



Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

Provisional

8687th

meeting

Monday, 16 December 2019, 3.10 p.m.

New York

President: Ms. Norman-Chalet (United States of America)

Members:

Belgium	Mrs. Van Vlierberge
China	Mr. Zhang Jun
Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Moriko
Dominican Republic	Mr. Trullols Yabra
Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
France	Mrs. Gueguen
Germany	Mr. Heusgen
Indonesia	Mr. Djani
Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
Peru	Mr. Ugarelli
Poland	Ms. Wronecka
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
South Africa	Mr. Van Shalkwyk
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Ms. Pierce

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2019/935)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2019/935)

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and Ms. Aisha Khurram, Afghan Youth Representative to the United Nations.

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/2019/935, 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: When I previously addressed the Security Council (see S/PV.8613), the people of Afghanistan were preparing to vote in the country's fourth presidential election since 2001. The election took place as scheduled on 28 September. Turnout on the day was modest, dampened by security threats and low voter mobilization in many areas. The preliminary results were to be announced on 19 October. However, they are yet to be announced. The primary reason for the delay is to ensure that the electoral process is as transparent and credible as possible, even at the expense of time.

From a technical perspective, the presidential election this year improved considerably on past elections in Afghanistan, with much greater transparency. The use of biometric voter verification devices seemed largely effective in detecting and deterring fraud, and several new monitoring mechanisms throughout the process have enabled the electoral management bodies

to detect and eliminate multiple and fraudulent votes. Candidates and other political stakeholders have had far greater access to information than in previous elections.

After election day, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) retrieved electoral materials and tallied results forms in the presence of candidate agents and observers. Results forms and data, which were electronically transmitted, were matched and processed at the newly established Digital Audit Verification Support System. Deduplication of biometric data to identify multiple voters and data comparison between the tallied results and Digital Audit Verification Support System were completed. Their primary objective was to detect potential fraud and exclude fraudulent votes from the count. The Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) also adjudicated more than 4,000 election day-related complaints.

Nevertheless, the electoral process has not been without problems. Some candidates and their supporters have expressed concerns concerning the technical aspects of the process and the lack of public information. There have been numerous exchanges between the electoral management bodies and candidates, both orally and in writing. That process entailed the blockage of audit and recount in seven provinces by supporters of some candidates. It also added to the delay in the announcement of the preliminary results. However, the process finally resulted in the resumption of audit and recount in the remaining seven provinces yesterday, on 15 December. We now expect to hear the preliminary results in the near future.

In the process, the United Nations technical experts and international commissioners have had extensive consultations and worked closely with the IEC and the ECC at both the commissioner and Secretariat levels. I acknowledge and commend the leadership exhibited by both the IEC and the ECC. I felt a strong sense among all stakeholders that Afghan ownership has to be maintained throughout the electoral process, and that the Afghan leadership and ownership of the process would need to take root in the Afghan political scene.

I call on all stakeholders to enable the electoral institutions to exercise their responsibilities in full, including by addressing all complaints through the appropriate legal and institutional channels. Once electoral complaints have been adjudicated in accordance with the law, I urge the candidates and their supporters to accept the outcome. When the election is

completed with credibility, it will become a milestone in the history of establishing a representative political system of the country.

The war continues to take an appalling toll on civilians living in Afghanistan. The third quarter of 2019 saw the highest number of civilian casualties since the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan began systematic recording 10 years ago. Over the months of October and November, we saw a slight decrease in overall numbers, but that is not enough. I am particularly concerned about the ongoing deliberate attacks on civilians and an increase in civilian casualties from non-suicide improvised explosive devices and aerial operations. Escalating violence in order to attain a position of strength in peace negotiations — causing many civilian casualties — is unacceptable. Many more concrete efforts to reduce civilian casualties are required by all parties.

I am also alarmed by the increased threat to aid workers in Afghanistan, which has affected the United Nations family in the past month. It is with profound sadness that I note the death of United Nations staff member Anil Raj, who was killed while travelling in a United Nations vehicle in Kabul. Mr. Raj was a highly capable professional and a well-liked colleague. His death has been deeply felt by the United Nations family in Afghanistan. I also note with indignation the death of Dr. Tetsu Nakamura, whose assassination was a profound shock to the Afghan people and the humanitarian community in Afghanistan. Sadly, those were not the only violent attacks on aid workers since my previous briefing. There is no conceivable justification for attacks on humanitarian workers, whether they be Afghan or international.

I am similarly concerned about the rise in threats and attacks against human rights defenders in Afghanistan and those with different political views. To name a few, a member of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission was killed by the Taliban earlier this year, and two human rights defenders became incommunicado and were arbitrarily detained by the National Directorate of Security as they were courageously investigating allegations of sexual abuse of children in Logar province.

Targeting and attacking such representatives of civil society is totally unacceptable. We will continue to work closely with a range of interlocutors to strengthen human rights protection for those striving

to create a more just and equitable society. In that context, I would like to welcome the recent “A” status re-accreditation of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

Whatever the outcome of the presidential election might be, peace will be the issue of paramount importance to the new Administration. Even while we await the outcome of the elections, efforts to achieve peace have not ceased. Talks between the United States and the Taliban have resumed. Efforts are under way to continue the intra-Afghan dialogue. President Ghani outlined his thoughts on peace at the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process Ministerial Conference. Those efforts reflect the strong yearning for peace by all, particularly the people of Afghanistan.

Through past efforts in the peace process, some key issues have emerged that need addressing to make substantive progress. They include the reduction of violence and achieving a ceasefire, as well as finding agreeable ways to build on gains made in the areas of human rights, justice and governance. Those issues are fundamental to the life and well-being of the Afghan people. Therefore, the peace process must by necessity be Afghan-owned. It is imperative that the new Government establish inclusive mechanisms through which the views and interests of the entire spectrum of the Afghan society, including women and youth, are justly reflected.

But we all know that peace in Afghanistan has wide-ranging implications for the region and beyond. It is a key issue that affects the stability of the region. It is also an issue fundamental to international efforts to counter terrorist groups, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province. Peace in Afghanistan would create opportunities for accelerated development and enhanced connectivity of the region and provide common benefits to the people and countries in the region. The strategy for peace therefore needs to have a broad base of support. All peace efforts made by the Afghans and other various stakeholders, including regional countries, should be closely coordinated in a way that creates synergy.

I would like to emphasize the importance of women’s participation in all the activities of Afghan society. In this context, I welcome and thank Afghanistan and the United Kingdom for creating the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan. I also note that the Parliament of Afghanistan passed a resolution on 25 November,

calling for the protection and promotion of women's rights and for the inclusion of women in the peace process. Those are strong expressions of commitment to supporting Afghan women, particularly in promoting their participation in the peace process and in addressing the continuing pervasiveness of violence against women and girls.

Incorporating the voices of the next generation will also be crucial. On this note, I would like to warmly welcome Aisha Khurram, the newly appointed Youth Representative for Afghanistan. I know that she has engaged seriously with a broad spectrum of youth in Afghanistan, and I look forward to hearing her remarks later in this meeting.

Afghanistan will need to continue its reliance on the support of external donors, both for its immediate humanitarian needs and to support longer-term economic development. We expect to have an important ministerial conference next year. It will be the first ministerial-level conference on the development of Afghanistan for the new administration. It will also likely be the last pledging conference for the remainder of the transformation decade ending in 2024. I should like to point out that in order to make meaningful progress in the field of development and reforms, Afghanistan must take positive and tangible steps on the fundamental issues of anti-corruption and accountability, including the issue of impunity. On the humanitarian front, the United Nations, working with the Government and non-governmental organizations, expects to reach 7.1 million people by the end of 2019 in 371 out of 401 districts of Afghanistan, exceeding the annual target due to a massive drought response. Next year, we hope to reach at least 7.1 million people and, to achieve this, we hope to raise \$733 million. We look forward to and appreciate the Council's support.

As Afghanistan awaits a new Government, the country and its international partners together have an opportunity to address key challenges and promote rightful causes in shaping a better future for the country. The key issues are peace, development, poverty reduction, human rights and accountability. If the country is to succeed in addressing these issues in the next years, the immediate goal is to deliver a credible election whose results reflect the genuine will of the Afghan people and are accepted by the broad range of stakeholders, particularly the candidates. The United Nations will continue to work with all those

concerned, both Afghans and international partners, to achieve peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan.

The President: I thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Khurram.

Ms. Khurram: Early one morning, a young father was taking a walk with his children in the quiet of his village. As the father slowed to fix his ride, he told his children to go on ahead. Only a few moments had gone by when a horrific sound shook their fragile little hearts beating apace. As they rushed back to their father, they saw him torn to pieces and what was left of him on fire. They hurried to put out the fire consuming what was left of their beloved guardian, and then they rushed to gather up his remains. Sohaila, who is only two, and Wajidullah, aged four, have yet to realize they were the victims of a drone strike.

