upcoming September presidential elections will require addressing these issues in order to ensure full participation of Afghan voters, especially women and persons with disabilities. We are also concerned about the possibility of a failed election and waste of resources, whereby the gap among political parties, the Afghan Government and Taliban would be widened. This requires the immediate attention of the United Nations and other relevant actors.

Since September 2018, the United States and other countries have been working quickly to facilitate efforts to achieve a negotiated peace settlement. There has been a clear absence of the meaningful participation of women and such other actors as victims directly affected by war in the peace process, alarming many who know that an inclusive delegation for peace is important to ensuring the success of the process and the sustainability of peace in Afghanistan.

Afghan women must be able to meaningfully participate in decisions that directly affect them, including the design, implementation and monitoring of such decisions. Although the United States is obligated to ensure women's active participation in the peace processes, pursuant to its own domestic Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017 and its Strategy on Women, Peace and Security of 2019, its approach to its peace talks with the Taliban has instead led to the marginalization of women in the peace process.

Women have participated as members of the High Peace Council in discussions for a future peace agreement, but this is no longer a viable pathway for the meaningful contribution of women in the peace process because the High Peace Council is limited to serving as a consultative body, merely raising public awareness rather than directly contributing to the peace process. Furthermore, Afghans remain concerned about the politicization of the peace talks by national, regional and international actors that do not advocate the interests of Afghans. At the recent peace talks in Doha, 11 strong women participants demonstrated their solidarity and commitment to national interests and communicated directly with the Taliban about their rights,

Afghan women today are not the women of 30 or 40 years ago.

We know our rights; they have been granted by our faith and are guaranteed by the Constitution, as required by international conventions ratified by Afghanistan. The international community must stand with us at this critical moment and ensure that our rights will not be compromised for a political peace deal. It must actively push for women to be given a place at the table and to be publicly and actively engaged in building the future of their country in order to ensure sustainable peace for the nation.

I therefore urge the Council to ensure clear procedures to engage Afghan women from diverse backgrounds in peace negotiations and conflict resolution efforts, including negotiators and religious leaders who can bridge the current political gaps towards sustainable peace. Furthermore, the Council should ensure that the organization and facilitation of the elections scheduled for later this year make space for women through enhanced security for women voters and candidates and for networks among Government, civil society and other stakeholders to promote the participation of women as voters, candidates and

observers. As the most important and trustworthy body in the world, the United Nations must call for an immediate ceasefire and a stop to the bloodshed on both sides.

Finally, the Council should inquire about the measures being taken to ensure the security and protection of women leaders, women religious peacemakers, women's rights activists, women human rights defenders and journalists.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Afghani for her briefing.

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

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): Mr. President, I thank you for putting this item on the agenda. It was not difficult to convince you, Sir, as we co-chair the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security. I thank you very much and I also thank my colleague from Indonesia, with whom we are penholders on Afghanistan, so, in a joint move, we put this very important issue on the agenda.

I would like to start by thanking Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for their trip to Afghanistan. It sent a very important signal to the United Nations system and the international community, and that signal was recognized in the country. I also thank them for their briefings.

I can only subscribe to what they both said with regard to the issue of women and peace and security. First, Ms. Mohammed reminded us about the progress made. When we think of the Taliban of 20 years ago, we recall the marginalization of women who were not allowed to get a real education or accept a job, let alone participate in political life. What we have achieved today therefore is very good. As the Deputy Secretary-General said, "women are rising". Women are now in school. I remember, when I was in Afghanistan years ago, I saw girls in a schoolroom and was touched by how eager they were to learn. It is a wonderful image. Based on the statistics we heard, women now participate in political life. They have jobs. They are journalists. They are rising, as Ms. Mohammed said. More infrastructure — such as schools — is open to them. A great deal has already been achieved. It has to be absolutely clear that whatever the outcome of the political process, the rights that have been achieved

thus far must be safeguarded and guaranteed. And, of course, we have to go beyond that.

We heard about the positive aspects, but our briefer Jamila Afghani informed us of what is on the negative side of the equation. The conflict is ongoing. We would like to express our condolences about the recent attacks that occurred. Women — and children for that matter — continue to be the primary victims of conflict. They have to survive in a situation of violence, and they have to figure out how their families will also survive. We hear that sexual and gender-based violence continues to occur in the country. Much therefore remains to be done.

In terms of women's participation, we heard that they are participating but not on the front lines. It is wonderful that there are three female vice-presidential candidates but there is no female presidential candidate. We are pleased that Afghanistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations is a woman, although she is not here today. Germany has not yet had a woman Permanent Representative to the United Nations. We have to change that— perhaps not too quickly— but that must change.

With regard to what needs to be done in the negotiations, Germany helped to put together the intra-Afghan dialogue, in which 20 per cent of the participants were women — we were very pleased that Jamila Afghani was one of the participants — but this is not enough. In the negotiations taking place in Doha between the United States and the Taliban, we must ensure that women do not remain in the background but that they are at the table, listened to and able to make a real impact so that their rights are respected. The country will not be at peace if women's rights are not protected or if they do not have equal opportunities. In addition, accountability for crimes that have been committed is extremely important.

I thank Ms. Mohammed for her remarks on the work of the United Nations. I very much welcome cooperation with the European Union-United Nations Spotlight Initiative. There is perhaps one operational point within the United Nations system: in the local staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan more women could be employed, which, I think, will also have a strong impact.

In her plea for more women's participation, which we all support, Jamila Afghani said that the international community must stand with the women of Afghanistan.

I can confirm that the Security Council does support them, and I hope everyone will join that support. The international community also stands behind her and her work. I wish her every success in her efforts.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): I thank the President for convening today's meeting. The beauty of speaking after my German colleague and fellow penholder is that I do not have to say much. He made many points with which I agree, except for the one about changing Permanent Representatives. Like Germany, we have not yet had a woman Permanent Representative, but we have had a female Foreign Minister.

First, I would like to thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for their briefings and their recent visit to Afghanistan. I agree with Mr. Heusgen that the visit was certainly a show of force and support for the process in Afghanistan. I would also like to thank Ms. Jamila Afghani for her valiant work on behalf of Afghan women.

It is a critical time for Afghanistan, as efforts for an intra-Afghan dialogue gather pace and Afghanistan moves towards the presidential election in September. We thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo for her briefing in this regard. We are happy to hear that an increasing number of people are registering to vote and that 36 per cent of them are women. That is a sign of progress.

