



Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

8481st meeting

Monday, 11 March 2019, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mrs. Gueguen (France)

Members:

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| Belgium | Mrs. Van Vlierberge |
| China | Mr. Wu Haitao |
| Côte d'Ivoire | Mr. Ipo |
| Dominican Republic | Mr. Singer Weisinger |
| Equatorial Guinea | Mrs. Mele Colifa |
| Germany | Mr. Heusgen |
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| Peru | Mr. Meza-Cuadra |
| Poland | Ms. Wronecka |
| Russian Federation | Mr. Nebenzia |
| South Africa | Ms. Tshabalala |
| United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | Mr. Hickey |
| United States of America | Mr. Cohen |

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2019/193)

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

Expression of sympathy in connection with the loss of Ethiopian Airlines flight ET-302

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the members of the Security Council, I would like to express our deep sorrow at learning that so many lost their lives yesterday in the tragic air incident in Ethiopia. The passengers lost hailed from more than 35 nations, and many were part of the United Nations family. The members of the Council express their profound sympathy and condolences to the families and loved ones of the passengers and crew who lost their lives.

I ask all those present to stand and join me in a moment of silence in memory of those who perished.

The members of the Security Council observed a minute of silence.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2019/193)

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Afghanistan to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Hamdullah Mohib, National Security Adviser of Afghanistan.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; and Ms. Storai Tapesh, Deputy Executive Director of the Afghan Women's Network.

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

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2019/193, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Yamamoto: Before I begin my remarks on Afghanistan, may I be allowed to express my sincere condolences and sympathy in connection with the loss of so many lives, including our United Nations colleagues, in the Ethiopian Airlines accident.

I turn now to the issue of Afghanistan. The last three months have seen significant developments in the areas of both peace and elections.

First, on peace, further efforts have been made to bring an end to the decades-long conflict in Afghanistan, yielding tangible progress. The United States and the Taliban have continued to engage in intensive direct talks; a number of countries have extended support to facilitate those talks. At the meeting of the International Contact Group, held in London in late January, participants welcomed the ongoing United States-Taliban talks and expressed hope that they would enable direct talks to take place between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban. In early February, there was a meeting between some Afghan representatives and the Taliban in Moscow that provided an opportunity for them to have a better understanding of each other's views and thinking on peace. Despite such engagements, the Taliban has not yet accepted to engage in direct talks with the Government. I stress the imperative need for the Taliban to talk directly with the Government.

Amid these efforts for peace, we must recognize that all international efforts, including regional efforts, need to come together to support an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. In order for such a process of peace and the implementation of an agreement to be sustainable, the support and cooperation of the international community, particularly regional countries, are essential. The United Nations welcomes various efforts and initiatives undertaken by countries concerned, but stresses the need for all those constructive efforts to be in concert and aligned in support of Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace efforts, as agreed in Geneva last November. In this context, we understand that the Government of Afghanistan has proposed to hold the third meeting of the Kabul process on peace.

In working towards peace, we must acknowledge the profound and legitimate concerns of many citizens regarding possible compromises on the gains made over the past 18 years in the name of peace. The United Nations shares many of these concerns, particularly regarding the fate of women's rights, freedom of expression, including media rights, and space for civil society to function effectively, all of which must be protected under a peace agreement. To address these effectively, the peace process must be inclusive of the meaningful participation of groups representing all segments of Afghanistan's diverse society including women, youth, ulemas and community and political leaders. We need to think also of the rights of the victims and the issues of transitional justice.

In particular, we must strongly support and advocate for the perspectives of Afghan women, who are expressing a clear determination to safeguard their hard-won civil, political and economic rights under any peace agreement. I commend the Government of Afghanistan for its commitment to women's participation. Building on these steps, we must ensure that women's representation is strengthened and diversified. Equally, there is a need to engage Afghanistan's younger generation. Afghan youth stand to gain the most from the tangible benefits of peace: enhanced security, freedom of movement and increased education and employment opportunities.

Afghanistan is set to hold a presidential election this year. We expect this to be a critical step forward in further consolidating its representative political system. The holding of the presidential election on schedule, however, will be very challenging. The widespread irregularities during last October's parliamentary elections undermined confidence in the electoral management bodies. These problems continued throughout the counting process, and the complete finalization of election results remains delayed for several months. As these problems mounted, political stakeholders expressed increasing scepticism about the ability of the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission to deliver a credible and timely presidential election.

In response to these concerns, the Election Law was amended by a presidential decree, in consultation with stakeholders, and a selection process of new members and heads of secretariats for the two commissions was held in early March, involving civil society, political parties and the presidential candidates. The two

commissions must now work to rebuild public trust in the country's electoral processes. The integrity and collegiality of the two bodies are critical, as is the support of all Government institutions, most notably the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. All candidates and political actors need to commit to respecting the independence of the two commissions so as to enable them to work without any interference. The United Nations is prepared to work closely with the newly composed commissions.

With less than five months remaining until election day, the technical and political challenges are daunting. The new commissioners will need to take urgent decisions on the implementation of the amended Election Law, which provides for reforms, including the use of biometric technology and change in the electoral system. In addition to the presidential election, the law provides for the conduct of three additional elections: provincial council elections, district council elections, and parliamentary elections for the province of Ghazni. The commissioners will need to assess whether the current electoral calendar will permit the holding of four simultaneous elections in July. It will likely be a stark choice — either to hold the presidential election on schedule or to implement all that are stipulated in the amended Election Law, knowing that this may entail a significant postponement of the presidential election. The United Nations will continue to work with Afghan stakeholders to help them ensure that the electoral process is conducted in a credible, transparent and inclusive manner. It is important, however, that Afghan institutions and stakeholders fully realize that the ultimate responsibility and ownership for elections rests with the people of Afghanistan.

All this is taking place in the context of a war that continues to inflict a devastating toll on civilians. According to statistics provided by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 2018 was the deadliest year on record for the Afghan conflict, with a total of 10,993 civilian casualties, including 3,804 civilians killed. In particular, the deliberate targeting of civilians is a war crime. The casualties caused by such attacks of Da'esh or the Islamic State-Khorasan Province more than doubled from 2017 to 2018, accounting for over 50 per cent of attributed attacks targeting civilians in 2018. Also alarming is the impact of the conflict on Afghan children. Last year, the number of children killed in the conflict reached a record high, with over 900 child deaths verified and thousands more injured,

including by explosive remnants of war. They also remain vulnerable to recruitment and use by parties to the conflict.

But even these figures do not capture the full human cost of the war. We must not forget the harsh realities of life for too many Afghan citizens. Today, over half the population in the country lives under the poverty line; the proportion increased from 37 per cent in 2014 to 54 per cent in 2018. Over the past year, severe drought has worsened living conditions still further; 13.5 million people in the country are severely food insecure. This means that they survive on less than one meal a day. The Government of Afghanistan, in partnership with the United Nations family, is doing what it can to address these urgent needs. Last year, the United Nations issued its humanitarian response plan which was 78 per cent funded, and this year we require \$612 million. While I wish to reiterate my gratitude to all donors that contributed generously last year, the response this year started very slowly; it currently stands at 4 per cent funded. I hope that the Security Council will also call on the international community to boost funding to address this critical situation without delay.

The issue of narcotics is another major socioeconomic challenge. Despite a decrease in opium production in 2018, the significant levels of opium poppy cultivation and illicit trafficking in opiates remain a threat to stability in the country. While a drug-use survey has not been undertaken in the country for a number of years, indications are that an estimated 10 per cent of the adult population uses narcotics regularly. In order to tackle that complex issue, the whole demand and supply chain needs to be addressed as a responsibility shared among Afghanistan, its neighbours and the international community.

Looking forward, Afghanistan and its international partners have begun exploring potential opportunities to expand development assistance in a post-settlement context. In order to contribute to sustainable peace, such assistance must build on existing achievements and deliver tangible benefits to those most in need. As the political situation evolves, the United Nations family remains committed to supporting the country's humanitarian and development goals.

Now is the moment for the international community to look at Afghanistan with renewed focus and reassess how we could contribute to the efforts towards peace

and work with the people and the Government of Afghanistan to improve socioeconomic conditions and promote further development. This year is likely to bring both numerous challenges and unprecedented opportunities. Addressing the challenges and taking advantage of the opportunities will require the concerted efforts of the international community, with Afghanistan in the lead.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Tapesh.

Ms. Tapesh: It is a great honour to address the Security Council on behalf of the Afghan Women's Network.

We, the women of Afghanistan, have cautious optimism for peace. Yet we are concerned more than ever that women's civil rights will be compromised in the name of peace. An inclusive approach to peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan will ensure that the voices of all Afghans, especially women, are included and that the benefits of peace are shared. Any agreement related to peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan that fails to meaningfully engage women and gender-equality experts or fails to promote and protect the rights of women and reflect the realities of women will not result in peace for women. Rather, it will serve to bring Afghanistan back to the social and political exclusion that women were once subjected to and deepen the drivers of conflict.

Today in Afghanistan, women play a significant role in every sector in the country, including decision-making. In the parliamentary elections in October 2018, men and women from diverse areas of Afghanistan chose to vote for women candidates, dispelling myths concerning women's participation and demonstrating that many of them have turned towards promoting women's rights. The Afghan Women's Network led a series of consultations in 2018 involving women and women's organizations across the entire country. Through this statement the Afghan Women's Network shares the voices of those women from all 34 provinces of Afghanistan.