A few short miles from this scene, there is an orphanage where I have visited the orphans of war. Most of them are victims of suicide bombing attacks — a scene that has forever changed my life. I heard one child, Royina, speak for the rest, her words cracking everyone's heart in the room as she spoke of her miseries. Another, Zuhra, only nine years old, lost her father in a rogue suicide bombing attack in Kabul. That was the moment they each lost not only a parent but their future, a breadwinner who should have held their hands throughout their childhood. Now, eyes filled with tears, one cried out the words: "How can I think of the future? I do not want to just peddle away my childhood on the streets."

I am privileged to address the Security Council in my capacity as Afghan Youth Representative to United Nations. The events that I described at the beginning of my speech are not stories from the last century or from the medieval era. This humanitarian catastrophe is the reality of our age, and for this we all will be judged by history, just as history has judged those before us, for the injustice that we allow and for the silence that we choose to keep. Are we still deluded that we will be forgiven?

Such scenes are rare for many people in this world, but we are living this reality. More than 100 people are killed or wounded on a daily basis in my country. They have families. It is hard to explain what they feel and go through when they see the dead bodies of their loved ones. Civilians, in particular youth and children, have

become witnesses and victims who are often caught in the increasingly ruthless violence carried out by the warring parties.

This war has crushed hopes, destroyed dreams and snuffed out innocent lives, but amid this chaos we, the Afghan youth, commend resolution 2250 (2015), adopted by this very Council, which has bestowed upon me the privilege and the responsibility to deliver the genuine messages and share the concerns of Afghan youth, mindful of the enormous challenges of our moment in history. I applaud the Afghans for their efforts, progressive thinking and organization, and the German Embassy in Kabul, which, in collaboration with the United Nations, has provided this remarkable opportunity to Afghan youth.

Violence across Afghanistan underscores the urgent need to end the conflict through a negotiated settlement. This war is an imposition upon the Afghan people, the product of a great game, and we have been dragged into it and made its primary victims by no will of our own. Eighteen years of ground and aerial operations have not succeeded in bringing an end to the conflict. We want a peace that is balanced and sustained so as to prevent crises like these from ever happening again.

We meet at a time when Afghanistan is in a critical but highly uncertain situation. The ongoing peace process, presidential elections and the possible withdrawal of foreign troops are combining to define the fate and future of our country at a time when Afghans are deeply frustrated and weary of the continued violence. This is not just a war on terrorism anymore; this is now a war against innocent civilians who want nothing but peace. And the most heartfelt cries one will hear from Afghan victims suffering from this calamity will be their pleas to stop the war and cease the killings. Afghan villages are no threat to anyone.

Afghanistan is one of the most youthful countries in the world, with 63 per cent of its population under 25 years old. Therefore, the greatest price for this conflict is not paid by politicians or battlefield elites; it is paid by Afghan children and youth. Violent conflict has plagued our country for decades, and that exposure to violence and uncertainty has shaped the lives of young Afghans. I am here for them today because this is also their United Nations, and my generation trusts that the truth alone will ensure international action.

The message I deliver today on behalf of Afghanistan's younger generation is one of hope, but at

this critical moment in time, hope has been overtaken by the fear — the fear of being excluded, forgotten and sacrificed. Over the past two months, I have redoubled my efforts to reach out to as many young people as I could. I have been to several universities, academic institutions, orphanages and community groups. I have launched an online survey and created a hashtag on social media with the name of #AfghanYouthCall. I have met young people from almost every province of Afghanistan in the Afghanistan National Youth Assembly for Peace. I have travelled outside Kabul province and organized round table discussions. As I travelled — mile after mile, door after door, community after community — all I found was a shared craving for peace. One common message echoed over and over again — “We want peace, a safe life and access to education, and we want to have a voice in the decisions that affect our future.”

Right now, reconciliation and peace are Afghanistan's highest priority, and the key to ensuring sustainable reconciliation is to ensure that the voices of Afghan youth from both sides of the conflict are considered in the peace process. Since this peace belongs to the people of Afghanistan more than to anyone else, it should bear our endorsement. Our endorsement alone will ensure the legitimacy of any deal reached during the peace process. And that endorsement, in particular that of the Afghan youth, will have to be earned. And it will be earned only if the miles we have walked on the path to progress are respected; only if our achievements are preserved and our rights protected.

It has been almost a year since peace negotiations between the Taliban and the United States took place in Doha. The young people of Afghanistan want a transparent and vigilant mechanism that protects their rights and achievements in any possible peace deal, because where we are today is the product of great effort and sacrifices. In this crucial moment of our history, we ask the Security Council to make untiring and sincere efforts, to play an active role and become the guarantor of our rights in any future peace agreement. My people, my fellow Afghan youth want the Security Council to commit to peace. They want an end to suicide bombings attacks, air strikes and night raids now. And we believe that the future will be forged by deeds, not simply words. Speeches alone will not solve our problems; it will take sincere efforts and persistent action to bring peace and stability back to Afghanistan.

My fellow Afghan youth demonstrate the marvel of human resolve — at a time of widespread violence and humanitarian catastrophe — to rebuild, to learn, to love and to live. Our schools, universities and academic institutions were bombed, and hundreds of our fellow young people lost their lives, but the next morning we went back to our classrooms. Those bombs, bullets and attacks could never silence us. We went back every day. We coped with the risks because we understand that no matter how much our lives are threatened on a daily basis, we have no future without an education. I assure the Council of the strong resolve of Afghan youth to rebuild their country. They are driven to build their country under fire if they must; they will continue to attend school while being bombed, if they must. We do not want future generations to look back and wonder why we refused to act or why we failed to pass on to them a situation that they deserved to inherit.

Although there will be setbacks, false starts and tough days ahead, we will never waver in our pursuit for peace. We have a youthful, productive and dynamic population that not only craves peace but fearlessly works for it at every level. Afghanistan's first robotics girls team, comprised of young girls, participated in their first global challenge, tasked with building a robot for a competition. They have captivated the public with their inspiring message of hope and determination. They have proved that after years of darkness, young Afghan boys and girls across the country can finally take charge and aspire to be the masters of their own destiny.

The message I should take back today to my fellow young Afghans should be one of reassurance that they are being heard and that a war so futile and aimless will no longer darken their days, rattle their nights and destroy their lives. If humankind is to prevail over the ill will of a few, then I must here and now secure a commitment from the international community, from this very Council — a resounding confirmation that we do stand for human rights, that every innocent life matters and that humanity will prevail over all else. It is here and now that I must secure the Council's commitment to advancing the peace process, with the primary objective of preserving human dignity and of ending this infamous humanitarian catastrophe. Those are the values that must prevail over national interests.

Let me put forward four pillars that I believe are fundamental to the future we want for the young people of Afghanistan and generations to come: first, the need

for the Security Council to play a proactive role in the Afghan peace process; secondly, the preservation of our rights and achievements in any possible peace agreement guaranteed by the Security Council; thirdly, an immediate end to the ongoing violence and a country-wide ceasefire; and fourthly, the substantive inclusion of all Afghan youth, including young Taliban members, in the peace process.

We, Afghan youth, are committed to building a society of coexistence, peace and tolerance. We stand together with young people all over the world to advance the cause of humankind. Let us build a peaceful and prosperous world together. So, bolstered by my generation's will and commitment to effecting positive change, I call on the global community to join and support us in building the future that my generation so richly deserves.

The President: I thank Ms. Khurram for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mrs. Raz (Afghanistan): I would like to first congratulate you, Madam President, on your competent leadership during your country's presidency of the Security Council for the month of December. I also thank you for organizing today's briefing. The United States has been a strategic partner of the Afghan people in our quest for prosperity and stability.

I also want to thank the Secretary-General for his latest report on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2019/935) and welcome his Special Representative, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, whom I thank for his comprehensive briefing and, more broadly, for his effective leadership of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). Mr. Yamamoto's experience and able guidance of the work of UNAMA at an important crossroads in the history of Afghanistan are commendable and exemplify the long-standing commitment and cooperation between the Governments and the people of Japan and Afghanistan.

When talking about the situation in Afghanistan, it is important to show the full picture, one that underlines not only the threats affecting our country, but also the achievements reached over years of hard work and sacrifice. Ms. Aisha Khurram, one of today's briefers, presents a picture of the new generation of educated Afghan women playing an active and influential role,

not only in our local society, but at the international level as well. As our first female Youth Representative to the United Nations, she is the voice of the post-2001 generation — a generation that is committed to the values of democracy, multilateralism and peace. She represents a new Afghanistan that is striving to not only protect the gains of the past 18 years, but to build upon them. It is truly a testament to the evolution of a new country.