There have been many calls by Afghan women for women's rights and roles not to be compromised in the name of an agreement. I think this is a point on which we can certainly concur with Ms. Jamila Afghani. The two-day solidarity mission by all-women top United Nations officials that focused on women and peace and security has reinforced the message that the international community cares about the well-being of Afghan women. Their meaningful participation in building an inclusive and democratic Afghanistan ensures that the rights of all segments of society are equal and protected.

I would just like to add three points. First, the need for greater and more meaningful participation of women in the peace and reconciliation process cannot be overstated. Indonesia remains a strong believer in the idea that the meaningful participation of women in the peace and reconciliation process increases the chances for peace to be sustained. We are pleased that, of the 37 members of the reconciliation council

established by President Ghani in November 2018 as the negotiating team, five are women. We hope that the number of women and the scope of their roles will continue to increase.

We were happy to hear from Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed just now that the role played by women in Afghanistan is improving: in terms of improving school enrolment, reducing maternal mortality and participating in political life. However, I think much remains to be done. Of course, we concur with Ms. Mohammed's point that, in building a culture of peace, including women is the only way to make peace. This is a very important aspect.

Secondly, I would like to underscore the importance of continuing to mainstream the women and peace and security agenda in Afghanistan. There have been an increased number of positive signs of the advancement of the women and peace and security agenda in recent years, but this progress needs to happen all over the country. Indonesia hopes that success in the peace and reconciliation process will lead to unstoppable advancement everywhere. In this regard, we support the Government's efforts to finalize the second phase of its national action plan on women and peace and security for the period 2019-2022.

We also applaud the election of two women — to lead the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission. Moreover, the fact that 36 per cent of the 8.5 million registered voters in the October 2018 parliamentary elections were women only underlines their enthusiasm for contributing to the democratic process. However, we heard Ms. Afghani's plea and concur that there is a need for greater involvement of women in Afghan democratic life, and I think that the Council needs to do more to this end.

Thirdly, the security situation should improve. It is regrettable that, despite the ongoing peace process, bombing and attacks are also ongoing, resulting in many civilian casualties. This cannot continue. We call for all Afghan political leaders to commit to the peace process and to the protection civilians. Indonesia condemns yesterday's attacks in several provinces in Afghanistan, and we express our deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government of Afghanistan. Attacks on civilians, particularly women and children, are a crime.

We once again reiterate that violence and extremism have no place in religion. Accordingly, Indonesia will

continue to support endeavours to involve members of ulema in peacemaking so that they convey the message of peace and harmony and become the voice of reason.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to start by thanking Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for briefing us on their recent joint mission to Afghanistan, together with the Executive Directors of the United Nations Population Fund and UN-Women, and for outlining the current situation in Afghanistan. I have also listened attentively to the remarks of Ms. Jamila Afghani, who spoke on behalf of civil society in Afghanistan today.

At present, the situation in Afghanistan is at a critical juncture. Election preparations and the peace and reconciliation process are moving ahead side by side, while the security situation is a source of concern and the humanitarian situation remains grim. The United Nations and the international community must continue to support the Afghan political and reconciliation process, preparations for the presidential election and capacity-building in fighting terrorism and maintaining stability. They must also honour their commitments in providing assistance to improve the local humanitarian situation and support Afghan reconstruction and reintegration into regional economic cooperation.

Although they are important force for maintaining international peace and security, women are also a vulnerable group prone to be victimized in armed conflicts. Women are important builders of, contributors to and participants in the peace process. The international community must support Afghanistan in enhancing protection for women, ensuring women's full access to participation and decision-making in the political sphere and peace process. At same time, it is also important to fully accommodate and respect local social realities and cultural traditions, build up the country's capacities relating to women and peace and security, and respect the country's national ownership of the process.

Just now, Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo also talked about the China-Russia-United States consultation in Beijing, which is the third round of consultations in Beijing on the issue of Afghanistan. We welcome Pakistan joining the consultations and trust that it will play an absolutely crucial role in advancing peace in Afghanistan. After the meeting, the four parties issued a four-party joint statement on the

Afghan peace process. I wish to take this opportunity to brief the Council on the outcomes of this consultation.

The four sides exchanged views on the current situation and joint efforts aimed at realizing a political settlement that would advance peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan and throughout the region. They emphasized the importance of their trilateral consensus on the Afghan peace process reached in Moscow on 25 April. They welcomed recent positive progress, as the crucial parties concerned have advanced in their talks and increased contacts with each other. They also welcomed the intra-Afghan meetings held in Moscow and Doha.

The four sides called for relevant parties to seize the opportunity for peace and immediately start intra-Afghan negotiations among the Taliban, the Afghan Government and other Afghans. They reaffirmed that negotiations should be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned and further agreed that these negotiations should produce a peace framework as soon as possible. This framework should guarantee the orderly and responsible transition of the security situation and set out the details of an agreement on a future inclusive political arrangement that is acceptable to all Afghans.

The four sides encouraged all parties to take steps to reduce violence, leading to a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire that starts with intra-Afghan negotiations. The four sides agreed to maintain the momentum of the consultations and will invite other important stakeholders to join them on the basis of the trilateral consensus agreed on 25 April in Moscow. This broader group will meet at the start of the intra-Afghan negotiations.

China supports the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and other competent entities in playing a greater role on the issue of Afghanistan. Alongside the international community, China is ready to continue contributing to security, stability, development and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, allow me to offer my condolences to the families of the victims of the attacks in Kabul yesterday. The Afghan civilian population has once again been challenged by tragic circumstances.

I thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed for her briefing and especially for her visit

to Afghanistan last week, which sent a strong message on the participation and protection of women. I would also like to thank Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo for her briefing and Ms. Jamila Afghani for her commitment to the inclusion of women in Afghan politics.

Finally, I thank Peru, Germany and Indonesia for taking the initiative to organize today's meeting. Equality between women and men and the participation of women are a priority in French diplomacy, as championed by President Macron in Europe, within the Group of Seven and at the United Nations. We are pleased to have the opportunity to discuss this issue today.

Today I will make two main observations. First, with respect to the issue of the protection of women, they remain, as the last 24 hours have once again highlighted, the first victims of the conflict. We must not lose sight of the fact that women continue to be subjected to the worst forms of violence, particularly in Taliban-controlled areas. France reiterates its full support for Afghanistan and the Government's ongoing efforts aimed at protecting Afghan women from violence, including sexual violence.

We especially welcome the commitments undertaken to fully implementing the women and peace and security action plan and call on Afghanistan, with the support of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the international community, to pursue this objective. We recall the importance of the European Union-United Nations Spotlight Initiative in strengthening the fight against violence against women and thereby in promoting the empowerment of women and equality between women and men.