First, the women of Afghanistan call for their full, equal and meaningful representation in peace and reconciliation processes relating to Afghanistan. Women are best placed to raise the concerns and priorities of women, as well as to find broad-based

solutions that benefit all of society. Afghan women emphasize the need for a transparent and accountable peace process that protects and promotes women's human rights, supports justice for victims of violence and war and prevents a culture of impunity.

Secondly, we see the momentum towards a ceasefire as critical. But women must be included in the security-sector reform, and gender advisers must be included in all stages of a ceasefire. An inclusive process will ensure that a ceasefire includes gender-awareness provisions, identifies violations related to gender-based violence and provides arrangements for women to monitor compliance with the ceasefire agreement.

Thirdly, the Constitution provides women and men with equal rights in line with sharia and Islamic principles. The Constitution was agreed upon by women and men across Afghanistan at the Constitutional Loya Jirga. It is imperative that those voices be respected and that the gender-equality provisions of the Constitution be maintained.

Lastly, violence against women and girls remains a serious concern in Afghanistan. Despite the introduction of new laws, there remain persistent obstacles to the implementation of the law, with women and girls as well as the broader community not being fully aware of their rights and protections under the law. As we look forward, we must ensure that all conflict-resolution processes, including the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, equally involve women as both participants and beneficiaries. They must also improve protection and ensure access to justice for all.

Let me conclude by stressing what practice and evidence has taught us. An inclusive approach to peace and reconciliation that promotes and protects the rights of women is critical for the effectiveness and sustainability of peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Tapeshe for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Mohib (Afghanistan): At the outset, I would like to express the deepest condolences of the people and the Government of Afghanistan over the recent tragic crash of the Ethiopian airliner, which resulted in many lives lost, including United Nations personnel.

I would like to thank you, Madam President, for convening today's meeting on the situation in Afghanistan. It is an honour for me to represent my country today in delivering my first address to the Security Council. I would like to congratulate France on assuming the presidency of the Council, as well as to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his report (S/2019/193). We also recognize his Special Representative, Ambassador Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his leadership of the work of the United Nations in Afghanistan. I would also like to recognize Ms. Storai Tapeshe, Deputy Executive Director of the Afghan Women's Network, who joins us today via video-conference.

As we approach the extension of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) this week, I would like to acknowledge the United Nations strategic engagement and support for Afghanistan's stability. The United Nations has a supportive role to play in working with the Afghan Government and people to bring about peace. Today I will share with members an update on where we are and the road ahead towards peace. To understand our approach to peace, the Council first has to understand the many new realities in Afghanistan today.

First of all, Afghanistan has undergone an era of social transformation. Seventy-five per cent of our population is under the age of 35, has grown up in a democracy and has a different set of expectations and principles than their parents' and grandparents' generations. Our generation was born in war and grew up in conflict or exile. We yearn for peace and wish for peace to complement what we have built over the past 18 years, not reverse it. We must safeguard our future.

Millions of Afghans have benefited from the best of national and international education opportunities, and members of this generation are now in positions of leadership and senior management. We have also experienced the transformation of our female citizens from victims of institutionalized discrimination under the Taliban regime to active, empowered, engaged contributors to all spheres of society and politics. Women also collectively play a vital role in our economic growth and national security. I would like to congratulate my colleague Ambassador Adela Raz on presenting her credentials last week to Secretary-General Guterres and becoming the first Afghan woman to hold that post. Ambassador Raz, as a child, studied in a secret school during the Taliban regime.

She symbolizes the transformation that women and girls have fought to achieve over the past 18 years.

Against the backdrop of those two social transformations, President Ghani introduced the decade of transformation when he took office in 2014 — a comprehensive, whole-of-Government reform agenda to implement the rule of law, tackle corruption systemically, implement more efficient and effective national development programmes and increase economic growth and revenue collection. We are moving the country towards self-reliance. It is a reform package designed to meet the demands of the new generation of Afghans for fair, clean and merit-based governance that is focused on the needs of the citizen, not the pockets of the political elite.

Five years into the decade of transformation, we have accomplished a tremendous amount, despite the competing priorities of war, elections and drought, as well as considerable resistance from those who are benefiting from corrupt systems. To name just a few highlights, last year the indicators of the World Bank's *Doing Business 2018* report recognized Afghanistan as the top reforming country for improving the business climate. Our access to information law was recognized as the best in the world. The Government increased domestic revenue by 91 per cent from 2014 to 2018 and met every benchmark of the International Monetary Fund during the same period. We have set a new tone of intolerance towards corruption. Since inaugurating our national strategy to counter corruption in 2017, we have already completed well over half of the goals and are now working towards a new set of benchmarks that will expose and address the next layer of problems in this long-term process of rooting out corruption.

We have invested tremendously in efforts to connect our region through trade and by addressing regional energy needs. Our farmers, producers, entrepreneurs, businessmen and businesswomen are now able to look outwards to export their products via the Lapis Lazuli Corridor to Europe, the Chabahar port in Iran to India and air corridors to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, China and beyond. We exported nearly \$1 billion-worth of products last year. We are moving from an aid to a trade economy.

The result of the past five years is that we have laid a legal foundation for a modern economy, society and State. We have also changed the tone of governance in Afghanistan. We have achieved all this thanks to the

creativity, perseverance and bravery of the Afghan people and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. We are grateful to the international community for the support and assistance they have provided. Continuing support for the decade of transformation will allow us to see the fruits of our sacrifices in both blood and treasure, but as Afghans we have the primary responsibility. We own the problems, and we are implementing solutions. The past five years have delivered us to the doorstep of peace. The country, and indeed the world, are abuzz with both the excitement of its possibilities and the concerns and uncertainties that surround it. Two years ago, peace was not part of the vocabulary when we spoke of Afghanistan. The National Unity Government made it a priority and took risks for peace, and today it is something we are working towards.

Let me give some insight as to where we stand with regard to peace today and where we are heading. After President Ghani's unconditional peace talks offer in February 2018, followed by the ceasefire in June 2018 and the announcement of an Afghan negotiating team and peace road map in November 2018, we have been working to build consensus across the country over the past few months. In December 2018, the Government hosted a jirga, with the participation of 2,500 young people from 34 provinces. In February, the country's first women's gathering was held in the Loya Jirga tent, in which 3,500 women gathered from all provinces to reach a consensus on what they expect from the peace process. They represented the voices of 15,000 women who had been consulted over a six-month period. This spring, the Government will convene a consultative loya jirga, which will further bond the collective voice of the Afghan people. That will be followed by the third Kabul process conference, where we will be looking practically at implementing a post-peace plan.

Peace is imperative and urgently needed, but not at any cost. The Constitution must be respected, as must be the democratic State and elected Government that it constitutes. The process must be inclusive and representative of the new Afghanistan, not a deal made among elites. If peace is going to belong to and be maintained by Afghans, it must ultimately be owned by Afghans themselves. The Afghan Government and the Afghan people have made commitments to peace. Now it is up to the Taliban to prove its commitment. It has so far failed to seize opportunities for peace, yet we stand ready to engage in direct talks. If the Taliban genuinely

wants peace, it should demonstrate it through positive deeds, not by continued attacks on innocent people and our security forces.

Peace also goes hand in hand with elections. We thank the United Nations for its steadfast support for the democratic process in Afghanistan and count on its continued technical support for the upcoming polls. The Afghan people have, time and again, gone to the polls to reinforce and strengthen their belief in democracy. In October 2018, 2,565 candidates, most of them of a younger generation, contested 249 seats in the Parliament. More than 4 million Afghans came out to vote, of whom more than 35 per cent were women.

It is the Government's responsibility to match our people's trust in their democracy with reforms and uphold, strengthen and protect our democratic systems. Since mismanagement, poor administration and organization were exposed during our parliamentary elections, we have been working to add further credibility and transparency to the process. After the Cabinet approved amendments to the electoral law, an unprecedented initiative took place two weeks ago. Current presidential candidates came together to elect new commissioners of both the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission. I will add that, in another first for our country, both newly elected Commission heads are women, elected by their predominately male colleagues. The Afghan people and our international partners have made enormous sacrifices to build our democracy, and the Afghan people are counting on the elections. I would like to emphasize that we welcome international monitors in every phase of the elections this year.

As we pursue peace, we are also simultaneously maintaining military operations and implementing reforms to strengthen our Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF). The ANDSF defied predictions of collapse and failure when it took over in 2014, by protecting not only Afghanistan's sovereignty but also safeguarding the world from the threat of global terror. After the implementation of new policies and strategies, we have seen improved operational output on the battlefield and a substantial increase in offensive operations. Our security forces have not only held ground, but solidified control over territories and weakened pockets of enemy contingents, including Da'esh elements in the eastern and northern parts of the country.

While fighting a war on several battlefields, with a shortage of needed equipment and capabilities, the Government implemented a complete overhaul of the security sector, which allowed for a much-needed generational change in leadership. I was honoured to witness the promotion of one of those new, young leaders on Armed Forces Day at the Ministry of Defence — Ms. Mursal Afshar was promoted from the rank of first lieutenant to that of captain. I was impressed with her professionalism, dedication and patriotism. I feel emboldened to know that we have young soldiers like Captain Afshar fighting the war for Afghanistan and the world.