Reflecting on that evolution requires us to remember our difficult journey to where we are today. In 2002, with the support and assistance of the international community, a new era of State-building and reconstruction that established the foundations for democracy, the rule of law and our modern institutions began. The adoption of a comprehensive Constitution opened the doors to the establishment of a republic that defends the equality of all its citizens. That new republic called for equal provision of health services, education and security, while instituting a democratic system of Government that gave our people the opportunity to elect their leaders for the very first time in decades, with presidential and National Assembly elections in 2004 and 2005, respectively.

The pursuit of democracy and the strengthening of our national institutions continued with the first peaceful transfer of power, following the presidential elections of 2014 and through the consolidation of our security forces in 2015, after resuming responsibility for full security from NATO. We then decided to embark on a bold journey towards economic growth and self-reliance through the start of our transformation decade 2015-2024 — an important goal, in which we re-envisioned an Afghanistan as a country no longer reliant on aid and insisted on a country capable of leading itself into an era of stability and prosperity.

That has required us to take steps in developing the legal and governance foundation for the benefit of the well-being of our people and strengthening our State. As part of those efforts, over 400 pieces of legislation were passed to modernize and expedite the effectiveness of our institutions. The success of those reforms is evident, and we can highlight the important growth of internal revenue by over 90 per cent since 2015, as an indicator. Efforts were also redoubled towards the strengthening of the independence of the judiciary, and key legislation was implemented to better tackle corruption as a cornerstone for enhancing the rule of law in Afghanistan.

In September, another decisive step was taken towards the building of a stronger, self-reliant Afghanistan. The holding of presidential elections represented a rejection by the people, both the elders and the young, of the ideology of extremism, as they withstood the threats of the Taliban to empower the republic and the strong values of democracy. That election was safeguarded by the heroism of our Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, and I want to take this opportunity to once again reiterate their bravery and effective work in allowing our people to cast a vote for the future of our country.

As we wait for the results, it is now the critical responsibility of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) to deliver the results of each vote cast by the people of Afghanistan. We are a committed and patient partner in that demanding task, and we hope that they are able to announce the results as soon as possible. In the meantime, we continue to call on all candidates to allow the IEC and the Electoral Complaints Commission to carry out their obligations according to the existing mechanism and election law.

Since his first day in office, President Ghani has placed peace at the top of the national agenda. He shared his peace plan in the Kabul process and the Geneva conference and announced unconditional peace talks with the Taliban. As part of that, we thank our international and regional partners who have responded to our call for peace and provided assistance to building an environment conducive to Afghan-led and Afghan-owned direct talks between the Taliban and the Government. Particularly, allow me to highlight the role of the United States in those important efforts.

As a next step in the process, President Ghani announced in October a seven-point peace and stability plan to move the process forward. The elements of that plan focus on building consensus on drivers of conflict at the national and transnational levels and emphasizing mechanisms to support an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. The plan emphasizes guaranteeing non-repetition of conflict and a credible system of verification in dealing with threats posed by transnational terrorist networks, transnational criminal organizations and non-State actors. Finally, on a post-peace future, it addresses the need for a development plan, while also stressing the need for institutional reforms to strengthen governance, fight corruption and address post-conflict grievances.

As part of the critical work to implement that new peace road map, the Government has identified three immediate concrete steps to better coordinate efforts and define priorities for the achievement of peace. Those include the hosting of mini jirgas to determine priorities of the mechanism to end the conflict, the formation of an alliance consultation group that engages the special representatives of our 12 to 15 countries in consultations on the way forward for peace, and the holding of additional intra-Afghan dialogues. We look forward to the cooperation and input of our international friends and partners as part of that framework, and we hope that those efforts will further serve to successfully move the peace process forward.

As we move in that new direction, it must be highlighted that we are committed to achieving enduring peace and stability in the country as a common goal and a shared aspiration of the people and Government of Afghanistan. We welcome the efforts of our regional and international partners in seeking to facilitate an environment for direct talks between the Government and the Taliban, but we also remain firm that a willingness to move that process can come only in the form of an immediate ceasefire by the Taliban. The gains of the past 18 years, particularly those of women, must also be protected and expanded on further. That is the shared view of the Afghan society and the international community as well.

Just last month, we launched the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan, along with Ambassador Pierce, who I once again thank for her dedication and support to women in Afghanistan. The message of support and solidarity by respective ambassadors coming from different countries and cultures and the leaders of non-governmental organizations and other organizations was loud and clear in that we cannot have long-lasting and consequential peace without the participation of women and the maintenance of their rights.

While peace remains our main objective, the Government is also focused on protecting our territory against all terrorist threats, including those created by the Taliban, Al-Qaida and Da'esh. Currently, the Taliban remains the main umbrella organization that provides an enabling ecosystem for Da'esh, Al-Qaida and others to launch their attacks against the security of us all. As such, we continue to engage the Taliban in the battlefield to prevent it from gaining any ground, while we diminish its control in various areas. In a recent

operation in north-eastern Afghanistan, our security forces effectively eliminated the presence of Da'esh. More than 243 Da'esh fighters and their families surrendered in Nangarhar province.

Afghanistan appreciates the support of NATO forces under the Resolute Support Mission, which continue to train our security forces, while also providing advice and assistance in the fight against that terrible threat. Looking forward, our focus should be on not only defeating terrorists on the ground, but also on countering their extremist ideologies and the sources of financing from their nexus with organized crime and the illegal narcotics trade.

Particularly on the latter, a comprehensive regional approach that truly addresses the issue in all its stages, from production to consumption, is urgently needed. In our response to that problem, we have made strides, conducting close to 3,000 operations this year, seizing and destroying thousands of drugs and their precursors in the process and arresting almost 800 individuals involved in that crime. Nevertheless, the efforts of one country alone will be futile in the face of a multinational threat that connects criminal networks around the region, if the larger root causes are not appropriately addressed. Regional platforms, such as the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, are good examples of what could be an effective mechanism to help us strengthen our cooperation in better countering those threats.

The selfless commitment of international humanitarian workers in our country is a real inspiration to all Afghans to continue our efforts to build a self-reliant and prosperous Afghanistan. We are forever indebted to those brave individuals, and we are determined to build on their work to achieve the goal of a prosperous Afghanistan.

In that context, I would like to pay tribute to the work of Dr. Tetsu Nakamura and Mr. Anil Raj. In the past weeks, enemies of Afghanistan targeted and killed those two individuals, who had focused their career on bettering the lives of Afghans. Mr. Raj, an American citizen and a staff member of the United Nations Development Programme, was attacked along with two of his local colleagues. Dr. Nakamura, a Japanese citizen who also held honorary Afghan citizenship, known as Uncle Murad to those he worked with, dedicated decades of his life to assisting Afghans in the construction of irrigation canals. The Afghan people

still mourn his loss and he will be remembered as a symbol of love and friendship between the peoples of Japan and Afghanistan.

I will conclude by saying that we have come this far through the steadfast commitments and goals set since 2002 to achieve a secure and prosperous Afghanistan. Many Member States ask a genuine question in wondering if they have done the right thing and made the right investment. I would answer yes. They have made the right investment by making the impossible possible. The presence today of two women from Afghanistan to proudly present the new nation and the new Afghan economy is the impossible thing that, together, we made possible.

It is now time to redouble those efforts and look to the next step as an opportunity to strengthen and preserve the democratic values and gains that we have earned through the sacrifices of the Afghan people and our international partners. We are determined to move this unfinished mission forward and to continue working to make Afghanistan a self-reliant, prosperous and peaceful country.

The President: I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): Let me start by commending Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his briefing today, as well as for his work, the dedication he has shown, his patience, his persistence and his advice. Through him, I would also like to thank the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for its work. We believe that UNAMA continues to play a very important role for us in monitoring the situation. We are very happy that in September, together with Indonesia, we were able to rally everyone's support for a new mandate for UNAMA.

Let me start with the electoral process. What we heard from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General regarding the recount is welcome news but, of course, the electoral process took too long. It has to run its course. The Independent Election Commission has to do its work. But we need the process to end not only so that we have the results but also for the assumption of the new Government and the transfer of power. We must end the period of uncertainty that we are still in and decrease the volatility faced by the country.

We are all struck by what we heard today from the briefers about the civilian casualties. They are all individuals. We heard about their fate from the Afghan Ambassador, as well as the civil society representative, who spoke of a young father who was killed. We have heard that the civilian casualty rate is at its highest as compared to other equally difficult periods. Aid workers, human rights defenders and civil society representatives seem to be the targets of the terrorists. As Mr. Yamamoto said, there is no conceivable justification for such attacks, which we must condemn.