Secondly, the participation of women in the peace process and Afghan political life must, more than ever, remain at the heart of the concerns of the Afghan Government, UNAMA and the international community. To be sustainable and meet the expectations of the entire Afghan population, the peace process must be inclusive. It is essential that women participate directly and meaningfully in peace discussions.

France welcomes the progress made at the Doha meeting held on 7 and 8 July. We hosted a delegation of 15 Afghan women in Paris in June to discuss their role in the peace process and receive training on negotiating. Nevertheless, there is still a long road ahead, and the preservation and consolidating of Afghanistan's human

rights achievements, including women's rights, must remain an absolute priority.

With two months to go before the presidential elections, it is also essential to continue efforts to ensure the full participation of women in Afghan politics and electoral processes. Progress has been made, with women constituting 35 per cent of the electorate in the upcoming presidential elections in September, an 8 per cent increase over the October 2018 parliamentary elections. We encourage the Afghan Government to take all measures to allow all Afghan women to vote. It is regrettable that no women are running in the elections of 28 September. Women continue to face too many obstacles, ranging from intimidation and physical threats to lack of financial resources. It is therefore crucial that we lend our support to UNAMA and beyond.

Let me conclude by reaffirming the three priorities on which our efforts must focus in this pivotal period: redoubling efforts to protect civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel, and meet humanitarian needs; bringing to fruition efforts to achieve a negotiated and lasting peace in Afghanistan; and ensuring the successful holding of presidential elections. It is imperative that the international community, and in particular the Security Council, continue to support Afghanistan on its path towards peace, democracy and development.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I would like to begin by expressing our condolences to Tunisia for the death of the President, but I also wish to join my colleagues in condemning the recent attacks in Kabul and other parts of Afghanistan, which are a very sad reminder of why peace is so essential. Afghanistan has suffered enough from such attacks, and we send our deepest condolences and sympathies to the Government and the families of the victims.

Like others, I think that it is very good that we are able to have this discussion today. Thank you, Mr. President, for scheduling it, and I thank the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo and Ms. Afghani, from the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. When I was in Afghanistan, I saw for myself the very good work that the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom does. It is good to hear more about it today.

It was also excellent that the Deputy Secretary-General was able to visit the country, and forgive me

for saying so, but particularly with a broken leg; that takes a lot of guts and organization, and I thank her very much for doing that. I think that it not only underscores the importance of the issue but also the determination all of us have to help Afghanistan and try to move this really important agenda forward.

I can confirm that, as the Deputy Secretary-General said, the European Union and the United Nations will increase our efforts to fight violence against women in Afghanistan through the Spotlight Initiative. When I first arrived in Kabul, it was just after the murder of Farkhunda Malikzada at the mosque, so it has very much been on my mind as an issue that deserves renewed efforts, notwithstanding the excellent work that has been undertaken so far.

We in the United Kingdom have a Global Special Envoy for Gender Equality, and she also went to Kabul early this month to support women's participation in preliminary discussions and the peace process itself. As others have mentioned, the recent intra-Afghan dialogue in Doha, which Germany and Qatar facilitated, was extremely good news. Nearly 25 per cent of the non-Taliban participants were women. It is clear that there is more that can be done, but that was an encouraging start on which we can build.

We all know that we need a genuine political process in Afghanistan to give all Afghans — and I want stress the word “all” — the best chance to decide the future of their country. We comprehensively support the ongoing efforts of the Afghan Government and the United States, and in particular Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad, who many of us remember from when he was the Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

I hope that the entire region, as well as the international community, can lend support to inclusive intra-Afghan peace negotiations, without delay and with the full involvement of both sides to the conflict, including, in particular, obviously, the legitimate Government of Afghanistan. I also hope that whenever we see attempts to roll back on women's rights we can speak up and challenge them. Any political settlement needs to build on the progress made on human rights, and that includes gender equality over the past 18 years. The Deputy Secretary-General set that point out very eloquently.

Like many of the speakers this morning we too have been following the elections. They are crucial for

future political stability and inclusion. In a clear signal of Afghan ownership, we welcome the Government's commitment to financing a significant portion of the election budget. We also urge the Independent Election Commission, with the support of the relevant Afghan ministries, to continue its work to deliver timely, inclusive and credible elections, working with the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, so that the Afghan people can exercise their right to vote safely. I know from first-hand experience how important elections are to the Afghan people, and I hope that we can give a lot of attention to ensuring the full, effective and meaningful participation of women, as both voters and candidates.

Elections are a civilian operation. They should not be used as a target. Polling takes place in schools and public places and involves ordinary citizens. An attack on the elections would be an attack on the Afghan people as a whole. We therefore hope that all political actors will behave responsibly and constructively, so that the elections can be peaceful and inclusive. In this regard, I might note and welcome the Taliban's commitment made at the intra-Afghan dialogue in Doha to refraining from targeting civilians. We hope that they will stand by this promise to their fellow Afghans.

For the United Kingdom, we remain committed to supporting inclusive peace in Afghanistan. In June, the Afghan Ambassador and I announced the launch of a group of friends of women in Afghanistan, and we will have a formal launch in autumn. This initiative is designed to complement the United Kingdom's regular engagement with women peacebuilders across Afghanistan. We recently held consultations on what the women and peace and security agenda means for them and exploring how best to use the upcoming anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000) to achieve their goals. We are looking forward to taking the findings of those consultations forward in the coming months, in the context of the Afghanistan peace process.

To conclude, we remain steadfast in our commitment to supporting the people and Government of Afghanistan in achieving a peaceful, inclusive and prosperous future, with equal rights and participation as its core.

Mr. Moriko (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes the holding of this briefing following the recent visit to Afghanistan of

Ms. Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Côte d'Ivoire condemns in the strongest terms the deadly attacks yesterday in Kabul and extends its condolences to the Afghan Government and the families in mourning.

My delegation thanks the Deputy Secretary-General and Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General, for their briefings, which inform the Security Council of the lessons learned from their solidarity mission on women and peace and security. We also thank Ms. Jamila Afghani of the Afghanistan section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom for her briefing. The high level of the United Nations delegation for the visit — composed of Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Ms. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, and Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN-Women — reflects the importance of women's participation in the process of restoring peace and security in Afghanistan.

In a context marked by many persistent social obstacles, the visit of the Deputy Secretary-General is, in our view, a strong message and encouragement to the Afghan authorities to continue their efforts aimed at increasing the participation of women in institutions and the peace process, in keeping with the conclusions of the national conference held on 12 December 2018 in Kabul. Despite the persistent challenges, the status of Afghan women has made encouraging improvements in recent years in terms of access to basic education, health and employment. As a result, Afghan women are increasingly contributing to the development of their country.