We must remember that peace with the Taliban in Afghanistan will not mean an end to the threat of global terrorism. Afghan forces will remain defiant in the face of terrorism, but that responsibility does not belong solely to Afghanistan — it is a long-term global threat that requires a sustained global response.

A zero-tolerance approach, based on genuine and sincere cooperation by all States, is key to success. Strict enforcement of Security Council sanctions measures set out in resolutions 1988 (2011) and 1267 (1999) should no longer be compromised. Any failure in that regard would translate into a failure in the Security Council's response to combat terrorist and extremist groups effectively, and would also render those groups capable of continuing their destructive activities.

Afghanistan will continue to pursue a sequential, thoughtful peace process, which will lead to dialogue between the Afghan Government and people and the Taliban. We will continue to pursue military and counter-terrorism objectives, and we remain absolutely committed to holding presidential elections this year. We ask our international partners to see Afghanistan as a platform for regional and global cooperation, not just for mutual economic benefit but also for the shared objectives of peace and stability.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate Afghanistan's gratitude for the role that the Council has played in galvanizing international partnership for Afghanistan, dating back to 2001, when we opened a new chapter in our modern history. The Council has been consistent in its support over the years, helping us to make progress towards self-reliance and peace. We are clear-eyed about the challenges that remain, which still demand the support of the Council and the international community. Afghanistan remains a trusted partner

that is committed to our international obligations to promote global peace, solidarity and stability.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): Like others, we would like to offer our deepest condolences for the many United Nations officials that perished in the tragic incident of Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302. We are also sad, as we lost an Indonesian national who worked for the World Food Programme, Ms. Harina Hafitz. We would like to convey our condolences to her family. I see Ambassador Taye Atskeselassie Amde in the Chamber, whom I ask to please convey our deepest condolences to the people and the Government of Ethiopia for that tragic accident.

We also would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Ambassador Yamamoto, and welcome the National Security Adviser of Afghanistan, Mr. Mohib, as well as our dear colleague Ambassador Adela Raz to the Security Council. We would also like to thank Ms. Storai Tapeshe for her briefing.

The work of UNAMA has been and will remain indispensable to reinforcing peacebuilding in Afghanistan for the foreseeable future. We commend the whole of the UNAMA team for its vital efforts, under the leadership of Ambassador Yamamoto. Indonesia also thanks all States Members of the United Nations on their constructive engagement on the UNAMA mandate renewal, and hopes for a smooth adoption of the draft resolution later this week. As a co-penholder with Germany, we hope for a united resolution, in which a united Council, with its full support, intensifies the momentum on a collective trajectory for peace, which the people of Afghanistan so much deserve. We are fully committed to helping the country succeed, in line with the aspirations of all Afghans, and we reaffirm our full support for its sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity.

Over the course of the years, the national authorities and people of Afghanistan have achieved progress in their nation-building efforts. Indonesia commends their efforts towards realizing a nationally united, peaceful, prosperous and democratic Afghanistan, in full consonance with the wishes of its citizens. But as we heard today, much more needs to be accomplished.

Listening to the various briefers, I am reminded once again of the words of the wondrous Afghan author Khaled Hosseini, who said:

“we are waiting, all of us, against insurmountable odds, for something extraordinary to happen”.

We in the Security Council must make sure that happens and perform our duty unflinchingly. Other United Nations system entities, as well as partners outside, must also do their utmost to enable peace to prevail in Afghanistan.

On its part, Indonesia has had long-standing engagement with Afghanistan. We have provided capacity-building and technical assistance in many areas, such as education and health care. People-to-people contacts have also been instituted. We began our engagement in the Afghan peace process in 2017. As our Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi reiterated at the Geneva conference last November, Indonesia is playing its role in meaningfully promoting peace and well-being in Afghanistan. That effort has included the hosting of a trilateral Ulema conference in Bogor last year, where prominent ulemas from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Indonesia undertook to spread the message loudly and clearly that violence and extremism have no place in the religion.

In response to today’s briefing, we would like to underline the following points.

First, I will address national reconciliation and democracy. An Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, underpinned by a comprehensive intra-Afghan dialogue, is fundamental. To that end, we welcome the plan to hold the grand jirga, which we hope will consolidate the different opinions among Afghans. Indonesia concurs with the Secretary-General’s observation that

“[t]he current moment represents perhaps the most significant chance to date for a negotiated settlement” (*S/2019/193, para. 56*).

A successful dialogue with all parties without exception and adherence to the democratic process, including mainstreaming of acceptance and honouring due rights for all segments of society, including women, are critical. There should be no reversals, only progress in the areas of human rights, rule of law and inclusive democracy. We call on all the parties to play a positive role in that regard. It is also important to learn from past shortcomings in parliamentary elections and to

ensure that adequate preparations are made so that presidential elections can be held freely, fairly and on time. We support Ambassador Yamamoto's call for the successful holding of presidential elections.

Secondly, security must improve. Indonesia is deeply saddened and shocked by the record number of civilian casualties for 2018. As Mr. Yamamoto said in his briefing this morning, UNAMA's data shows an 11 per cent increase in the number of deaths, with a staggering number of casualties, almost 11,000, nearly half of them women and children. We also condemn the increasing attacks on children. Such wanton targeting, as well as that of essential civilian infrastructure, is deplorable, as is the number of displaced persons, which in 2018 reached almost 360,000, half of whom are children. While we call on the Afghan Government to use the capacity it has to protect its people, we also urge anyone who has any influence with the insurgents and terrorists to thwart their vile attacks. We acknowledge that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant also remains a serious danger. No effort must be spared to deal with and eradicate terrorist groups. The Secretary-General's report also describes the various parties whose actions have resulted in civilian casualties. Indonesia implores everyone to fulfil their obligations under international human rights law and humanitarian law.

Thirdly, effective State institutions are imperative. Indonesia hopes that the reforms pursued by the current Government continue after the election this year. Well-functioning and accountable governance structures, justice, transparency and effective anti-corruption mechanisms also help to build the people's sense of ownership of the Government's national vision, which is crucial.

Fourthly, broad-based socioeconomic development is essential. The Government must increase its focus on enabling livelihoods for ordinary Afghans across the country. Nevertheless, we recognize that the recent drought, and the concomitant increase in the numbers of displaced people, has added to the strain. This is another instance where climate change is affecting livelihoods, peace and security, and the international community should come up with a fitting response. Human lives — Afghan lives — are at stake.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize Indonesia's full support for all measures that hasten Afghanistan's march towards the dawn of a new era of peace and prosperity. We must stand united in our sustained efforts to enable

it to emerge from its challenges, rebuild robustly and care for its people.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): At the outset, I too would like to express my condolences and those of my country to the Ambassador of Ethiopia for the terrible human suffering resulting from yesterday's plane crash, and to echo my Indonesian colleague's words about our own nationals who were among the United Nations personnel killed. So many people died, including members of the United Nations family, who gave their lives for what we all stand for.

I would like to thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing. We fully support him and his work. Today I want to focus on the fate of the Afghan people. The figures that Mr. Yamamoto gave are truly alarming, especially with regard to the number of civilian deaths, the situation of children who have died or been injured, the ongoing recruitment of children and the overall poverty level, which is nightmarish. As my Indonesian colleague just said, this is another example where climate change has an effect on wealth and on peace and security. The suffering of the people should move us to act collectively and responsibly so that this pain can end. Germany continues to be very engaged. We are the second largest donor of humanitarian aid and contributor of troops. Our Foreign Minister, Heiko Maas, is actually in Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif, where our German troops are stationed, as we speak, in proof of Germany's commitment to the Afghan people.

In his briefing Mr. Yamamoto said that while 2018 was the deadliest year of the past two decades — in other words, since the United Nations has been engaged there — at the same time, 2019 will be a year of unprecedented opportunities, and we must do everything we can to take advantage of them. In that regard, I would refer to the convincing briefing by Afghanistan's National Security Adviser, Mr. Mohib, on the country's reform process, particularly with regard to good governance, the fight against corruption, gender parity, improving the business environment and the availability of business opportunities. In the context of gender parity, I would also like to welcome the appointment of our colleague Mrs. Adela Raz as Afghanistan's first female ambassador. I have to admit that in the entire time that Germany has been a State Member of the United Nations, it has not progressed that far, but I am sure it will one day. I should emphasize, however, that while it is one thing to have laws and a Constitution on paper, implementing them is

something else. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and therefore with regard to what Mr. Mohib said about the fight against corruption, it is imperative that more progress be made. With regard to the elections, I can only echo Mr. Yamamoto's words.

Turning to the peace talks, we would like to applaud all the efforts undertaken. I would also like to mention the talks in Doha. Once again, let me repeat what Mr. Yamamoto said, which is that it is crucial to ensure that the Taliban talks to the Afghan Government. Only Afghans can make peace with one another, and it has to be an inclusive process and an Afghan-led operation. In that context, I would like to commend Ms. Tapesh for her briefing. Women must be included in the peace process in a meaningful way. I would be interested to know how many women are actually sitting around the table in the talks in Doha or Moscow. I would be surprised if we get anywhere close to parity. As Ms. Tapesh said, women's human rights must not be compromised in the effort to get to a peace agreement. While this is not an aim in itself, if women and civil society are not included in peace talks, if women's rights are not covered, we are already laying the ground for the next conflict, because the marginalization of parts of civil society, including women, becomes a driver of new conflict. It is very important that the Constitution of Afghanistan, as set up, remains in place, supporting equal rights for women and young people, as well as freedom of the media and civil society, and of religion, including for ulemas.