Germany remains committed to Afghanistan. For years, we have been the second-largest donor and we are the second-largest troop-contributor. We feel involved with the country and its fate. Germany facilitated intra-Afghan talks in Doha. We are ready to continue to be engaged and to organize further intra-Afghan dialogues. In such dialogues, as well as those that we conducted in Doha, we ensured the inclusion of women. We believe that there should not be any negotiations or talks on the future of Afghanistan without the participation of women.

With regard to achieving sustainable peace in the country, as in other conflicts, nothing can be achieved through military means. We must ensure a negotiated, inclusive political settlement that is Afghan-owned and Afghan-led. As previous speakers have said, the outcome of negotiations for sustainable peace in the country must protect the rights of women. We must ensure no backslide and go beyond what we have achieved so far. There must be the full and effective participation of women and young people in all areas of Afghan society, including the political sphere. It is very good that we have two women representatives from Afghanistan among us, but it would also be wonderful if they were ministers in an Afghan Cabinet made up of 50 per cent women.

I believe that the inclusion of women in an Afghan Government would also ensure that it focuses on contributing to the well-being of the country. I hope that, as a result of the elections, we will not have long negotiations but a clear result and the rapid formation of a Government so that what the Ambassador said the Afghan Government was ready to do, namely, to provide services to the population and to ensure that there are functioning institutions, the rule of law and accountability and that there is no longer impunity in the country, can be achieved. Only by establishing such institutions can a Government carry out its work,

provide jobs for all and ensure that good education, universities et cetera exist.

Let me end with these remarks and again express our wish that the elections finally come to an end, that there is a new Government and that work starts again for the benefit of the people of the country.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): I would like to start by saying that, as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), we welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2501 (2019), on the renewal of the mandate of the 1267/1988 Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, which will contribute positively towards efforts to bring about peace and stability. That is a good start and shows that the Security Council is united in helping Afghanistan. We would also like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto as well as Ms. Khurram for their briefings. I also listened attentively to Ambassador Adela Raz, the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, and thank her for her statement.

Afghanistan's resilience in the face of the issues described by the briefer is admirable. As crucial as intra-Afghan reconciliation and a collective Afghan effort are to achieving durable peace and development, we in the Council must also be united and unrelenting in supporting Afghanistan. As I just mentioned, the adoption of resolution 2501 (2019) is clearly a show of our unity.

Indonesia remains fully committed to assisting Afghanistan in restoring peace and normalcy. As Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto also said, which I heard clearly, there are numerous positive developments. We concur with those assessments, but the most important part is to build on those gains. That is a significant point. We should continue to build with care in the areas of human rights, justice, good governance and, of course, inclusiveness.

We would like to highlight three additional points, the first being the election. We welcome the presidential election that took place on 20 September at 4,678 polling centres across 34 provinces. A total of 2.69 million Afghans voted amid grave security challenges. Indeed, many more would have voted if there had been better security. The election once again demonstrates Afghans' clear commitment to a democratic system. We hope that the results will not be delayed further and that once they are announced, all parties will address any complaints they have through the appropriate

channels and processes, in line with Afghanistan's legal framework. We also thank the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for its support to both the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission. As the country moves towards stability, UNAMA's work will continue to be indispensable, and in that regard I join others in thanking Mr. Yamamoto and his team for their excellent work so far. We of course hope that after the election is finalized the future leaders of Afghanistan will continue with national reconciliation efforts, good governance and development as a priority, without which it will be hard to achieve stability.

My second point concerns the security and protection of civilians. Indonesia is deeply concerned about the continued high numbers of casualties, particularly among civilians. According to UNAMA, 41 per cent of all the country's recorded civilian casualties in the third quarter were women and children. That is unacceptable. The Secretary-General's report (S/2019/935) states that the conflict in Afghanistan remains the world's deadliest for children. The numbers are heartbreaking and include attacks on United Nations personnel and innocent workers from humanitarian and international organizations, which we condemn. In that regard, I would like to express our condolences to the families of Mr. Anil Raj and Dr. Tetsu Nakamura. That must all end. Indonesia appeals urgently to all the parties to stop the violence and to abide by international humanitarian law and human rights law.

My third point is about the peace process and the role of women and young people. We concur with the Secretary-General's observation that the current moment represents perhaps the most significant chance to date for a negotiated settlement. Underscoring the importance of an intra-Afghan peace process that is led and owned by the Afghans themselves, we emphasize the need for the continued support of all the countries of the region to the promotion of peace in Afghanistan. Enduring peace and nation-building will also be elusive if the role of Afghan women and young people does not increase. We are glad that today we have Ms. Aisha Khurram representing youth here and giving a clear voice to the call for reconciliation and to us all. I hope that all of us, not only here in the Chamber but outside as well, will hear her appeal to us on behalf of the young people of Afghanistan to continue helping in the peace process. We salute her for the work she has done.

With regard to the role of women, Indonesia is actively supporting activities that include capacity-building for Afghan women and their active participation in the peace process. In Jakarta we recently hosted a dialogue for Afghan women and women from every party in Indonesia on the role of women in building and sustaining peace. Afghan women from both rural and urban regions discussed experiences and lessons learned with their Indonesian counterparts, and hopefully, as my colleague the Ambassador of Germany mentioned, that can also lead to greater participation by women in Afghanistan's active political life. Mrs. Marsudi, our Foreign Minister, is keen to remain personally engaged in helping to facilitate Afghan women's robust participation in peacebuilding. She has also joined the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan, recently launched by my colleagues the Permanent Representatives of Afghan and the United Kingdom, whom we thank for that. I can assure them that Indonesia will continue to contribute positively to that effort. We believe in that cause, and we believe in helping Afghanistan.

In conclusion, as we are almost at the end of 2019, we pray that the new year will bring the normalcy and peace that the people of Afghanistan have waited for so long. While all Afghan stakeholders should resume an intra-Afghan dialogue accompanied by an immediate nationwide ceasefire, we should also work to contribute effectively to helping Afghanistan emerge from its challenges. Ms. Khurram has challenged us and clearly articulated the hope of Afghan youth, so it is up to all of us here to fulfil her dream and her destiny.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his analysis of the processes unfolding in Afghanistan. We share many of the views in the Secretary-General's most recent quarterly report (S/2019/935) and would like to make the following comments.

We believe that UNAMA has an important role to play in coordinating the international assistance to Afghanistan. We have been carefully monitoring the country's tense situation. Needless to say, we are very concerned about the major acts of terrorism that have been occurring regularly in various Afghan cities, including with the use of suicide bombers. Unfortunately, we are still seeing record numbers of

civilian victims, and women and children in particular. Today Ms. Aisha Khurram shared heartfelt words and testimony on the incalculable horrors that the ongoing conflict has inflicted on the Afghan people. Indeed, Afghan soldiers and police officers are dying at the hands of terrorists, along with international workers, including United Nations staff, as we heard from Mr. Yamamoto. We are seriously concerned about the continued presence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Afghanistan. In spite of some successes by the Afghan security forces, the insurgents have been able to maintain their positions and influence in the country. We are worried about ISIL's sleeper cells in north-eastern Afghanistan, as well as their diversifying methods and channels for recruiting civilians, especially Afghan youths. That represents a real threat to the security of both Afghanistan and its neighbours, the countries of Central Asia and Russia's southern regions.

We are also intensively monitoring developments regarding the fight against drug trafficking in Afghanistan. The drug threat remains a serious problem not just for Afghanistan but for the region and the whole world. Narcodollars are a source of significant financial support for terrorism. We believe it is extremely important to continue and to expand the international efforts to combat that scourge. We are ready to fulfil our obligations by assisting the collective efforts against this threat, including through our active participation in the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Russia has put its promises into practice through its efforts to train narcotics squads from Afghanistan, Pakistan and the countries of Central Asia, as well as regular assistance under the auspices of UNODC's global Paris Pact Initiative. We are also upholding our commitments in this area within the framework of regional organizations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

As a friend and partner to Afghanistan for many years, Russia has traditionally advocated for restoring the stable peace that this long-suffering land has desired for so long. We consider promoting an Afghan-led peace process especially important. We are sincerely interested in achieving reconciliation and a subsequent post-conflict settlement in the country as soon as possible, and we are prepared to continue providing comprehensive assistance in that regard. That is what our efforts are aimed at, including

those based on the Moscow format and our help in launching an intra-Afghan dialogue mechanism in Moscow. We support a resumption of negotiations between the United States and the Taliban. In that context, we believe that the consultations among the troika of the special representatives of Russia, China and the United States involving the key regional players are especially important to creating favourable international conditions for further progress in the national reconciliation process. We considered our Pakistani partners' participation in the troika's past two meetings, in Beijing in July and Moscow in October, to be helpful.