Despite the limited funding, the efforts of Afghan authorities to implement resolution 1325 (2000) have resulted in, inter alia, the adoption of the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan, in the interest of peace and security. This initiative strengthens the role of women in negotiation and conflict-resolution processes. However, although article 22 of the Constitution guarantees gender equality, women's contribution to peace processes and their participation in political life remain low, owing to the obstacles related to gender inequality.

While ongoing negotiations are giving hope for peace in Afghanistan, my delegation is hopeful that

the current gains of Afghan women in the political and economic fields will be consolidated. In this regard, my delegation welcomes the gradual increase in the number of women in education, the judiciary, the army and the police. There are now more than 68,000 female teachers, including 800 female university professors in private and public institutions, as well as more than 6,000 female judges, prosecutors, lawyers, police officers and army personnel.

In conclusion, my delegation welcomes the appointment of two women to head the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission, two key institutions in the organization of the presidential election to be held on 28 September. The successful organization of these elections will be proof of the indispensable contribution of women to strengthening peace and stability in Afghanistan and in the rest of the world.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, we thank Ms. Jamila Afghani for her frank briefing. We would say to her that we know very well that by helping women, we are helping Afghanistan as a whole.

We also thank our brave United Nations women at the very helm of the Organization — Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo — for their briefings. It is very important that they visited Afghanistan and received their information first hand. Their recent visit to the country and the Council's mission to Kabul in January 2018 confirmed that the situation there is not only difficult, but critical. The country continues to be shaken by large-scale bloody terrorist acts, including in Kabul. There has been an increase in civilian casualties, including women and children, as well as among Afghan military and police forces. We recognize and appreciate their dedication to the fight against terrorism. Coordinated action is needed to address this harmful trend.

We are gravely concerned about the presence of the terrorist organization the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Afghanistan. Afghan security forces have had some success, but militants continue to strengthen their positions and influence, including in the north and south of the country, replenishing their ranks with foreign terrorist fighters from Syria and Iraq. We are also concerned about the diversification of ISIL's methods and channels of youth recruitment.

The terrorist threat is inextricably linked to the drug problem, which poses a serious threat to Afghanistan, the region and the world. Drug dollars fuel terrorism. We believe that it is essential to maintain and redouble international efforts to combat this scourge. We wish to draw attention to the professional operations and measures undertaken by the Collective Security Treaty Organization in the fight against drug trafficking. Russia will facilitate Afghanistan's establishment as a peaceful, independent and flourishing State that will generate neither terrorists nor drug threat. We intend to continue to work with our Afghan friends to eradicate security threats, primarily from ISIL and Al-Qaida, and to strengthen the capacity of civilian, security and anti-drug entities.

Despite the difficult military and political situation in Afghanistan, we see a window of opportunity for a peaceful settlement and national reconciliation, with the participation of the broadest possible range of social and political circles in the country. At this stage, international cooperation is coalescing around the settlement of the regional conflict in Afghanistan. We believe that this is a step in the right direction. We are convinced that this process should not be turned into a vain and frivolous display or a political competition. Our common objective is to preserve a unified and indivisible ethnically diverse Afghan State that provides equal opportunities in life for all groups in the population, including women.

Russia has consistently supported the Afghan people's aspirations for lasting peace. We have a genuine interest in promoting the Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace and reconciliation process and the subsequent stabilization of the country. A peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan is our common objective. We are ready to continue to provide assistance to that end. It was this objective that guided our own efforts in this area when we organized the second meeting of the Moscow format of consultations in November 2018, which brought together the broadest possible range of stakeholders, and when, in May, we also provided a forum for intra-Afghan discussions with the delegation of the Taliban.

We highly appreciate our constructive and honest relations with the people and political forces of Afghanistan and we intend to develop them in every way possible. We support the policy of making the peace process in Afghanistan as inclusive as possible and encourage the participation of all the

country's sociopolitical forces, including women. We are convinced that broad discussions are the key to achieving peace in Afghanistan.

We are pleased that the inter-Afghan dialogue — which was launched in Moscow on 5 and 6 February and brought women, leading politicians and the Taliban around the same table for the first time — was taken a step further in Doha on 7 and 8 July. We know that the German Government contributed significantly to the convening of this dialogue. It is all the more encouraging that both rounds have confirmed the sincere commitment of all Afghans to achieving peace and reconciliation. We welcome the fact that, in both Moscow and Doha, the participants adopted an outcome document that reflected their intention to continue moving consistently towards intra-Afghan peace.

We would like to highlight another successful channel of cooperation on Afghanistan, namely, the trilateral consultations at the level of special representatives of Russia, the United States and China. These meetings took place in Washington, D.C., in March, in Moscow in April, and in Beijing in July. It is important that a joint statement was issued after the meetings in Moscow and Beijing, details of which our colleague from China has just conveyed to us. We welcome the inclusion of Pakistan in these consultations with the troika, and we are confident that Iran can play an important, constructive role.

On the whole, the inclusion of regional players in this format would have a beneficial impact on the development of solutions to the post-conflict order in Afghanistan, as only an atmosphere of good-neighbourliness and cooperation will allow us to solve the acute problems in Afghanistan today. We are convinced that we need to move forward in Afghanistan using tried and tested structures, and we see great potential in the Contact Group of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization with Afghanistan, as well as in the counter-terrorism and anti-drugs cooperation between Afghanistan and the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Afghanistan is on the threshold of presidential elections that are planned for September. We believe that these elections should be a powerful consolidating factor for Afghan society. On the whole, the criteria for unification should be defined not only in the holding of elections, but also through efforts to achieve national reconciliation. It is that approach that will allow us to

strengthen the dignified status of women, which has always been and will remain not only a decoration in modern Afghanistan, but an embodiment of the bravery of the Afghan people as a whole in fighting terrorism, in politics and diplomacy, in journalism, in parliamentarianism, in national reconciliation and in the social and economic reconstruction of the country. We must not forget that very serious challenges lie ahead. Therefore, any steps towards the future in Afghanistan should be acceptable to all Afghans, including women.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Mr. President, for having called this meeting. I thank Ms. Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General; Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs; as well as Ms. Jamila Afghani for their briefings. The briefings follow their most recent visit to Afghanistan, where they had important meetings. They have shared with us their recommendations, which reflect the importance of reaching agreements on very important issues in Afghanistan, in particular a comprehensive, just and sustainable peace process.

I join others in offering my condolences to the Government and people of Afghanistan following the terrorist attacks that happened yesterday in Kabul. We condemn those attacks. We think they are reprehensible and unjustifiable. We must bring the perpetrators of those attacks to justice.