Lastly, Mr. Yamamoto mentioned the importance of transitional justice. Accountability for crimes is key. Again, that is not merely an end in itself, it is also a warning that people who commit crimes will always have to be looking over their shoulders, because one day justice is going to catch up with them.

So, as my colleague from Indonesia said, we in the Council have to do our job. We have an important role to play in clearly communicating our expectations for the peace process and the future of Afghanistan.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We too would like to start by expressing our deepest condolences to our Ethiopian friends in connection with the tragic crash of an Ethiopian Airlines plane and the resulting death toll of many people from a number of countries, including personnel from various entities in the United Nations system.

We thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of

the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his analysis of the processes ongoing in Afghanistan. We listened carefully to the briefings by Mr. Hamdullah Mohib, National Security Adviser to the President of Afghanistan, and Ms. Tapesh. We share many of the views in the quarterly report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/193), and would like to add the following points.

We believe that through its coordination of international assistance, UNAMA has an important role to play in the stabilization of Afghanistan. But we are concerned about the situation there. It is deplorable that the number of civilian victims is at a record high, as the Secretary-General's report notes. We are also very worried about the continuing presence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Afghanistan. In spite of isolated successes for the Afghan security forces, the militants continue to strengthen their position and influence in the country, filling their ranks by recruiting foreign terrorist fighters, among others, who have moved there after fighting for ISIL in Syria and Iraq. Apart from anything else, that creates a real threat to the security of our Central Asian friends and the southern regions of Russia. We cannot help being alarmed by the major terrorist attacks, some using suicide bombers, that have been occurring regularly in various cities in Afghanistan, including Kabul. Their victims are primarily civilians, including women and children. Members of the Afghan military and police forces are dying at the hands of the terrorists, and the reports of serious losses are more and more frequent. Today we pay tribute to their memory and courage.

The situation with regard to the fight against drug trafficking in Afghanistan continues to be a focus of our attention. The drug threat remains a serious problem for the region, the world and the country itself, while narco dollars are a serious source of financial support for terrorism, and we believe it is vital to continue intensifying international efforts to combat this evil. We remain committed to meeting our obligations to provide assistance to the collective effort to counter the drug threat, including with the active participation of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. We have taken our own practical steps in that regard, including through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. We will continue to contribute to the training of narcotics police from Afghanistan, Pakistan and the countries of Central Asia.

Russia has consistently supported the Afghan people's aspirations for a stable peace. Our countries are linked by historic bonds of friendship based on both countries' interests. Advancing a peace process led by the Afghans themselves is especially important. We are sincerely interested in promoting national reconciliation and the resulting stabilization of the country's situation as quickly as possible. We emphasize our willingness to provide comprehensive assistance to that end, and that purpose is what guides us in implementing our own efforts in that area. On 9 November 2018, with that in mind, Russia held a second meeting of the Moscow consultations format with major participation by interested parties. We support the policy of making the upcoming peace process in Afghanistan as inclusive as possible, involving all the country's social and political forces, including the opposition. The inter-Afghan meeting organized in Moscow on 5 and 6 February by the Afghan diaspora, in which leading Afghan political parties and Taliban representatives participated, embodied the broadly accepted international principle of an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned dialogue for settling the conflict.

We have noted the world's growing understanding of the importance of the regional context of an Afghan settlement as well, and the need to harness the potential in that regard of bodies that have been shown to be effective, particularly the SCO, and in that context, we want to highlight the revived mechanism of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group. We believe firmly that all the current peace initiatives and negotiation efforts should be aimed at uniting the whole country and all Afghans, without exception. That is the key to achieving our common goal in Afghanistan of a genuine peace and to transforming Afghanistan into an independent, self-sufficient, thriving State that will no longer breed terrorist threats.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): The United States expresses its deepest sympathies to all affected by the crash of Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302. We offer our condolences in solidarity with the people and the Government of Ethiopia responding to the crash. Our Embassies in Addis Ababa and Nairobi are working tirelessly to offer all possible assistance. The tragedy was especially difficult for members of the United Nations community, with at least 19 United Nations workers from various agencies and offices among those dead. We mourn the lives of all 157 victims, alongside

the people and Governments of the more than 35 countries from which they came.

I thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing and the continuing hard work that he and his team have been doing in support of economic development in Afghanistan. I also thank Ms. Tapeshe for her briefing today and for the important and courageous work she is doing in support of human rights, women's empowerment and women's participation in Afghanistan's political process. And I thank Mr. Mohib for joining us in the Council today.

We share the concerns expressed today about the many challenges facing Afghanistan, including the very difficult humanitarian situation. We recognize that more than 6.3 million people are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. That number has nearly doubled from last year, as severe drought in 2018 affected more than 10 million Afghans. Moreover, Afghanistan remains one of the most dangerous places for humanitarian workers to deliver assistance. The United States continues to step up to provide assistance to vulnerable populations in Afghanistan in response to this emergency. We continue to be the largest humanitarian donor in Afghanistan and have contributed more than \$232 million in life-saving assistance in the past year. We encourage our colleagues to continue to rise to the challenge alongside us.

We also recognize the very difficult security situation in Afghanistan. At the same time, we believe that 2019 promises to be a year for peace. The United States is committed to using its influence with all interested parties to make 2019 that year, in close consultation with the Afghan Government. We are not seeking a withdrawal agreement but rather a comprehensive peace agreement that can guarantee that Afghanistan never again becomes a platform for transnational terrorism and that can codify an intra-Afghan consensus on a political road map for the future of the country.

In January, we agreed in principle to a framework addressing the interconnected issues of counter-terrorism and withdrawal, including agreement on enforcement mechanisms to guarantee implementation. The recently concluded round of talks in Doha clarified a more detailed understanding of those topics. We have also consulted extensively with the Afghan Government and our international partners on the issues. In mid-February, the Taliban took a step

towards the type of intra-Afghan dialogue that we believe is necessary, by appointing and empowering a negotiating team led by Mullah Baradar. We have asked President Ghani to work across broader Afghan society to build an inclusive national team. All sides agree that there can be no military solution. Consequently, we are also pressing for an end to Afghans killing other Afghans, and specifically for the Taliban to implement a ceasefire or a major reduction in violence that would create an enabling environment for an intra-Afghan dialogue to proceed.

As we heard from Special Representative Yamamoto and his team over the past week, a peace agreement will enjoy broad Afghan and international support only if it preserves and strengthens the social and economic gains achieved since 2001. Afghanistan's State institutions must survive and develop. Human rights must be respected, there must be a free press and women and girls must be empowered. We would prefer to see a peace agreement that brings the Taliban into the political process and facilitates a political framework for the future of Afghanistan. However, even if there is no progress on the peace track, elections need to take place.

The United States is doing what it can to support the preparations for a credible election and encourage the Afghan Government to move forward with preparations for presidential elections. Building on lessons learned from the parliamentary elections and previous cycles, electoral reforms must have a realistic and firm timeline and be carried out in consultation with election stakeholders, including the presidential candidates. Also, we have called on Afghanistan's neighbours to lend their cooperation, participation and facilitation to assist Afghans to come to the peace table and make an honourable, just peace with each other.

We look forward to coming to an understanding on the shape of a regional mechanism that could facilitate the finalization of the peace agreement. Afghans deserve to live in peace, and the United States welcomes the strong international support for efforts that we believe have a real chance to bring peace to Afghanistan after 17 years of war.

Finally, we look forward to the renewal for another year of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The next 12 months will be a pivotal period for Afghanistan, and UNAMA will have a critical role to play in strengthening the

legitimacy of Afghanistan's election process and supporting the Afghanistan peace process and in donor coordination.

Mrs. Mele Colifa (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, like the other delegations, Equatorial Guinea would like to express its deepest condolences to the Government of Ethiopia and to the families and the Governments of the States of the victims of the Ethiopian Airlines crash that took place yesterday, Sunday, 10 March, who included a group of people who were travelling to participate in the fourth United Nations Environment Assembly.

We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for the comprehensive report presented at this meeting (S/2019/193) and also for his tireless efforts to achieve lasting peace in Afghanistan. We also thank the National Security Adviser of Afghanistan, Mr. Hamdullah Mohib, and the Deputy Executive Director of the Afghan Women's Network, Ms. Storai Tapes, for their contributions, which enrich and complement the information available to us so far.

We welcome the intensified measures implemented by the Afghan Government, through the National Defence and Security Forces, to address security threats in various cities, as a result of which a small decrease in such incidents has been noted. However, the reality is that security, unfortunately, remains the main challenge for Afghanistan. We continue to observe with extreme concern the high number of civilian deaths caused by anti-Government elements and by the use of improvised explosive devices, as reported by UNAMA.

In that regard, we strongly condemn all heinous, deliberate attacks carried out during the reporting period against civilians, especially against women and children and civilian targets. We urge the parties to the conflict to strictly comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law to take all possible measures to avoid attacks against the civilian population and civilian infrastructure, as well as with their obligations concerning the limitation of humanitarian access.