Afghanistan is on the threshold of a new phase in its life, in which the Afghan people themselves must play the key role in solving the country's problems. We support efforts aimed at ensuring that the upcoming Afghanistan peace process is as inclusive as possible and that all social and political forces in the country, including the opposition, are involved. The intra-Afghan meeting organized by the Afghan diaspora in Moscow in February, with the participation of the leading political parties in Afghanistan and representatives of the Taliban, was a clear embodiment of the principle widely endorsed by the international community of an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned dialogue for the settlement of the conflict in the country.

It is more urgent than ever to ensure that the potential of regional organizations is fully utilized, especially the SCO, and we note the participation of Afghanistan in SCO meetings as an observer. We want to particularly highlight the mechanism of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group and its signing of a road map with the Government of Afghanistan. We also see opportunities opening up for strengthening the cooperation between Afghanistan and the CSTO.

The situation following the outcome of the 28 September presidential elections needs particular attention. It is regrettable that difficulties and delays in the vote-counting process have led to a destabilization of the internal political situation and to mass protests. We affirm our principled position that the expression of the will of the people should help to unite the country rather than divide it.

There can be no military solution to the crisis in Afghanistan. The only way to resolve it is to use political and diplomatic means to reach an Afghanistan-wide agreement. We firmly believe that all the peace

initiatives and ongoing negotiations should serve to unite the entire country and all Afghans, without exception. It is close international cooperation, particularly at the regional level, that will enable us to achieve our common goal of restoring the country to a land of enduring peace, stability and prosperity.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing and commends him for leading the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in the enormous amount of work it has done over the years. We also listened carefully to the statements by Afghan youth delegate Ms. Khurram and Ambassador Raz, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations.

China has been following the developments in Afghanistan closely. The realization of peace and stability in that country is not only the goal that the Afghan people strongly aspire to but also a shared expectation of the countries in the region and the international community. The results of Afghanistan's presidential elections have yet to be announced. Its security situation is disconcerting, its peace and reconciliation process beset by growing uncertainties and its humanitarian situation dire. The international community should therefore continue to provide Afghanistan with support and assistance. We need to continue to help it improve its security environment, as the situation on the ground has recently been worsening, with air strikes and search operations that have led to a considerable increase in civilian deaths. Terrorist groups remain active and drugs are still an important source of funding for them.

As the Afghan presidential elections enter their final stage, China applauds Afghanistan for the tremendous efforts it has made to ensure their smooth conduct. We respect the choice of the Afghan people and support the work of the Independent Election Commission. At the same time, we will be watching closely for any new challenges to Afghan security and stability following the release of the election results.

China calls for foreign troops to withdraw from Afghanistan in an orderly and responsible manner and for all Afghan political parties to resolve their differences through dialogue in order to ensure a stable and smooth transition of power. The international community should provide training, funding and technical support for capacity-building in the Afghan

National Defence and Security Forces and assist the country in effectively countering terrorism, transnational crime, drug trafficking and other threats.

We should provide rigorous support to Afghanistan in advancing its peace and reconciliation process. The international community and other countries in the region have recently been actively promoting direct talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban, lending impetus to the peace and reconciliation process. China calls on all Afghan parties, including the Taliban, to prioritize the interests of their country and people, seize these historic opportunities and engage in intra-Afghan talks in order to establish an extensive and inclusive political framework as early as possible and open the door to reconciliation. China is a staunch supporter of the Afghan peace and reconciliation process. We have been actively exercising diplomacy and our good offices, and will continue to engage the parties in talks through channels such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Contact Group with Afghanistan, the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue and the China-United States-Russia-Pakistan consultations on Afghanistan. Our efforts are aimed at building regional consensus and an environment that is conducive to peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan, while also providing a platform for intra-Afghan talks.

It is important that we provide tangible assistance in promoting Afghanistan's socioeconomic development. Its Government and people need continued attention and significant assistance if they are to improve their humanitarian situation, while help is also needed to enable Afghanistan use its own advantages and participate in regional economic cooperation and connectivity in order to eradicate poverty and overcome the challenges caused by natural disasters. In our communications with Mr. Yamamoto, we have expressed deep concerns about the worsening poverty situation in Afghanistan, which deserves our joint efforts. UNAMA should therefore play an active role in that regard by implementing its mandate, supporting Afghanistan in post-conflict reconstruction and enhancing its cooperation with regional countries and organizations.

To boost Afghanistan's socioeconomic development, China will focus the assistance it provides to the country on areas relating to people's lives. We have helped Afghanistan to build the Republic Hospital, Kabul University and the Afghanistan

Technical Vocational Institute. Every year, we provide scholarships to Afghan students and treat Afghan children with congenital heart problems. We have also been carrying out regional cooperation projects in disaster risk management and other areas. China will continue to work with Afghanistan to actively implement the China-Afghanistan memorandum of understanding on jointly advancing the Belt and Road Initiative, thereby supporting the country in its reconstruction and integration into regional economic development. Thanks to our concerted efforts, China and Afghanistan have opened direct flights, established direct transport links and expanded economic and trade ties.

We stand ready to work with Afghanistan in a spirit of consultation, cooperation and mutual benefit to strengthen economic cooperation in the region, create connectivity partnerships, promote regional peace and stability through development and help to achieve lasting peace in Afghanistan. Let us work together to build a community united by the vision of a shared future for all humankind.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank Special Representative Yamamoto and Ms. Khurram for their extremely helpful briefings and note how nice it is to see Ms. Khurram here again. I would also like to thank my colleague the Afghan Ambassador. We are very pleased to be part of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan and find it heartening to hear so much support from colleagues around the table. I thank them very much for that. I am also very grateful to the Indonesian Foreign Minister for her guidance.

I would first like to once again express our enormous gratitude to the Special Representative for the work that he and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) are doing in incredibly challenging circumstances. In a moment I will turn to the three main issues concerning us today — the peace process, the elections and economic development — but before that I want to add the United Kingdom's voice to all those condemning last month's attack on a United Nations vehicle in Kabul and the recent attack that killed Dr. Nakamura. We join all those who lament the loss of those fine colleagues. We send our sympathies and condolences to their families and all those who knew them.

There is absolutely no justification for those disgraceful acts of violence. The Taliban claims to

speak for the people of Afghanistan and yet, if it does not take part directly in such attacks, it certainly creates an environment in which such attacks become possible. In that connection, I would like to mention the Taliban attack on Bagram last Tuesday, which killed two civilians and injured many more. The United Kingdom calls on the Taliban to end such attacks in order to give Afghans a chance at the stable and just peace that they so much deserve.

Turning to the peace process, we share the view of other members that only a political process can deliver a lasting and just peace and that the deal between the United States and the Taliban is crucial to unlocking intra-Afghan talks between the Government and the Taliban. The United Kingdom also hopes that talks can resume soon, but it is clear that the Taliban needs to firmly commit to a concrete reduction in violence as a matter of urgency. The Taliban needs to show that it is serious about peace, the Afghan people need respite from the awful violence and we need to create a conducive environment for the crucial intra-Afghan talks to succeed.

I have mentioned the vital role that women have to play in the peace process and join my colleagues in underscoring that once again. I wish to commend UNAMA for the launch of the nationwide global open days on women, peace and security at the symposium in Kabul in October.

My second point concerns the Afghan presidential elections. We join others in calling on all stakeholders to respect and uphold the integrity of the electoral management bodies as they work to complete the process and deliver the results in a timely manner. We welcome UNAMA's continued engagement around the elections with national and international partners and likewise support its call for transparency, impartiality and independence as the results are processed. It was good to see that the Independent Election Commission will be able to move forward with recounts in the remaining provinces. We hope that the process will unfold expeditiously and transparently and look forward to preliminary results.

My last point is on Afghanistan's economic development needs. Regardless of what happens in the months ahead, Afghanistan will continue to have considerable economic development and humanitarian needs, as the Indonesian representative so clearly set out. Financial commitments made at the Brussels summit

in 2016 will run out next year. The United Kingdom supports the holding of a pledging conference in 2020 to address the financing gap and identify development priorities for the remainder of the transformation decade. We therefore welcome the work that UNAMA is doing with the Afghan Government in preparation for the 2020 ministerial conference on Afghanistan and the initiation of discussions with potential hosts for that event.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto for his detailed briefing. We have listened to his remarks, which we endorse in full. We also thank Ms. Aisha Khurram for her excellent presentation.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea regrets the low turnout in the presidential elections on 28 September as a result of the fear that the Taliban instilled in citizens to dissuade them from going to the polls. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to encourage the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission not to give up on conducting a transparent, impartial and independent review that safeguards the integrity of the electoral process and to respond, in accordance with the law, to all electoral complaints raised by candidates and others so that the published results may be accepted by a majority of the candidates and the Afghan people.