For more than 40 years, Afghanistan has been in an unstable political and security situation. The Afghan people suffer on a daily basis. The political authorities in Afghanistan must make efforts to avoid partisan and sectarian interests to provide the population with a safe and dignified life.

For its part, the Security Council should intensify its efforts to support the political process and to allow for elections to be held in September, as planned and to support the negotiations about a national reconciliation that aim to make the political process in Afghanistan a success.

We cannot talk about political reconciliation without mentioning the essential role of Afghan women. Indeed, women and mothers make up half of society, and they are responsible for educating an entire generation. Given the important role of women in society, we must uphold their civil and political rights. That is a prerequisite in all countries, including Afghanistan, and the Government has taken measures to

improve gender equality in a number of different areas. We join others who have spoken before us in calling for women's participation in the political reconciliation process in order to preserve the gains that have been made in the past.

Kuwait firmly believes that there cannot be sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan and within the region without negotiations at the diplomatic level. Military solutions have never led to long-term, sustainable peace. That is why we call on all parties to participate constructively in the diplomatic efforts to achieve peace and to preserve the interests of the Afghan people. Although we understand that the path to peace is strewn with difficulties, we know that the starting point should be inclusive national reconciliation in order to achieve the peace that is so desired. A sustainable peace requires regional cooperation, given the important role played by the countries of the region. That is necessary to re-establish peace in Afghanistan.

We have taken note of the bilateral meetings held between Afghanistan and other countries in the region in an attempt to improve the situation in the country. We welcome international efforts to facilitate political reconciliation in Afghanistan, in particular those of Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad, the United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation. We are delighted to see the positive developments in that regard following the intra-Afghan negotiations in Doha a few days ago, as well as the communiqué signed by the United States of America and Afghanistan yesterday to deal with the Afghan crisis.

In conclusion, we reiterate that diplomatic efforts in Afghanistan should be accompanied by significant investment in education. We need to prioritize education in order to build a society. Many peoples have seen their societies fall because of war and conflict and have been able to catch up only after investing in education, without distinction between men and women. There is no alternative for a comprehensive development approach that focuses on building the capacities of individuals, enhancing Government capabilities, building infrastructure and accelerating economic growth. Addressing these diverse challenges is the only way to eliminate the deep-rooted causes of this conflict, which has lasted so long.

Mr. Lewicki (Poland): First of all, let me join other delegations in condemning in the strongest terms the recent terrorist attacks and in expressing our sincerest

condolences to the families of victims. These heinous acts must stop, and those responsible for these terrorist attacks must be held accountable.

Let me also thank all briefers. We have heard repeatedly that despite the many challenges that Afghan women still face, the progress made in recent years has been impressive. I wish to commend the Afghan authorities and society, in particular Afghan women, for that progress because we — the Security Council, the international community and the United Nations — are here simply to assist them in their efforts to achieve a stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

As stressed in resolution 1325 (2000), the founding resolution of the women and peace and security agenda, women play an important role in conflict prevention and resolution. As one of the World Bank's reports on the role of gender in the prevention of violent conflicts assesses, women's empowerment and gender equality are strongly associated with more peaceful and stable societies and with more effective and long-term peacebuilding efforts. So we are more than happy to see the progress made regarding the empowerment of women in Afghanistan because no stable peace is possible without women's full participation in the peace processes.

In that vein, we support all efforts to find a peaceful settlement and we have heard about many efforts, including by the members of the Security Council. It is our view that it is crucial to ensure the full participation of Afghan women in all peace talks. As was mentioned by many colleagues, any peace agreement cannot compromise the gains achieved by women over recent years. I therefore fully concur with what Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo said about the fact that women need to fully participate in the peace talks.

We are concerned about the violence still faced by Afghan women. Ms. Afghani said that approximately 60 per cent of women are still affected by violence. In that context, we see an important role for the security and justice sector, which means that the security and justice sector, supported by local communities, needs to find an effective response to gender-based violence. The culture of impunity must be eliminated for the benefit of the whole of Afghan society.

In that regard, we welcome and strongly support the increased efforts of the European Union and the United Nations to fight violence against women through the Spotlight Initiative. We also agree with

Ms. Afghani that special attention should be paid to women, in particular those in a vulnerable situation, such as women with disabilities. We hope that the recently adopted resolution 2475 (2019) on persons with disabilities, initiated by the United Kingdom and Poland, will strengthen the protection of rights and improve the situation of women with disabilities.

I also wish to agree with the Ambassador of Indonesia, Mr. Djani, about the positive role that can also be played by religious leaders in the promotion of women's rights. I would also like to echo colleagues in stressing the importance of fair and credible upcoming presidential elections.

I wish to express our deep appreciation to the United Nations, the Deputy Secretary-General and our brave colleagues, United Nations personnel, working in the challenging situation in Afghanistan.

Ms. Norman-Chalet (United States of America): We also join colleagues today in expressing condolences to the Government of Tunisia on the passing of its President, as well as to the victims' families for the senseless attacks in Kabul yesterday.

It is good to see Deputy Secretary-General Mohammed here in the Council. I thank her for her briefing and for the continued hard work that the United Nations undertakes to support peace, human rights and economic development in Afghanistan. As she noted in her remarks, women have a critical role to play in supporting the development of a comprehensive and sustainable peace agreement in Afghanistan. We also appreciate the updates provided by Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and the statement by Ms. Jamila Afghani highlighting critical issues.

This week, President Trump reiterated that there was no military solution to the decades-long war in Afghanistan. Now is the time to seize the opportunity to end the war. The United States efforts are focused on achieving an inclusive political settlement that ends the war in Afghanistan. As we seek a negotiated political settlement to the Afghan conflict, the United States continues to support bringing Afghans together at the negotiating table to decide the future of their own country — one that is inclusive of women, representatives of opposition parties, civil society and minority groups.

Let me reaffirm that the United States does not seek a withdrawal agreement. Rather, we are committed to pursuing a comprehensive peace agreement that would guarantee that Afghanistan never again becomes a platform for transnational terrorism.

The United States and the Taliban reached an agreement, in principle, in January that any comprehensive peace agreement must address four interconnected issues: counter-terrorism, foreign-troop presence, intra-Afghan dialogue leading to intra-Afghan negotiations, and a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire. We have continued to talk in more detail about those issues with the Taliban, most recently in Doha last month. We have been clear that we are not negotiating, nor will we negotiate, with the Taliban on behalf of the Government or the people of Afghanistan.