We note the launching of a three-year public administration reform programme by the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission, in particular the increase in the representation of

women in civil service. As we have reiterated in the past, meaningful participation by women in all stages of the peace process is a guarantee for ensuring the protection and promotion of Afghan women's rights in any resulting peace agreement.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, we share the deep concern of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and other delegations that spoke previously. The 5 per cent increase in the total number of civilian casualties and the 11 per cent increase in civilian deaths as compared to 2017, according to the published report of UNAMA and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in addition to the approximately 13.5 million people facing high levels of food insecurity owing to the severe drought, among other factors, are cause for great alarm. That is why, once again, we must all echo the call of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for all parties to reduce the level of violence and protect civilians, especially women and children.

In conclusion, we would like to encourage the Government of Afghanistan to continue its efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace process through direct conversations among the parties involved — inclusive and comprehensive talks among Afghans — with the participation of the countries of the region. It must also join forces with other political actors to prepare the presidential elections scheduled for 20 July to ensure their credibility and legitimacy.

We would also like to express well-deserved praise and support for the important role that UNAMA is playing in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to add my voice to the expressions of condolences following yesterday's Ethiopian Airlines crash, which left many victims. We would also like to express our condolences and support to the Government of Ethiopia, as well as the countries of the region home to the victims and to the United Nations, which lost several staff members in that sad event.

My delegation thanks Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, for his briefing on the developments in that country. I also thank Mr. Hamdullah Mohib, National Security Adviser of Afghanistan, and Ms. Storai Tapes, Deputy Executive Director of the Afghan Women's Network, for their relevant briefings

on bringing peace to the country and the inclusion of women in the reconciliation process.

Côte d'Ivoire takes note of the recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/193), which, among other recommendations, calls on the United Nations to continue its efforts in the framework of a forward-looking vision, based in particular on an understanding of Afghans' long-term aspirations and on development scenarios that take into account the country's socioeconomic and security environment.

My country believes that conducting a peaceful, transparent, inclusive and credible electoral process remains essential to restoring peace, stability and sustainable development in Afghanistan. We therefore deplore the shortcomings observed in the parliamentary elections of 20 October 2018. In that regard, we encourage the Independent Electoral Commission and all Afghan stakeholders to take the necessary corrective measures to ensure that the presidential election of 20 July is held under the best possible conditions. Appropriate measures must therefore be taken to ensure the protection of voters and to secure polling places given the low rate of participation in the parliamentary elections largely due to threats and deadly attacks by the Taliban and the local branch of the Islamic State.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the negotiations between the United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad, and the Taliban, which offer hope for the restoration of peace and stability in Afghanistan.

We also welcome the multifaceted efforts to promote dialogue among Afghan political actors, as well as with regional State actors. In that regard, it is worth highlighting the second meeting of Afghan, Chinese and Pakistani Foreign Ministers on 15 December 2018 in Kabul; the visit by Pakistan's Minister for Foreign Affairs to Kabul on 24 December 2018, which should contribute to the effective implementation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity towards helping to resolve the security problem in the region; the visits of the National Security Adviser of Afghanistan to India, China, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in January; and the meeting between the Afghan political stakeholders and a Taliban delegation on 5 and 6 February in Moscow.

While the initiatives I have mentioned above are encouraging, they cannot ensure lasting peace and

stability in Afghanistan without national ownership and the participation of all political and social actors.

In that context, my delegation remains convinced that it is crucial to work to promote the role of women in accordance with the outcomes of the national conference on women's participation in the peace process, held in Kabul on 12 December 2018. It is also important to strengthen Government action to combat violence against women and girls, in particular by amending the 2009 law that limits women's rights.

My country remains concerned about the security and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, where the widespread use of explosive devices as well as the systematic obstruction of humanitarian assistance in Taliban-controlled provinces represent a real challenge.

In that regard, my delegation would like to commend the assistance that the United Nations and its partners are providing to more than 3.5 million people in need. We urge the international community to continue its financial support to the humanitarian response plan for Afghanistan.

The complex multifaceted challenges facing Afghanistan, in particular the fight against corruption, terrorism and drug trafficking, require the ongoing attention of the international community and the substantial support of the Afghan Government.

That is at the heart of Côte d'Ivoire's call to support the troops of the Resolute Support Mission and to fulfil the funding pledges for the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces until 2024. It encourages all the forces engaged in Afghanistan to further strengthen their joint operations with the country's National Defence and Security Forces in the provinces most affected by a lack of security.

The most recent developments in the situation in Afghanistan give us reason to believe that political and security instability is not irreversible. Peace in the country is possible and will be achieved as a result of the will of the Afghans themselves to write a new page in their history in harmony and prosperity, with international support driven by the regional stakeholders.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): On 10 March, the crash of an Ethiopian Airlines plane resulted in the tragic deaths of more than 100 passengers and crew members, including Ethiopian and Chinese nationals and citizens of more than 30 countries,

among them United Nations staff. China mourns the death of the victims and expresses deep condolences to their families.

I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing and I appreciate his efforts. I have listened carefully to the statements of the Afghan National Security Adviser, Mr. Hamdullah Mohib, and the civil society representative, Ms. Tapesh.

The situation in Afghanistan is now at a critical juncture, as the country has many important issues on its political agenda. At the same time, the country's security situation is a cause for concern and its humanitarian situation remains challenging. We hope that the country will achieve lasting peace and development, which are not only in the best interest of the Afghan people but also of regional security, stability, peace and prosperity.

The international community should fulfil its commitment by continuing its strong support for Afghanistan.

First, we should promote political dialogue in the country. We call on all parties in Afghanistan to act for the country's greater benefit and to seize this significant opportunity for political reconciliation to embark on the path of development. The international community should support an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led and inclusive political process and assist the Government in developing a comprehensive, inclusive and realistic road map for political reconciliation, back the Government's efforts to promote political dialogue and encourage the Taliban to return to the negotiating table as soon as possible. It should also support international mechanisms such as the Kabul process and the Moscow format to that end.

Secondly, we should facilitate the successful holding of elections. Since the presidential election will be held this year, we hope that the new Independent Election Commission will scale up its preparation for that election. We also hope that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) will provide technical support to the Commission. In addition, in the light of the developments on the ground, UNAMA should adjust its mandate. The Mission and other mechanisms should undertake a comprehensive and in-depth assessment of the country's reconstruction in the new conditions. All stakeholders across the political spectrum in Afghanistan should strengthen their unity, consider the maintenance of national

political stability a shared responsibility and resolve their differences through dialogue.

Thirdly, the international community must help Afghanistan to improve its security environment. In 2018, fighting inside Afghanistan resulted in a record number of civilian casualties. Statistics from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime also show that drug production in the country remains high. The international community should strengthen cooperation so as to help the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces to build capacity. It should also assist the country in promoting alternative development activities, combating Afghan terrorists harboured by the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement terrorist organization and effectively overcoming such threats as terrorism, transnational crime and drug trafficking.

Fourthly, we must effectively help to improve the livelihoods of the Afghan people. In the past five years, there has been a significant increase in the number of people living in poverty in the country. The international community should continue to help the Government and the people of Afghanistan to improve their lives by honouring its assistance pledges, helping the country to fulfil its development potential and supporting its integration into regional economic cooperation. It should also assist the millions of drought-affected Afghans, improve the humanitarian situation of the Afghan refugees in the neighbouring countries and support their return to their homeland at an early date.

China has always supported the political process in Afghanistan and the early achievement of an inclusive political reconciliation. Through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Afghanistan Contact Group, the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' dialogue and other multilateral mechanisms, China has always supported the political process and other areas of Afghanistan. Ambassador Deng Xijun, Special Envoy for Afghanistan of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, has participated in all relevant international conferences on Afghanistan, actively engaged with all sides and provided good offices, thereby contributing to the political process on China's behalf. China will continue its efforts and support the early resumption of the quadrilateral coordination group, comprising China, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States, to facilitate the Afghan peace and reconciliation process.

China actively supports Afghanistan's reconstruction and integration into regional economic development. Within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, China and Afghanistan have strengthened cooperation in all fields, including trade. The road transport corridors between the countries have been launched, with freight trains regularly travelling to Afghanistan. Direct flights and trains between the two countries have been operating steadily. China has provided humanitarian assistance in the amount of more than 60 million yuan renminbi to the drought-affected people in Afghanistan. The Red Cross Society of China launched an assistance programme for children with serious illnesses in Afghanistan. By the end of 2018, it had arranged for 100 children with congenital heart disease in Afghanistan to receive treatment in China, all of whom were cured and returned to the country.

China will continue to work with Afghanistan to actively implement the memorandum of understanding between the two countries on the joint promotion of the Belt and Road initiative and to promote strong cooperation in the areas of trade, energy, health care, fibre-optic cable communication, tax supervision, intellectual property rights, think tanks and other fields.

China is ready to work with the international community to contribute to security, stability, development and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Ms. Tshabalala (South Africa): Let me take this opportunity to express South Africa's condolences to our Ethiopian friends and colleagues as well as to the countries affected by the tragedy of flight ET-302, which has also affected members of our United Nations family.

I wish to thank you, Madam President, for having convened this briefing on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) this morning. We also thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and Ms. Storai Tapesh, Deputy Executive Director of the Afghan Women's Network, for their informative briefings. We also appreciate the participation of Mr. Hamdullah Mohib, National Security Adviser of Afghanistan, and appreciate his presence here today.