In addition, I would like to point out that Equatorial Guinea, in its conviction that the peace process must be inclusive and Afghan-led with a view to the peaceful resolution of the conflict and a comprehensive political solution, considers it particularly important that the talks on a peace process continue. In that spirit, we welcome all the efforts made to bring about a peace dialogue between Afghans and the Taliban on 24 September in Doha, as well as the meetings held with countries in the region to strengthen the momentum of regional cooperation through multilateral forums designed to build regional consensus on peace and stability in Afghanistan and the meetings held with other countries mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/935).

In the same vein, we encourage the Government of Afghanistan to continue to include women in peace processes and ensure that they take a leading role in negotiations. We welcome the Afghan Government's continuing efforts to improve legal safeguards to eliminate violence against women and girls and the

launch by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the second national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000) on 12 November.

With regard to the humanitarian and security situations in Afghanistan, we share Mr. Yamamoto's deep concern. Security incidents have increased by 13 per cent as compared to the same period last year. Consequently, as stated in the report, between July and September there was an alarming increase in the number of civilian casualties recorded since the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) began systematically documenting them in 2009. Accordingly, we call on the parties to observe international law and international humanitarian law with regard to the protection of civilians.

Those incidents, coupled with drought, sudden natural disasters, food insecurity and poverty, are causing significant numbers of people to move and confirm the considerable challenges facing Afghanistan, which require the international community's ongoing attention and the provision of substantial support to the Afghan Government with the aim of improving its security environment.

As this is our last intervention on this issue, I would like to conclude by again commending Mr. Yamamoto for UNAMA's continued commitment and the important role it is playing in promoting peace and lasting stability in Afghanistan. Furthermore, we encourage the Afghan Government to continue to work closely with UNAMA so that both, together with the support of the international community, can meet current challenges in Afghanistan.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank today's briefers. Poland highly values and welcomes the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tadamichi Yamamoto to support peace and development in Afghanistan. We praise his dedication and commitment. I also thank Ms. Khurram for her informative briefing and valuable comments on the role of youth in Afghanistan.

Before I make my remarks on the current situation in Afghanistan, I would like to pay tribute to Mr. Tetsu Nakamura. The respected physician and head of Peace Japan Medical Services, who had recently been granted honorary Afghan citizenship for his decades of humanitarian work in the country, should serve as an example of dedication and commitment for all of us.

The recent presidential election has proven that the Afghan people highly value democratic principles and their meaningful implementation. That is why, despite challenging security circumstances, they decided to actively participate in the latest round of presidential elections. We all have to respect and acknowledge that act of courage. The Afghan political elite cannot let the Afghan people down. We have been following closely all the events after the election, and we firmly believe that only independent and impartial electoral bodies can develop a solution to the existing situation. We therefore call on all stakeholders and political leaders to respect the verdict of the constitutional bodies. Particular interests and ambitions should not hamper the future of Afghanistan and its people.

We have condemned in the strongest terms the ongoing terrorist activity targeting innocent civilians and public facilities. The recent attack in Bagram, which targeted a hospital, constitutes a grave violation of international law. However, Poland strongly believes that the peace process should continue. The current situation can be resolved only through political means. We support pursuing the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, but that should not be done at the expense of the rights of women and minorities.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and Ms. Aisha Khurram, Afghan Youth Representative to the United Nations, for their comprehensive and valuable briefings. I would like to echo those who have spoken before me and express our gratitude to Mr. Yamamoto for his work as Head of UNAMA. We appreciate his vital role and dynamic efforts aimed at supporting the Afghan people in particularly complex political circumstances that have witnessed many historic accomplishments.

As we meet here, three months after the presidential elections in Afghanistan, I would like to commend the Government and the people of Afghanistan for successfully holding those historic elections. The people of Afghanistan have written one of the most beautiful and courageous pages in confronting all challenges, threats and acts of violence by showing up at the polling stations to select the President of their country. We also salute the efforts of UNAMA and the Independent Election Commission to monitor the voting process and count the votes in those historic elections.

The end of the year is near and there are many issues of concern in Afghanistan that we need to tackle, in particular the peace process and the national reconciliation efforts, in order to put an end to 40 years of unstable and challenging security and political situations that have negatively impacted the lives of Afghans. We call on all Afghans to engage in a frank dialogue that supersedes any personal, confessional or partisan differences. The priority in that regard should be given to the interests of Afghanistan and its citizens in order to put an end to armed confrontation once and for all. The Security Council must continue to step up efforts in support of the political process and call all countries in the region to create favourable conditions for peace in Afghanistan and the region.

In terms of the security situation, we share the concerns of the Secretary-General about the instability in Afghanistan, especially in the light of the ongoing armed fighting in most of the country. Security-related attacks have increased by 13 per cent as compared to last year. In addition, UNAMA recorded 6,654 security incidents between 9 August and 7 November. According to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/935), those security incidents are generated by armed clashes, which represent 55 per cent of the violent incidents in Afghanistan, in addition to suicide attacks, which represent 24 per cent of such incidents. Those horrible figures demonstrate the magnitude of challenges and responsibilities facing Afghanistan, the countries of the region and the international community as a whole. That demonstrates the need to achieve an Afghan peace agreement that is supported at the regional and international levels in order to put an end to the violence once and for all.

Despite the challenges facing Afghanistan, we appreciate the concrete steps that the Afghan Government recently took to continue its efforts to combat the scourge of drugs and terrorism in order to re-establish its control and sovereignty over the entire country. Afghanistan has also continued to seek to amend and improve national legislation to put an end to violence against Afghan women. We have noted with satisfaction the continued engagement of Afghanistan in dialogues with neighbouring countries and countries of the region throughout various meetings and conferences, which have led to continued cooperation with the aim of achieving peace and stability in the region, enhancing security cooperation and combating terrorism.

As this is the last time that I take the floor on this item of the agenda, I would like, in conclusion, to reiterate the solidarity of the State of Kuwait with the Government and the people of Afghanistan in supporting them in all the challenges they are facing. We support their efforts towards national reconciliation on the way to achieving lasting peace and stability through a negotiated political settlement that ensures security, development and prosperity for the brotherly Afghan people.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): I, too, wish to thank Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto for his insightful briefing. I also thank Ms. Aisha Khurram, who gave us an opportunity to hear the voice of the youth of Afghanistan, as well as Ambassador Adela Raz of Afghanistan, who, as usual, very eloquently advocated on behalf of her country. I would also like to commend Mr. Yamamoto's commitment to an Afghanistan on the road to lasting peace and thank him for his constant efforts.

Afghanistan will not be able to take that path alone. The international and regional commitments to the Afghan people must be unified and unailing. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is the embodiment of that support on the ground. Under the leadership of Mr. Yamamoto, UNAMA has made outstanding progress in the area of human rights, in particular in women's rights, and the path to democracy. We must maintain that progress.

As we await the results of the 28 September election, I would first like to commend the men and women of Afghanistan for the courage they showed in braving the threats to go to the polling stations. Although certainly lower than in previous elections, the level of electoral participation was nevertheless encouraging, and despite the technical difficulties, we can conclude that the voting process was satisfactory.

But that is only a first step. The credibility of the elections now depends on the results being announced and accepted by all of the candidates. To that end, the vote-counting process must be transparent. The Independent Election Commission must communicate more openly and systematically throughout the entire vote-counting process in order to build that trust and prepare for a conclusive announcement of the results. The next Government can best ensure its success by peacefully and democratically accepting the results.

The latter will have the difficult task of leading the inter-Afghan peace process.

In order to ensure lasting results, that process must be inclusive and leave no segment of the population behind. In order to ensure lasting peace, we will also need to maintain the gains made in the areas of justice, the rule of law and respect for fundamental freedoms, particularly the rights and freedoms of Afghan women, which Ambassador Raz has been eloquently defending here at the United Nations. In that regard, I commend her, as well as Ambassador Pierce, on their successful launching of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan, in which I am very honoured to participate.

Further progress is also needed to improve governance, eliminate corruption and combat drugs.

The continued elevated levels of violence in Afghanistan remain a source of constant concern for my country. Civilian casualties have reached their highest level since 2009, as Mr. Yamamoto just recalled. Combating terrorism must remain a priority. We have just renewed the mandate of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, and the commitment of the United Nations alongside the Afghan people in the fight against terrorism must continue.

In that context, it is important that the discussions between the United States and the Taliban lead to a significant reduction in the violence in order to make it possible to establish a ceasefire during future inter-Afghan peace negotiations.

The civilian population, in particular women and children, continue to pay a high price, which is unacceptable. The attack on 3 December in Jalalabad that killed Dr. Tetsu Nakamura, founder and senior official of the non-governmental organization Peace Japan Medical Services, as well as five Afghans, is shocking, and France condemns it in the strongest terms. International humanitarian law must be upheld, and we are duty-bound to ensure that it is respected. Humanitarian and medical personnel must be protected, as must civilian and humanitarian infrastructure, and unimpeded humanitarian access must be ensured throughout Afghan territory.