While the negotiations with the Taliban continue, we have been conducting parallel talks with the Afghan Government. Our goal is to facilitate an intra-Afghan negotiation so that the Afghans themselves can reach a political settlement and chart a peaceful and prosperous path for their country. In June, during his visit to Kabul, Secretary Pompeo set an ambitious target date of 1 September for the Taliban and the Afghan Government to reach a framework agreement through negotiations.

Peace is our priority and it must not wait for the Afghan presidential election scheduled for 28 September. At the same time, we continue to press the Afghan Government and electoral institutions to take all steps necessary to be prepared to hold a credible election.

Special Representative Khalilzad is currently in Kabul for consultations with the Afghan Government on next steps in the peace process, including identifying a national negotiating team that can participate in intra-Afghan negotiations. Special Representative Khalilzad has continuously advocated for Afghan women to be included in those negotiations.

Not only should Afghan women have a seat at the negotiating table, they should have meaningful participation and a role in decision-making, as has been said by others this morning and reiterated by Ms. Afghani. Special Representative Khalilzad is also continuing his engagement with representatives of civil society, including peace advocates and women's rights groups, to further encourage broad participation in the peace process.

Afghans — men and women — are already coming together in support of peace. The Intra-Afghan Conference for Peace, hosted in Doha, Qatar, from 7 to 8 July with the critical support of Germany, marked a positive step forward towards an inclusive dialogue among all Afghan national stakeholders. We were encouraged that women made up nearly 25 per cent of non-Taliban participants at that crucial conference.

The strong presence and engagement of Afghan women at the recent talks reflect the gains that Afghanistan has made in the past 18 years. In 2001, conditions for women in Afghanistan were dire. Access to education was limited, with fewer than 900,000 children in school and almost no girls registered.

Today 9 million children, including more than 3.5 million girls, attend primary and secondary school. An additional 100,000 women also study at public and private universities. Today women make up 27 per cent of civil service employees in Afghanistan. They have served in key Cabinet positions, including as Ministers of Public Health, Women's Affairs, Counter-narcotics and Mining, and now here in New York as Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

The United States shares the desire of Afghans and the international community to protect those gains and our shared investment. We remain committed to all Afghans who support human rights, including the rights of women, girls and ethnic minorities.

As Afghans continue to pursue peace, planning for a timely and credible presidential election continues. Preparation for the presidential elections, including the publication of the final voter list, the printing of ballots and the recruitment and training of poll workers is continuing apace. Donors are also contributing \$59 million of the \$149 million election budget, including approximately \$29 million from the United States. We continue to urge the Afghan Government, the Independent Election Commission and all political stakeholders to take all necessary steps to ensure that the elections are credible.

In closing, allow me to note that, in line with the United States strategy on women, peace and security, we will continue efforts to put women at the centre of our diplomacy and development efforts in Afghanistan, protecting women in conflict and supporting women's meaningful participation in the peace process. We will do that because it has been proven that women's participation in peace processes result in more

sustainable and long-lasting agreements. That effort is supported by the historic legislation on women, peace and security signed by President Trump in October 2017, making the United States the first country in the world with a comprehensive law on this issue.

Let me again express our appreciation to the United Nations and other international partners for their support in strengthening the legitimacy of Afghanistan's electoral process and supporting Afghanistan's peace process.

Mr. Mabhongo (South Africa): Let me too start, on behalf of South Africa, by extending our condolences to the Government and the people of Afghanistan on the recent terrorist attacks in Kabul. We also wish to extend our condolences to the Government and the people of Tunisia on the passing of President Béji Caïd Essebsi.

My delegation wishes to thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed for her very insightful briefing on her recent visit to Afghanistan. The visit by such a high-powered delegation, including the Under-Secretaries-General of UN-Women, the United Nations Population Fund and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, epitomizes mostly the solidarity with and support of the international community, in particular the United Nations, for Afghanistan. We therefore also wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo and Ms. Jamila Afghani for their briefings earlier.

South Africa looks forward to the presidential elections that will take place in September in Afghanistan, and we encourage all parties to work together to ensure that the elections commence as planned and mandated by the Afghan Constitution. Additionally, it is equally important that the upcoming elections be credible, inclusive, free, fair, safe and transparent. We wish to welcome the progress made by Afghanistan in its efforts to achieve meaningful and inclusive participation in the peace process.

The convening at the beginning of this year of the national conference of Afghan women for peace, which was organized by the Office of the First Lady, with support from the High Peace Council, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Afghan Women's Network and other civil society organizations, was a noteworthy initiative in advancing the women and peace and security agenda.

Such activities by Afghan women across all levels and sectors of society create a conducive environment for women to continue to play an instrumental role in the peace process and beyond. A 15-point declaration on the role of women was developed by the conference and submitted to President Ashraf Ghani. We welcome the undertaking by President Ashraf Ghani to have its provisions considered at the consultative *loya jirga* and peace talks. Those are positive steps towards ensuring the full and inclusive participation of women in the peace process in Afghanistan.

We also wish to commend the Afghan Government for the development of a second phase of the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan and encourage its comprehensive implementation. It is commendable that Afghanistan has made significant strides to implement the aspirations of resolution 1325 (2000) by ensuring the meaningful role of women in the peace process.

Sustainable peace in Afghanistan is dependent upon broad consensus whereby women, as well as young people, fully participate in the peace process. That should include their participation at all levels of local and national Government. South Africa therefore encourages the further incorporation of gender perspectives and the concerns of women in enhancing the sustainability of peace and security in Afghanistan.

In conclusion, we remain convinced that the only long-term solution to the situation in Afghanistan is a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political process leading to the peaceful resolution of conflict and an inclusive political settlement.

Mr. Sipaco Ribala (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, allow me to offer my condolences to Tunisia on the death of its President and to thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, not only for her excellent informative briefing but also for the outstanding work that she has been doing and her continued commitment to achieving international peace and security.

I also thank Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Peacebuilding and Political Affairs, for her informative briefing. I also thank Ms. Jamila Afghani, President of the Afghan section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, for her valuable contribution.

Last but not least, I commend the President of the Security Council, Ambassador Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, and the delegations of Germany and Indonesia for convening this meeting. This briefing, as we shall see, will enlighten us on various aspects related to the woman and peace and security agenda, the reconciliation process and the inclusive participation in the upcoming elections in Afghanistan. Those issues are of vital importance to achieving lasting peace and a truly inclusive political process.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea has consistently accorded great attention to the political and reconstruction process in Afghanistan, especially now as work is under way on the upcoming presidential elections, scheduled for September, and on sensitive peace talks. We are confident that, despite the difficulties that their country has experienced, the Afghan people will maintain their resolve to elect their political leaders, based on universal suffrage, and we hope that the State institutions responsible for holding elections, political parties and international partners will ensure that the elections are credible and inclusive and that their outcome is accepted by all Afghan parties so as to ensure the success of the reconstruction process.