South Africa would like to welcome the holding of parliamentary elections in Afghanistan under Afghan auspices in 2018 and looks forward to the presidential elections that are expected to take place

later this year, on 20 July. We would like to reiterate our support for the progress made on electoral reform in Afghanistan, which we hope will ensure that the upcoming elections are credible, timely, inclusive, free and fair, safe and transparent and meet the hopes of all the people of Afghanistan. We need to support the people of Afghanistan as they rebuild trust and work towards reconciliation.

South Africa would also like to commend the efforts of UNAMA, whose work has been invaluable in strengthening the capacity, capabilities and professionalism of Afghanistan's electoral assistance and monitoring bodies. In this regard, South Africa will support the renewal of the mandate of UNAMA.

We are confident that this will bring positive gains for the people of Afghanistan during the election and post-election period in July. We also welcome the positive role of civil society and women's organizations in contributing to the peace process and preparations towards the elections. We welcome the reported positive developments in Afghanistan, especially the resurgent role of Afghan women, the nationwide dialogue among women there and the increased participation in decision-making structures of Afghanistan. This inclusive approach towards the consolidation of peace in Afghanistan will play an important role in long-term sustainable peace and development in the country as well as in the region.

The recent escalating levels of violence in Afghanistan, particularly the indiscriminate attacks against civilians, remain of concern. The continued violence could undermine the progress that has been made in the security and political environments, especially in the lead-up to the elections. This could also exacerbate the already serious humanitarian situation, which would leave many with the choice of migrating or turning to acts of violence in their communities.

The human cost of conflict further weakens the society in which it takes place and has devastating effects on the most vulnerable groups, in particular children, women, people living with disabilities and the elderly. Their hopes for a secure future deteriorate with each day that passes and we do not act effectively in their interest.

South Africa calls on all parties to protect Afghan women, children and those that have been displaced from attacks and particularly from sexual and gender-based violence. We also wish to condemn the unlawful

recruitment and use of children by armed forces and call for the protection, release and reintegration of all children associated with armed forces and armed groups. We also wish to express our deep concern about the growing links between drug production and trafficking in Afghanistan and terrorism.

We strongly condemn the violent and terrorist attacks in the country, including attacks using improvised explosive devices, suicide attacks and assassinations. This could weaken the progress made by the Afghan authorities and the parties and stakeholders involved in bringing about peace and stability in Afghanistan.

We urge all parties to engage in direct talks and continue with their efforts to preserve the gains made over the years, including on issues such as human rights, in particular women and children's rights. In this regard, South Africa believes that a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political process that provides for the peaceful resolution of the conflict and a comprehensive political settlement is the only long-term solution to the situation in Afghanistan.

We welcome all forms of international engagement and appreciate the efforts of all stakeholders in encouraging Afghanistan to find solutions aimed at achieving a long-lasting, durable peace.

Mr. Singer (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): Before turning to the topic under discussion today, we wish to echo the expressions of deep sorrow in connection with the events that took place in Ethiopia yesterday. Our deep condolences go to all nations and United Nations agencies affected and to the colleagues, family members and friends of the victims.

I wish to thank Mr. Yamamoto and Ms. Tapesh for their informative briefings on the situation in Afghanistan and to welcome the presence of Mr. Mohib, who is representing the Government of Afghanistan.

There is a consensus today that the time has come for peace in Afghanistan. Several key events have given promising signs of this reality: the holding of the parliamentary elections in October, the upcoming presidential elections in July and the efforts of the Afghan Government and the Taliban movement to reach a political agreement. We cannot allow this window of opportunity to close. A commitment must be made to conduct a constructive dialogue between the Afghan Government and the Taliban.

Furthermore, initiatives such as the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, which laid the groundwork for an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led process; the convening this month by President Ghani of the Loya Jirga, to be attended by a grand assembly of prominent Afghans and all of the elite and influential figures of the country; the recent Moscow-format dialogues; and the talks between the United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, and the Taliban delegation in Qatar are vital to the process of achieving a sustainable peace.

The path to be followed involves the strengthening of alliances within Afghanistan, which eventually will lead to stronger institutions, an environment of respect for the rule of law and human rights, economic growth and a reduction in poverty. These conditions will make it possible above all for the Afghan people to return to their places of origin.

Regarding the results of the legislative elections, we call for confidence-building and for the Electoral Complaints Commission to take the necessary measures and enact the legal and technical reforms necessary to ensure that it can fulfil its mandate of holding transparent and credible elections, with the least disturbance possible. We call on the international community and the United Nations to continue to assist the Afghan electoral system in order to achieve credible, acceptable presidential elections.

With regard to security, we are alarmed at the fact that the conflict is continuing to affect the civilian population and result in numerous civilian casualties. Clashes between ethnic groups, as well as between Government forces and insurgents, and high-profile attacks are ongoing in the conflict. It is vital that initiatives such as the mutual ceasefire observed in June between the Taliban and the Government become the standard, not the exception.

Another element of concern for the Dominican Republic is the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, where more than 6 million people are currently in need of humanitarian assistance. This is directly linked to the prevailing level of conflict, the severe drought and natural disasters. More than 13 million Afghans are facing significant levels of food insecurity, and more than 3 million are facing emergency levels of food insecurity. This requires a plan that will make it possible to overcome these conditions. We call on the Government of Afghanistan and the agencies of

the United Nations system to continue to cooperate to overcome this serious humanitarian situation.

On the other hand, despite the progress made, women continue to face violence and violations of their rights, especially those living in rural and Taliban-controlled areas. We cannot achieve peace at the expense of the rights and freedom of Afghan women, who fought for many years to get where they are today — a quota system ensures that 28 per cent of the representatives of the Parliament are women; women occupy prominent and leadership positions, such as Her Excellency Ms. Adela Raz, first woman Ambassador of Afghanistan to the United Nations; and a large number of women work in both the public and private sectors.

That progress must be continued and efforts redoubled to implement initiatives such as the national priority programme on women's economic empowerment. In that regard, we are concerned that Afghan women have not been participating meaningfully in the talks with the Taliban and decision-making peace bodies. It is key for Afghan women to be included in the negotiations, as well as young people and civil society representatives. Any peace agreement between the parties must be centred on the human rights of all people, including those of women and children. As First Lady Rula Ghani has said, women can be agents of change and should be integrated into all projects.

Similarly, it is important for parties to the negotiation process to support the independence and effectiveness of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, to prioritize support for, and allocation of, resources to women human rights defenders and to assist in the effective implementation of legal frameworks for the protection of women from violence.

We also call on all parties to take measures to prevent and end all grave violations against children. In that regard, we ask the Government to take concrete actions to ensure accountability and end impunity for such violations, secure the necessary resources for the implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security and the criminalization of sexual violence based on gender, and adopt legislation to prohibit the practice of bacha bazi.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that we are likely at a decisive moment in reaching a negotiated settlement to end the long and devastating conflict in Afghanistan. We encourage the parties to continue their efforts, create conditions that are conducive to lasting

peace and lay the foundations for the safe and dignified return of the Afghans who had to abandon their roots. The time has come to build confidence in a future of peace and guaranteed rights for the Afghan people.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we would like to join others in expressing our condolences to the countries and families affected by the recent tragic aeroplane crash in Ethiopia.

We appreciate the convening of this meeting and thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his frank briefing on the latest developments on the ground. We also express our appreciation to the Deputy Executive Director of the Afghan Women's Network, Ms. Storai Tapes, for sharing with the Security Council her valuable remarks on the situation of women in Afghanistan, as well as to the National Security Adviser of Afghanistan, Mr. Hamdullah Mohib.

Peru is closely following the latest advances in the peace process in the country. That is why we welcome the actions taken by the Government of President Ashraf Ghani to strengthen democracy, such as the implementation of the law on access to information on the anti-corruption strategy. We also welcome the initiatives undertaken by various countries, which together are creating the conditions to build sustainable peace. The ultimate aim of that community of visions and efforts must be to provide the Afghan people with adequate spaces for internal dialogue that will allow them to define the type of society and State they wish to build with a view to putting an end to the violence and overcoming the difficult humanitarian situation.

In that regard, it is important for the Government and the Taliban to engage in direct conversations with each other and with all relevant representative actors, supported by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and with the help of the international community. That process must include the participation of partners in the region if it is to ensure the sustainability of a potential agreement and lead to greater stability in the region.

We also believe that, with the cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the support of the international community, it is critical to continue to combat the threat of illicit drug trafficking, whose enormous resources in that territory contribute to both the financing of terrorism and the generation of a vicious circle of violence and destruction. Suffice it to

say that the number of civilian casualties recorded in the past year is the highest figure since UNAMA and the United Nations human rights office began documenting that information, which reaffirms our conviction that there is no military solution as an option for peace.

In all those efforts, as I have already suggested, the active participation of women and young people must be ensured. At the same time, measures must be taken to guarantee the human rights of those groups in accordance with the Afghan Constitution and accepted international commitments, particularly given the prevalence of violence against women and girls. In that regard, we welcome the increased participation of women in political life, such as the presence of three women running mates in the future presidential elections and the occupation by women of public administration positions, including the Afghan Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ms. Adela Raz.