Humanitarian response is essential but insufficient. We also must heed and fully take into account the aspirations of Afghan young people, as expressed strongly by Ms. Aisha Khurram. The most important

aspiration of young Afghans is an end to violence as well as lasting peace, which will require a just and inclusive process based on respect for the rights of all and for basic equality between men and women. France, which has long-standing and deep ties with the great country of Afghanistan, will not waver in its support for Afghanistan's efforts to achieve that goal.

We around this table have converging goals and messages, which is key. Indeed, it is our goal and our common responsibility here in the Security Council to create conditions conducive to peace and security, which will make it possible for young people in Afghanistan to take charge of their own destiny and together build a better future.

Mr. Trullols Yabra (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We wish to thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing and Aisha Khurram for her inspiring words. We also take this opportunity to thank Mr. Yamamoto for his years of service and his great dedication to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

We wish to express our recognition to the Afghan people for having decisively stepped up to exercise their right to vote, despite the obstacles and threats to their security. We extend that recognition to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces for their efforts to ensure security during the electoral process. We deplore the fact that consensus has not yet been reached regarding the results of the elections. In that regard, it is vital to preserve the integrity of the process and to ensure that the electoral institutions fully exercise their responsibilities. The concerns raised must be addressed institutionally and through the appropriate channels. We believe that the international community, including the Council, must play a key role in accompanying the process of building a definitive political solution in Afghanistan.

The Dominican Republic therefore believes that now is the time to redouble efforts to that end on the basis of the achievements already made.

First, we believe that dialogue and direct negotiations between the Government and the Taliban are the best way to put an end to the conflict, which continues to cost lives and delay the sustainable development of the country, which the Afghan people so strongly hope for.

Secondly, with respect to the security situation, we are concerned about the high number of victims

resulting from the continued hostilities and attacks. No political or peace process can move forward in a hostile atmosphere. We would recall the parties' obligation to respect international humanitarian law and to refrain from carrying indiscriminate attacks against civilians, whom they have an obligation to protect.

We welcome the recent approval of the law on the protection of children, which is another milestone towards renewal and hope for children and all people in Afghanistan. It is truly alarming that Afghanistan continues to be the most deadly conflict in the world for children, with more than 2,000 children killed or injured in the first nine months of the year. We categorically condemn such violations and attacks against children. The only way to break with this horrifying trend is for both the Government and the Taliban to comply with peace initiatives aimed at ensuring a permanent ceasefire.

Despite the difficulties that we have already mentioned, we welcome the fact that the Government continues to enhance measures aimed at eliminating violence against women and girls. In that same vein, we reiterate the need to achieve significant participation by women in the peace process and in all areas of decision-making in Afghanistan.

While progress has been made, much remains to be done. Poverty, inequality, illiteracy, harmful traditional practices and violent extremism mean that women, particularly in remote provinces, are vulnerable to violence and abuse. There is also a need to foster economic development and job creation among a population that is predominantly young and whose participation continues to be crucial for peace and development in Afghanistan.

The security risks faced by humanitarian personnel in certain parts of the country are unacceptable. During the most recent reporting period alone, six humanitarian workers were killed, nine injured and 16 abducted. We urge all parties to the conflict to ensure access and security for humanitarian personnel and to be unstinting in their efforts to bring to justice the perpetrators of such attacks.

In conclusion, we acknowledge the role played by UNAMA to promote peace in the country. Its work and its achievements in the various aspects of its mandate must be further shored up, so as to guarantee an enduring peace and a new future for the people of Afghanistan.

Mr. Moriko (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation congratulates Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his briefing on the current situation in the country. We also thank Ms. Aisha Khurram, Afghan Youth Representative to the United Nations, and Ambassador Adela Raz, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations, for the great relevance of their briefings, which prompt my delegation to make observations regarding the political, security and humanitarian aspects of the situation.

Concerning the political situation, my delegation welcomes the fact that, despite a difficult security backdrop characterized by deadly attacks and attempts at intimidation, the Afghan authorities successfully held presidential elections on 28 September. The holding of the elections reflects the commitment of the Afghan people to peace, progress and the building of a democratic society.

However, the current impasse in the political process as a result of the delay by the Independent Election Commission in announcing the election results, three months after the voting, remains a source of concern for my country. It is therefore important that the results of the election be published as soon as possible and that the parties undertake resolutely to relaunch the peace process, which is key to the lasting stability to which the Afghan people aspire.

In that context, all initiatives aimed at promoting peace in schools, university peace clubs and civil-society groups, as well as the peace programmes of most Afghan universities, are worthy of support and encouragement. Côte d'Ivoire, which has always advocated dialogue as the best method of resolving conflict, welcomes the resumption of talks between the United States and the Taliban three months after their interruption, on 7 September. In this regard, we invite the Taliban to demonstrate its determination to participate in the negotiations by putting an end to the violence and resuming direct political dialogue with the Afghan authorities. My delegation also calls on all countries of the region to support those talks so as to ensure regional peace, stability and security.

With regard to the security situation, my country is concerned about the continuing violence and insecurity in Afghanistan. According to available information, it is estimated that 40,000 civilians have been killed

since 2001 and more than 120,000 injured. Moreover, since the beginning of the war, at least 62,000 Afghan soldiers and police officers have lost their lives. The year 2019 was particularly deadly, with 1,174 civilians killed in the third quarter, which, according to the United Nations, represents an increase of 42 per cent from the previous year. My country therefore believes that the efforts of the international community and, above all, those of the Council must seek to end to the deadly violence that will have a lasting impact on the most vulnerable segments of the population, particularly women and children.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, we must recall that, 18 years since the fall of the Taliban regime, the protection of civilians and the delivery of humanitarian assistance remain significant challenges, especially in provinces under Taliban control. Accordingly, my delegation commends the outstanding work of the United Nations and its partners in providing relief to more than 3.5 million people in need. My delegation urges the entire international community to maintain its financial support for the humanitarian response plan for Afghanistan in order to provide the assistance necessary to populations in dire need.

Côte d'Ivoire therefore deplores the restrictions on humanitarian agencies' access to vulnerable populations, as well as attacks on humanitarian workers, which constitute a violation of international humanitarian law. Côte d'Ivoire encourages the forces engaged in Afghanistan to further strengthen joint operations with the defence and security forces in the provinces most affected by insecurity and calls on stakeholders to honour their funding pledges to the Afghan army.

Furthermore, my delegation welcomes Afghanistan's continued commitment to regional cooperation and welcomes in particular the opening of the Torkham border crossing, a confidence-building measure that sends a strong message with regard to the implementation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, which is likely to contribute to the resolution of security issues in the region.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire commends Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto and the entire UNAMA team for their tireless efforts to end the conflict in Afghanistan and assures them of its full support in carrying out their mission.

Mr. Ugarelli (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the convening of this meeting and for the comprehensive presentations by the briefers, who, from their specific perspectives, described for us a situation that calls urgently for the support of the international community and Security Council action.

Peru notes with deep concern the worsening levels of violence and suffering in various areas of Afghanistan that have led to recent fatalities among civilians, many of whom are women and children. We condemn in the strongest terms the attack on a vehicle from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which killed a member of its personnel and wounded five others. We hope that this cowardly act will be subject to exhaustive investigations leading to the identification and appropriate punishment of those responsible. We deplore the observed increase in the number of fatalities and injuries among the civilian population from July to September, the highest number since UNAMA began keeping records.

The fragile situation compels us to emphasize the urgent need to establish a minimal framework of understanding that could help reverse the negative trends on the ground and lead to the establishment of direct negotiations between the Taliban and Government representatives within the framework of the intra-Afghan dialogue. To that end, we stress the importance for those countries with the most influence on the parties to exert the political pressure necessary to set aside confrontational rhetoric and mutual recriminations and address all differences through diplomatic channels.

We also believe that such an undertaking must necessarily be supported by the firm response of the Council through the various means at its disposal. The persistence of violence is unacceptable and requires this organ to assume greater responsibility. To that end, we believe that it is critical to allay the uncertainty and unease spawned by the delay in reporting the results of the presidential election held at the end of September. We look forward to a timely solution to the technical difficulties so that we can at least receive preliminary results, in line with the proposal made by the Afghan electoral institutions in mid-November. We believe that it is imperative that this be followed up by moderate, responsible and cautious action by the relevant stakeholders that encourages the restoration of a stable environment.