At such a critical time — as we have stressed in this Chamber time and again — during the period leading up to the presidential elections, women must play not only a significant, but also a leading role. While we acknowledge that significant progress has been made in that regard, we encourage the Afghan Government to continue to include women at all stages of negotiations and decision-making in the peace and reconciliation processes. It is clear that we must ensure that the rights of women are always guaranteed at all levels of the peace talks. In that regard, we echo and support the message conveyed by the Deputy Secretary-General that women must be at the centre of efforts to achieve lasting peace and security in the country.

We listened attentively to the information provided by the briefers, and we are certain that the various meetings held with political and religious leaders, as well as with various women's groups, during the visit by the high-level United Nations delegation last weekend will undoubtedly strengthen the Afghan peace process.

We must all promote the implementation of the woman and peace and security agenda and build peace through the political and economic empowerment of women. In that context, we echo the recommendations

of today's briefers, as well as those of those of the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security, established pursuant to resolution 2242 (2015), at its 10 July meeting, namely, for the purpose of resolving the conflict, to include support for the meaningful participation of women in any peace talks with members of the Taliban, as well as decision-making bodies involved in the peace process, including during informal and formal peace negotiations, while calling on the Government and international partners to dedicate the resources necessary to implement the national action plan on women, peace and security, demanding the protection of women human rights defenders and calling on the Afghan Government to sign the Arms Trade Treaty and to take meaningful steps to stop the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the country.

Our delegation supports a policy aimed at ensuring that the upcoming peace process in Afghanistan is as inclusive as possible by incorporating all social and political stakeholders in the country, including the opposition. That is why we welcome the fact that political leaders met with Taliban representatives in Qatar. We hope that the parties will respect their international obligations and protect civilians, among others, as an outcome of the talks. In that regard, we also believe that the peace process will be strengthened not only by the support of the United Nations, but also through partnerships with the international community and, in particular, countries of the region.

In conclusion, we would like to stress our concern about the ongoing attacks on civilians and the level of sexual and gender-based violence that continue to occur in Afghanistan. In that regard, we join delegations in condemning yesterday's terrorist attack in the country.

Mrs. Van Vlierberge (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): The plight of women in Afghanistan deserves our full attention. We welcome the recent visit to Afghanistan of the Deputy Secretary-General and Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo to address the subject, as well as this opportunity today to share ideas and recommendations with Ms. Afghani. It is important that the Council, as our briefers have just done, send a clear sign of support to women in Afghanistan, in particular in the light of the crucial months ahead.

Today I will address four points: the role of women in the peace process, their role in the elections, the protection of civilians and, lastly, support for the

National Action Plan on Resolution 1325 (2000): Women, peace and security.

The recent intra-Afghan dialogue facilitated by Qatar and Germany is an important step, but the road ahead remains long. We welcome the presence of 10 women around the table and encourage increased participation in the future. We reiterate the importance of promoting the meaningful and equal participation of women at all stages of the peace process. We fully support national and international efforts towards a peace that is Afghan-owned and Afghan-led. As the Deputy Secretary-General and Ms. Afghani underscored, no future peace agreement can allow the situation faced by women to deteriorate. We recall the universality of human rights in that respect. After 19 years of armed conflict, it would be deeply unfair for women to pay the price of peace. Just and lasting peace is not possible if half the population is excluded.

The presidential elections in October will be another step towards building a democratic Afghanistan. They must be safe, fair and free. All political parties and electoral institutions must contribute to a peaceful process and avoid polarization. It is essential that women throughout Afghanistan be able to stand as candidates in the elections, be represented in electoral institutions and vote in complete security. It would be a good idea for all candidates to address the issue of women's rights during the campaign. We acknowledge the important role of including civil society and, in particular, women's organizations in that regard.

The conflict in Afghanistan is one of the deadliest in the world and requires special efforts to protect civilians. The protection of civilians is an important priority. All parties must respect the rules of international humanitarian law. Women are all too often the victims of attacks against civilians, as we saw recently in the attacks in Ghazni and Kabul. We condemn the attack in Kabul on 25 July against State employees, which killed seven, including five women. We expect all parties to make every effort to prevent civilian casualties and ensure accountability in the event of non-compliance. Our message to the Taliban is clear — condemn terrorism, abandon the military path, choose the political path and invest in the negotiation process. There is no other alternative.

Belgium is fully committed to the plight of women and girls in Afghanistan. In December, we made a voluntary contribution of €2 million to UN

Women, which supports Afghan authorities in rolling out the National Action Plan to implement resolution 1325 (2000) in the country. We now await the launch of the second phase of the Action Plan, based on lessons learned, in particular with regard to the role of civil society.

We acknowledge the important role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to support the country in the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda, as demonstrated during the recently held meeting of the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security on Afghanistan. Belgium supports and agrees with the recommendations made by the Group. The next UNAMA mandate-renewal must highlight those efforts. Belgium will pay special attention to that issue during the negotiations.

Mr. Beras Hernández (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we extend our condolences to the people of Tunisia following the death of their President. We would also like to extend our sympathy to the Afghan family following the recent attacks in Kabul.

I thank Ms. Mohammed, Ms. DiCarlo and Ms. Afghani for their briefings.

In a timely and hopeful rapprochement exercise, Afghan and Taliban political leaders met in Qatar a few days ago and called for a reduction in violence. We welcome that peace initiative by international actors.

We are encouraged by the positive feedback from Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo about her visit to Afghanistan. The fact that she has seen progress in the level of women's participation and leadership they have assumed in decision-making processes is a source of satisfaction. In addition, the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security recently met to discuss the situation of women, together with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and the United Nations country team, which allowed us to reaffirm that it is vital to guarantee women's participation in the September elections and at the negotiating table to address the future of the country.

We highlight the resilience of Afghan women, who, even in a hostile environment plagued by inequality, have advanced and overcome significant obstacles. We believe that it is urgent to put an end to sexual and gender-based violence in Afghanistan, as it affects

the dignity, health and well-being of Afghan women. We encourage the authorities to promote substantive actions that prohibit it and to independently investigate and bring to justice those responsible.

We applaud the development of the second phase of the 2019-2022 National Action Plan on Resolution 1325 (2000): Women, peace and security and eagerly await its early completion. We urge the Government and the Taliban to integrate the meaningful participation of Afghan women into the dialogue for peace.

Afghanistan is at a turning point with its elections and peace negotiations. All efforts to enable the Afghan people to escape instability and violence must be exhausted. It is our duty to help them in a process that must be Afghan-owned and Afghan-led, with the participation of all actors in society, in particular women and young people.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Peru.