On the other hand, we note with concern the existing difficulties, including in logistical terms, with regard to holding presidential, provincial and district elections next July, in particular the lack of credibility and confidence in the electoral commissions and their members, which has been creating political instability. We believe that it is urgent to promptly appoint new members of the electoral commissions and adopt the necessary measures and reforms to restore the confidence of civilians in the electoral process. That will also contribute to strengthening the commitment and the necessary adequate and inclusive participation of the various political factions. We believe that it is necessary to identify good practices and confront the difficulties and shortcomings that arose in the parliamentary elections last October in order to take the appropriate preventive measures to guarantee a transparent, free and inclusive process.

We conclude by underscoring the need to implement the Geneva communiqué, the goal of which is to strengthen the international community's commitments, and to expeditiously promote development in Afghanistan. In that regard, we recognize the crucial and dedicated work towards the achievement of the desired sustainable peace in the territory on the part of Mr. Yamamoto and UNAMA, whose extension of mandate we fully support.

Mrs. Van Vlierberge (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Allow me, at the outset, to also express my sincerest

condolences for the recent tragic accident in Ethiopia that led to numerous deaths, including those of many members of the United Nations family.

I would like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his insightful briefing and admirable commitment to lasting peace in Afghanistan. I also warmly thank Ms. Tapesch for her remarks and efforts to promote women's rights in Afghanistan. Lastly, I would like to thank Mr. Mohib for his briefing and presence here today.

I would like to underscore three points today: the peace process, the elections and the importance of promoting and protecting human rights in Afghanistan.

First, with regard to consultations aimed at establishing a peace process, Belgium hopes that this year will mark a decisive step towards reaching a negotiated settlement of what has been a long and devastating conflict in Afghanistan. We believe that a lasting peace agreement can be reached only through a comprehensive and inclusive intra-Afghan dialogue. I reiterate our support for the Kabul process, which must form the basis of an Afghan-led and -controlled peace process, and, in its second phase, must be able to rely on the support of the entire international community. Belgium also calls on all parties to encourage the meaningful and equal participation of women at all stages of the peace process. Any agreement reached should guarantee the protection and promotion of women's rights in accordance with the Afghan Constitution. As Ms. Tapesch also stated earlier, it would be extremely unfair for women to have to pay such a price for peace.

Secondly, 2019 is also a crucial year for the consolidation of democracy in Afghanistan. To meet the challenges ahead, Afghanistan is in need of a representative legislature. In that regard, it is necessary that the results of the parliamentary elections be finalized. Belgium underlines the need to learn from last year's elections and to implement the necessary electoral reforms. In addition, we call on all political actors to act responsibly and ensure that the upcoming presidential and other elections are free, transparent and credible.

That brings me to my third point, which is the human rights situation in Afghanistan. Belgium is deeply concerned about the impact of the armed conflict on the civilian population. The 2018 report (S/2019/193) on United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), released in February 2019, on

the protection of civilians in armed conflict, indicates a record number of civilian deaths, many of them women and children. Belgium calls on all parties to take effective measures to prevent and end all serious violations against children, including those resulting from aerial bombardments and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Of particular concern has been the observation of an increasing number of anti-Government elements targeting civilians, often using improvised explosive devices. The trend involving increasingly violent and deliberate attacks on health-care facilities and schools continues and is unacceptable. International humanitarian law must be respected by all parties.

As members are aware, Belgium attaches great importance to the role of women in peacebuilding. In line with its contribution of €2 million to support the work of UN-WOMEN in the implementation of the Afghan action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) at the Geneva conference held in November 2018, Belgium welcomes the measures taken by the Government to protect and promote women's rights. Those measures have resulted in women's increased participation in public service and decision-making at the local level. In that regard, we listened carefully to Ms. Tapesch's recommendations. We encourage further efforts to protect women human rights defenders and expand access to education for women and girls to allow them to participate fully in social, economic and political life.

In conclusion, allow me to pay tribute to the victims of violence in Afghanistan and to the resilience of the Afghan people and security forces. The goal of peace is achievable in Afghanistan. Belgium supports an Afghan-led and -controlled peaceful settlement.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I express our sincere condolences to the Government of Ethiopia and to all the Governments and the families of the victims of the tragic accident involving Ethiopian Airlines.

We thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his briefing today. We take this opportunity to reaffirm our appreciation for UNAMA's efforts in supporting and helping the Afghan people in difficult circumstances. I also thank Mr. Hamdullah Mohib, National Security Adviser of Afghanistan, and

Ms. Storai Tapesh for their participation in our meeting and for their valuable briefings.

We fully realize that Afghanistan is going through a delicate transition stage following the parliamentary elections in October 2018 and the upcoming presidential elections in July. We hope that the preparations for the presidential elections will lead to more political consultations that help de-escalate the tensions among the various parties and prioritize the national interests over personal ones, thus selecting the proper candidate for the presidency of Afghanistan in the upcoming stage. The preparations for the presidential elections also call for redoubled efforts using the lessons learned from the parliamentary elections in October 2018. In that regard, we welcome the contents of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/193) and what Mr. Yamamoto noted in his briefing about the efforts to prepare for the presidential elections and how the various challenges posed by the parliamentary elections were addressed, as well as the imperative need to hold the presidential elections as scheduled on 20 July 2019.

Discussing presidential elections leads us also to talk about national reconciliation as an essential element in the political process in Afghanistan. We noted with satisfaction the intensified efforts in the second half of 2018 towards political reconciliation, whereby the Government of Afghanistan continued its preparations to conduct a peaceful dialogue among the Afghan people. In addition, a presidential decree was issued on 12 December 2018 on establishing the High Consultative Council to strengthen the national dialogue.

We have also followed with satisfaction the international and regional efforts to advance the peace process in Afghanistan, including the important role of the United States Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad in the current negotiations. The State of Kuwait supports all international efforts that would help bring together the Afghan people and establish national reconciliation among all parties in Afghanistan.

Kuwait stresses its continued support for the security, sovereignty and stability of Afghanistan. However, we are concerned about the instability in the security situation, as mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General. The conflict between the Afghan Government and anti-Government forces continues in most parts of the country. The United Nations reported more than 22,000 security incidents in Afghanistan in 2018. That serves to underscore the difficulty faced

by the Afghan Government and the international community, especially given that the Taliban continue their expansion to many villages and centres in the country, while the Da'esh group continues its terrorist attacks against unarmed civilians. We are all aware of the toll of those terrorist attacks in terms of civilian lives, with UNAMA recording 10,993 dead or injured civilian victims as a result of acts of violence committed during 2018 alone — the highest recorded number since UNAMA started reporting victims in 2009.

The State of Kuwait believes that there is an important opportunity now to reach a political settlement in Afghanistan. We reiterate that any peace process must include all the parties concerned in order to reach consensus among them. In addition, it is also important that any peace process must include the neighbouring States so as to reach a regional consensus and achieve stability in Afghanistan. History has taught us that there cannot be a lasting comprehensive solution without all levels of Afghan society and all States in the region participating in the efforts to that end. We hope that Afghanistan will be able to emerge from this historic stage and enjoy the benefits of peace and stability.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to join other members of the Security Council in expressing our deep sorrow and conveying our sincere condolences to the families and friends of those who lost their lives in the tragic accident involving the Ethiopian airplane.

I thank all the briefers for having shared their insightful and comprehensive analyses on the current situation in Afghanistan. Let me also express my gratitude to Special Representative Yamamoto for presenting the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/193), as well as for all the work of the team of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which is helping to promote political dialogue, enhance good governance and foster economic development. In my intervention I will touch upon three major points, namely, the peace process, the preparations for the upcoming presidential elections and the challenges presented by the current humanitarian situation.

Poland welcomes all the efforts of the Afghan Government and other initiatives undertaken to advance the peace process. All the initiatives in that regard should promote an inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned dialogue on reconciliation and

political participation. The process has to include the effective and meaningful participation of women and lay a foundation for all those who want to declare that they renounce violence and respect the Constitution with a view to building a peaceful Afghanistan. The peace process, which is crucial for the future of the whole region, cannot be based on an agreement that compromises unquestionable gains achieved on human rights, the rule of law, the freedom of speech and women's rights.

Afghanistan managed to conduct parliamentary and district council elections in 2018 within the accepted time frame. All the experience garnered and the lessons learned should now be used in the holding of peaceful, transparent and credible presidential elections in 2019. We urge UNAMA to provide assistance to the electoral bodies and support inclusiveness in the electoral process, including measures to enable the full and safe participation of women. Poland wishes to underline the importance of protecting schools and other places used as polling and voter-registration centres.

In the latest report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in Afghanistan, the statistics provided show a very dire picture. Overall civilian deaths reached a record-high level in 2018, with more than 3,000 killed and over 7,000 people injured. Nine hundred and twenty-seven children lost their lives as a result of military and terrorist activities during the year. This has to stop. The situation is unacceptable to the international community; it cannot be allowed to continue. We urge all parties to the conflict to show genuine commitment and respect for humanitarian principles, human rights and international humanitarian law. Poland calls upon anti-Government elements to stop using improvised explosive devices and suicide attacks, which remained the leading cause of civilian casualties in 2018.

Climate change not only poses a threat to some countries in Africa but also has an impact on the security situation of other regions, including the region where Afghanistan is situated. Extreme weather events, droughts, desertification and water scarcity strongly affect the humanitarian situation and can lead to the escalation of local and regional conflicts. Therefore, we must emphasize prevention and mitigation and strengthen country resilience. Better climate-related risk-assessment and management strategies are needed to effectively address these threats.