We too would like to begin by expressing our gratitude to Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo, and Ms. Jamila Afghani for the valuable and detailing information they have provided us with today.

We also join others in offering our condolences to the people of Tunisia following the passing of President Essebsi, as well as to the Government and people of Afghanistan in the wake of yesterday's attacks, whose many victims included women and children.

We wish to commend Ms. Mohammed's leadership in making the journey to bear witness to the situation of women in Afghanistan in situ. We welcome the fact that she was accompanied by Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and Ms. Natalia Kanem, which enabled a comprehensive approach to be taken. We believe that the visit was particularly significant in the light of the presidential elections to be held in Afghanistan in September. These must be held on the basis of a spirit of dialogue, tolerance, inclusion and mutual respect.

In that connection, we welcome the historic appointment of two women as respective heads of the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission. This constitutes a crucial step forward for the involvement of women in the political life of the country, which will undoubtedly contribute

to strengthening governance and the legitimacy of the Afghan political system.

Moreover, we consider it essential to promote the participation of women in the implementation processes and mechanisms of the peace and reconciliation process. Based on reports on the ground, Peru is convinced that women's participation is a vital element of conflict resolution, peacebuilding and peacekeeping. In addition, the greater involvement of women in decision-making must be promoted through the creation of employment opportunities and the establishment of quotas in Government positions. We hope that the Afghan Government will continue to work on the implementation of its National Action Plan on Resolution 1325 (2000): Women, peace and security, as well as on its programme for the economic empowerment of women.

At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen access to justice and the fight against impunity so that victims are able to trust their institutions and that those responsible for acts of violence are held accountable. We must bear in mind that, in the majority of cases, women and girls affected by so many years of conflict do not have access to protection services or legal assistance.

In order to contribute to that cause, the Council should maintain and strengthen its gender perspective and the women and peace and security agenda, particularly in the development of mandates, as well as in following up on the recommendations made. In this connection, we believe it important to further synthesize the work of women's organizations and that of the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security — which Peru has the honour to co-chair with Germany — in terms of their approach to the various cases that form part of their agenda. We discussed the situation in Afghanistan, for example, as recently as 10 July.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Naeemi (Afghanistan): At the outset, I would like to highlight three very important main issues that I have been raised during the course of the meeting today.

First of all, let me thank all members of the Council for condemning the terrorist attacks that took place yesterday. That reflects the Council's unanimous support for the people of Afghanistan, particularly

those who lost their loved ones. I wish to share that the majority of those affected were civilians.

Secondly, I refer to the issue of women. Today's women are totally different to those of yesterday. The situation of women in Afghanistan today cannot be compared, at any level, with that of the past. I really appreciate and support the statement delivered by the Deputy Secretary-General and the work of her team.

Thirdly, I shall turn to the matter of elections. I wish to strongly state that the Government and His Excellency President Ashraf Ghani are committed to organizing free and fair elections. The most important point I would like to highlight is the violation of women's rights, on which President Ashraf Ghani has a zero-tolerance policy. Regardless of what we have heard, President Ashraf Ghani is personally working on this issue at the Government level and at the national level.

I thank the Permanent Mission of Peru for convening this briefing on the occasion of the visit of Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and her high-level delegation to Afghanistan, in the context of women and peace and security, as well as development. I also welcome Ms. Jamila Afghani's participation in this meeting via video-teleconference.

A visit of this kind truly underlines the commitment of the United Nations to continuing its support and bringing its agenda to the most relevant stakeholders: the people on the ground. The United Nations has always been an engaged partner for the benefit of our country, and we are thankful that Ms. Mohammed and her delegation chose to travel to Afghanistan at a time when a vital process for the achievement of lasting and comprehensive peace is taking place.

The momentum for peace continues to grow stronger and the Government of Afghanistan is determined to bring the decades-long conflict to an end. As Ms. Mohammed highlighted during her visit, however, a comprehensive settlement must have women at the very centre of its agenda and must recognize their role as leaders and agents of change, willing and able to delineate what peace means to them. Their rights and the institutional gains of the past 18 years must be preserved and protected. From the Government's side, we will continue our commitment to ensuring the inclusive role of women in peace and in development as we move forward in our efforts towards building a stable and self-sustaining Afghanistan.

Regarding other ongoing processes in the country, allow me to once again reiterate the Government's commitment to the holding of firm, transparent, free and secure elections on 28 September, the date selected by the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan. Holding these elections will assert the will of the people of Afghanistan to reaffirm our commitment to democracy and the rule of law in our country. Furthermore, a joint security plan has been finalized to ensure that the presidential elections are held in a secure environment.

More broadly, our security forces have kept terrorist groups from making any major gains in the country and operating with great confidence and efficiency. The effort will continue, prioritizing the defence of our people and our country's territorial integrity, in parallel with the ongoing peace negotiations. In that regard, we reiterate our call on the Taliban to honour its commitment to peace through deeds and not words, particularly in the aftermath of yesterday's deadly blasts in Kabul, which once again claimed the lives of innocent civilians. We maintain our belief that only a dual-track approach of pressure and incentives can ensure a conducive environment for a successful comprehensive agreement with the Taliban.

Despite the challenges that remain, the past 18 years have seen the emergence of a new democratic and developing Afghanistan. Reforms in the security and civilian sectors, as well as in the rule of governance, have allowed us to continue with strong determination the implementation of the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework and the national priority programmes and to follow a steady path towards stability and self-reliance through the fight against corruption, the empowerment of youth and women, the promotion of economic growth and the development of stronger and more efficient public institutions. Those efforts, coupled with particular and tangible regional steps within the Afghan-led platforms, the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan and the Heart of Asia process, have allowed us to also emerge as a catalyst for economic and regional cooperation.

Allow me to reiterate Afghanistan's gratitude and support for the work of the United Nations in our country. We further hope that the visit was able to provide Deputy Secretary-General Mohammed and her delegation with valuable perspectives and input on the importance of a thorough renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

We look forward to the discussion of that matter in September, in the hope that the United Nations Assistance Mission will be renewed for a period of one year, at the minimum, and that the renewal document will retain core priority issues for Afghanistan and incorporate new developments, including the upcoming elections and the peace process. The commitment of the international community and the United Nations to the people of Afghanistan is instrumental in protecting

and preserving the gains achieved in these years of partnership and transformation.

In closing, allow me to once again thank the Deputy Secretary-General and her high-level delegation for their visit, which truly symbolizes the strong commitment between the United Nations and the people of Afghanistan. We look forward to continuing to work together towards a stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.