In conclusion, let me express our full support for the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan to bring about lasting peace and stability in the country. We stand with Afghanistan in its war against terrorism and support its unrelenting efforts to spread its authority over its entire territory. We encourage all parties engaged in internal and regional dialogue to reinforce their commitments in order to achieve peace and stability by enhancing connectivity and cooperation.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): Let me begin by expressing our condolences with regard to all of those killed or affected by the tragic aeroplane crash in Ethiopia.

Let me also thank our briefers today: first, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto, given that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continues to do vital work in very difficult circumstances; next, National Security Adviser Mohib, whose personal commitment to reform, women's empowerment and credible elections taking place later this year are very encouraging to us; and, finally, Ms. Tapesh, whose words on the importance of involving women in all aspects of the political process and in safeguarding women's rights in Afghanistan were very powerful.

I would also like to take this opportunity to condemn the recent attack on those Afghans attending the commemoration of Abdul Ali Mazari's death and express our deepest sympathy for those affected. That recent attack was a very tangible demonstration of the challenges we face collectively in ensuring the protection of civilians and politicians of all ethnicities and space for peaceful dialogue in Afghanistan.

We join the representative of the Dominican Republic and other speakers today in being deeply concerned by the 10,993 recorded civilian casualties of the armed conflict in 2018 and the 11 per cent increase in civilian deaths registered by UNAMA in the past year. As the Security Council, we must remind old parties that any targeting or killing of civilians is a serious violation of international humanitarian law. We support UNAMA's efforts to ensure that protection remains at the core of the humanitarian response in Afghanistan.

We often sit in this Chamber and talk about what a crucial time we are entering in terms of defining Afghanistan's future. This is especially true today as we approach important elections that underpin political stability in the country. As my Indonesian and

Belgian colleagues already recognized today, it is very important that lessons from October's parliamentary elections be learned and rapidly addressed to ensure that this year's presidential vote is transparent, credible and inclusive.

We recognize the efforts by Afghanistan's electoral management bodies to address many of these issues. But the new election commissioners face a formidable task. There is a great deal still to be done to deliver a credible vote on 20 July. We urge UNAMA to work closely and urgently with the new commissioners to identify priorities, highlight where key milestones are not being met and lead the international community's response. We would also welcome a clear and pragmatic plan for the voter-registration and verification systems that will be used for July's vote.

Once again, we would ask the Mission to consider what more UNAMA can do and what additional resources it needs to strengthen support ahead of the forthcoming elections. We would welcome the detailed updates from the United Nations on this priority issue in the coming months.

The forthcoming elections are crucial for Afghanistan. Both the international community and the Afghan Government can and should focus on this even while we continue to support and drive progress towards a long-term political settlement to the conflict. We are therefore strongly supportive of all efforts aimed at starting a credible and sustainable Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process to resolve the conflict. As the representative of Germany already noted today, the current opportunity for peace is unprecedented, and Afghanistan, its neighbours and the wider international community should do everything possible to seize it.

The forthcoming Kabul process meeting will provide a good opportunity for the international community and the region to take stock and work out how best to support Afghan peace efforts. We are particularly supportive of the efforts being led by United States Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad, including to kick-start the intra-Afghan dialogue, which must lie at the heart of any effort towards an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political settlement.

I would like to turn now to the points made by Ms. Tapesh earlier today. As progress is being made on the path towards women's meaningful participation in all levels of decision-making, from the local community to the negotiations table, it is essential that we maintain

momentum. That is not just because it is the right thing to do. It is also because analysis suggests that the sustained and empowered involvement of women makes any peace process much more likely to succeed. It is positive that there are an increasing number of women on the High Peace Council, but more can be done to ensure that women's voices are represented. Any political settlement should protect the progress achieved on human rights and gender equality in Afghanistan over the past 18 years.

That will require patience, given the distrust between the parties and the history of the conflict. It will also require the international community to be united in its demand for the Taliban to sit down with other Afghans and, in particular, representatives of the internationally recognized Government. The Taliban claims that it is serious about peace. It must realize that peace requires compromise and dialogue. All other parties are ready to engage in such dialogue with an open mind. We should all call upon the Taliban to do the same.

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

I would like to begin by reiterating France's sincere condolences to the relatives of the victims of the tragic crash of Ethiopian Airlines Flight ET-302. I would like to express our solidarity with the families of the victims; with Ethiopia, Kenya and all other countries of those who died; and with the United Nations family.

Allow me to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his insightful briefing on the peace efforts and electoral process. I also thank National Security Adviser of Afghanistan Hamdullah Mohib for travelling to be with us at today's debate and for his very comprehensive briefing. Lastly, I would like to warmly thank Ms. Storai Tapesh for her briefing, in particular on the crucial issue of women's political participation — a very important subject on which we intend to focus during the French and German presidencies of the Security Council.

I shall make four points.

First, while 2018 was one of the deadliest years for civilians, our priority, more than ever, must be to achieve lasting negotiated peace in Afghanistan.

I commend the United States, through the work of its Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad, for engaging in discussions with the Taliban with a view to bringing its members into peace talks with the Afghan Government and all Afghan political forces. France calls on the Taliban to accept direct talks with the Afghan Government. As the Special Representative underscored, it is essential that the peace process be inclusive and led by Afghans for Afghans. In that regard, as has been said, it is particularly important that women and young people participate directly and meaningfully in the peace process and at all levels of decision-making.

In addition, France recalls the need to unify the various regional and international initiatives to achieve lasting peace so that international efforts are coordinated and non-competing. The Kabul process provides an appropriate framework in that regard. As the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy said in Geneva, we are also convinced that the European Union can play a facilitating role in peace talks. Others before me have stressed that we must not forget how far Afghans have come in the past 18 years. As talks continue, the preservation and strengthening of achievements in the areas of justice, the rule of law, human rights, including women's rights, and respect for fundamental freedoms — in particular the freedoms of expression, opinion and the press — must remain an absolute priority. Sacrificing those elements could jeopardize the international community's support, including financial support from international donors, for the ongoing process.

Secondly, it is important to ensure the smooth conduct of presidential elections. To be credible, the presidential elections to be held on 20 July must be free, transparent and inclusive. The shortcomings identified in the parliamentary elections and in previous elections must be rectified and efforts to prepare for the electoral process must be intensified to prevent further delays. That will require all candidates to act constructively. The reform of the electoral law and the renewal of the terms of the members of the electoral commissions must help rebuild the trust of the Afghan people because credible institutions and legitimate representatives are also an indicator of peace. The Independent Election Commission must continue to work to ensure the widest possible participation of the population in elections, in particular women, as candidates and voters. Security

for the elections will also be a key element, and we reiterate our full support for the Afghan security forces, whose efforts were recognized during the last elections.

Thirdly, it is urgent that we redouble our efforts to protect civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel, and meet humanitarian needs. In addition to the unprecedented increase in the number of civilian casualties in 2018, including 900 children killed, caused in particular to attacks by Da'esh, the number of attacks on humanitarian workers has also increased by more than 150 per cent in one year. Hospitals and schools continue to be targeted. The World Health Organization database lists 87 attacks on medical personnel and health infrastructure since January 2018. It is imperative that all parties to the conflict respect their obligations under international humanitarian law.

France welcomes the efforts of UNAMA in support of the Afghan authorities to curb the number of civilian casualties, in particular among children. It is also imperative that laws to eliminate violence against women, as well as the articles of the penal code amended in 2018 to protect women and children from sexual violence and to combat the recruitment and use of children, be fully implemented. To that end, it is important that justice capacities be strengthened. The voices of victims must be taken into account. It is therefore essential that all measures be taken to limit their marginalization and stigmatization. In particular, UNAMA could include in its reports additional information on early and forced child marriages organized by Da'esh in Khorasan. Finally, we must do all in our power to meet the growing humanitarian needs of 6.5 million Afghans in need and ensure safe and unhindered humanitarian access throughout the country.

Fourthly and lastly, with regard to the essential role of the United Nations in continuing to support Afghanistan at this pivotal time, I acknowledge the outstanding work done by UNAMA and the various United Nations agencies in Afghanistan, both in support of peace efforts and the electoral process, as well as development and humanitarian assistance. As we prepare to renew the Mission's mandate in a few days, we must not lose sight of the essential work it does every day. In that regard, I recall the importance that France attaches to the unity of international partners and of the Council in support of Afghanistan. We must remain more united than ever in support of

Afghanistan's path to peace, stability, democracy and economic and social development.

I resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamamoto to respond to observations made.

Mr. Yamamoto: I thank you, Madam, for the opportunity to supplement the briefing I made earlier. I would like to talk about Afghanistan's central role in the peace process.

The peace process is about determining the future of the country and its people. Therefore, the centrality of Afghanistan in the peace process is imperative and the process must be owned by its people, including women. It is necessary that substantive talks on peace take place between the Government, representing a cross-section of the population, and the Taliban.

Inclusiveness, coherence and representativeness in negotiations are critical to success.

We understand that the Government is consulting widely to forge the negotiating structure, including a negotiating team, that will enable such inclusiveness with coherence. The establishment of such a negotiating team will be critical to moving the process of peace further along. We have learned that a presidential decree was issued yesterday for the holding of a consultative peace jirga — a traditional assembly of leaders — in late April. We hope that this will help create a national consensus on peace through an inclusive process.

The President (*spoke in French*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council Members to informal consultations to continue our discussions on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.