Achieving sustainable peace will require a broad consensus based on a shared vision for the future. It is therefore necessary that all segments of the Afghan population be adequately represented, including through the meaningful participation of women and young people in political processes. We welcome the initiatives of UNAMA under way, aimed at making progress in that key area. We also believe that it is vital for the international community to step up its contributions to stabilizing and stimulating the local economy, and to set up infrastructure and programmes to create jobs and offer hope and opportunity to the youngest members of the population.

In conclusion, I affirm Peru's full support for the renewal of the mandate of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, which assists the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), and underscore the important work it is doing. We also thank Special Representative Yamamoto and his team for their commendable efforts and wish them every success in continuing their work with resolve in seeking peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

Mrs. Van Vlierberge (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, let me thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing and his tireless efforts in the service of realizing a prosperous and stable Afghanistan. We welcome Ms. Aisha Khurram. Belgium attaches great importance to the voice of young leaders like her. Finally, I warmly thank the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his detailed briefing.

We welcome the holding of the September presidential elections. We support the important role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in the electoral process. The electoral institutions must communicate proactively with all stakeholders and safeguard the integrity of the electoral process. In the coming days, when the results are announced by the Independent Election Commission, we encourage all parties to act responsibly, demonstrate restraint and direct any future complaints through existing legal mechanisms. With regard to the search for peace, we remain convinced of the need for peace talks and welcome the recent prisoner exchange as a confidence-building measure. We fully support the central role of the Afghan Government in the peace process and call on the Taliban to engage in talks with the Government.

If a peace agreement is to be sustainable, it must safeguard the gains made in terms of women's rights at all costs. Women must participate meaningfully in the peace process. In that regard, we welcome last month's launch of the second national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), as well as the inclusion of Afghanistan in the joint United Nations-European Union Spotlight Initiative to combat sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls. We are also encouraged by the recent inauguration in New York of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan, the goals of which we fully support.

The level of violence seen is totally unacceptable. Afghanistan is the deadliest conflict in the world for children, with more than 2,400 children killed or injured in the first nine months of 2019. Belgium is committed to facilitating negotiations on a consensual response by the Council to the situation involving children and armed conflict in Afghanistan. We welcome the efforts of the United Nations Mine Action Service and its partners to reduce the number of child victims of mines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by enhancing child-centred risk education.

Belgium notes with concern that explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices remain the second leading cause of security incidents in Afghanistan and that their use is increasing. We invite the Afghan armed forces, Afghan security services, the NATO Resolute Support Mission and civilian organizations involved in mine action in Afghanistan to share information on IEDs and their precursors in order to prevent, insofar as possible, their manufacture and use by the Taliban and other armed groups.

We strongly condemn the attacks on United Nations personnel, as well as on human rights defenders and journalists, and call on Afghan authorities to spare no effort to identify and bring the perpetrators to justice. We reiterate that all parties are under obligation to respect international humanitarian law and to take immediate measures to prevent civilian casualties. The Government must redouble its efforts to implement its policy of reducing the number of civilian casualties. Ensuring justice for the victims and accountability for the most serious crimes are prerequisites for reconciliation. Those principles can be a valuable part of a broader, situation-specific transitional justice process for lasting peace.

I conclude by expressing my gratitude to UNAMA and United Nations agencies for their efforts in Afghanistan to build peace and prosperity. I am encouraged by the role of young people in that regard. Belgium will also maintain its commitment to Afghanistan in 2020, through its support for European Union and United Nations programmes, as well as through its participation in the NATO Resolute Support Mission and its financial contribution to the Afghanistan National Army Trust Fund.

Mr. Van Shalkwyk (South Africa): Allow me to begin by thanking the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for his briefing. In that regard, I would also like to commend UNAMA's personnel and Mr. Yamamoto for their vital contribution to supporting Afghanistan's efforts towards restoring peace and stability in the country, particularly with regard to the recent election process and UNAMA's efforts to support that process.

I would also like to extend our appreciation to Ms. Khurram and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for their briefings.

With regard to the peace process, South Africa encourages all Afghan stakeholders who are committed to the nation's peace talks to renew their efforts as they rebuild trust and work towards peace and reconciliation. That would also assist in promoting national unity and cohesion, aimed at achieving a lasting political solution. In that regard, the only way for Afghanistan to achieve durable peace and stability is through a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political process, leading to a negotiated settlement of the conflict.

My delegation is of the view that any engagement towards long-lasting peace and security for the people of Afghanistan should be considered. However, it is also important that all sectors of the Afghan Government and society be included in those discussions so as to ensure that a comprehensive and inclusive peace is established and sustained.

South Africa strongly believes that an integral aspect of that engagement is the inclusion and participation of women. The inclusion of women's voices in the peace talks is vital to ensuring that the significant gains in women's and girl's rights are protected. The unique perspectives of Afghan women would also provide additional viewpoints that are necessary to the peace

process. The efforts of the Afghan Government in advancing those integral rights are welcomed and encouraged to continue.

The continuing high levels of violence in Afghanistan, particularly the indiscriminate attacks perpetrated against civilians, women, children and the elderly remain of concern to South Africa. The continuing violence will undermine the progress made in the political process. The effect of that violence is particularly felt by the most vulnerable in society, including women, children and those living with disabilities. We call on all parties to ensure the protection of civilians and to adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

The Afghan people recently went to the polls to elect a new President. We hope that the Independent Election Commission can conclude its important work with regard to the electoral process and is able to announce the results of the presidential elections in due course.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of the United States of America.

The work done by Special Representative Yamamoto over the past three and a half years has required commitment, resolve and, I know, many long hours. I thank him for his briefing and for the consistent support of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for good governance, human rights and development in Afghanistan. But, more than that, I thank him for his leadership and service as Special Representative.

I want to also thank Ms. Aisha Khurram for her briefing today. I was struck by the way her comments captured the important role she plays in Afghanistan. It is only through the meaningful participation of young leaders like her and women across Afghanistan that the country will reach its full potential.

As we convene to discuss the importance of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, we extend our deepest condolences to the family and colleagues of a selfless and dedicated American, UNAMA employee Mr. Anil Raj, who was killed in Kabul last month. We likewise extend our sympathies to the loved ones of Dr. Tetsu Nakamura and his five dedicated Afghan colleagues, who are mourned by

Afghans of all walks of life. We strongly condemn the senseless killing of those individuals, who were in Afghanistan to serve its people.

The United States remains deeply committed to Afghanistan. As Afghanistan continues its process of auditing votes to ensure the credible outcome of the presidential election, we call for the continued support of the electoral bodies. We continue to call on all Afghan candidates to engage with the audit process, file any complaints through the legal channels and refrain from any actions that would increase tensions.

As Afghanistan conducts its electoral process, we also remain committed to our Afghan partners in their efforts to combat security threats in the region, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP). Over the past few months, successful Afghan and coalition counter-terrorism operations against ISIL-KP have led to hundreds of the group's fighters surrendering to Afghan security forces, all but eradicating their presence in Nangarhar. A September operation in Helmand successfully targeted a number of the senior leaders of Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent. Those who perpetuate senseless violence against innocent civilians have no place in Afghanistan's future.

We are extremely concerned about the allegations of sexual abuse of boys in several schools in Logar province and the subsequent arbitrary detention of civil society activists who reported the alleged exploitation and violence. We call on all Government authorities to take decisive action to hold perpetrators accountable and to take immediate measures to ensure the protection of victims and their families. Protecting the lives and welfare of children must be a priority of all.

We also continue to strongly support the role played by Afghan women in Afghanistan's economic, political and social advancement. As we have heard today, Afghanistan has a powerful female voice here at the United Nations in Ambassador Raz, which is a testament to the Afghan Government's efforts to promote female leadership in the country. We commend Afghanistan's national action plan on women and peace and security and emphasize the importance of implementation as

one of the many concrete steps necessary to enhance women's meaningful participation in building an Afghanistan that works for everyone. The United States recently joined the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan, which, as mentioned earlier, by the United Kingdom and Afghanistan. We look forward to working with other Permanent Representatives in the United Nations to lift the voices of women in Afghanistan and ensure they are heard.

We have heard directly from the citizens of Afghanistan that they are ready for a peaceful and democratic future. For our part, the United States continues to support an inclusive Afghan peace process. The goal of our efforts remains to enable direct intra-Afghan negotiations among Afghan stakeholders, including the Afghan Government, opposition political leaders, civil society, particularly women, and the Taliban. The purpose of those negotiations is for Afghans to chart a political road map for the future of their country, end the conflict, ensure Afghanistan is never a platform for international terrorism and preserve the gains of the past 18 years.

To that end, we restarted talks with the Taliban last month. In order to create an environment conducive to negotiations, we urge all sides to immediately reduce the level of violence, culminating in a ceasefire. Additionally, we call on the Government of Afghanistan to swiftly appoint an inclusive national negotiating team that will negotiate a comprehensive and sustainable peace settlement with the Taliban. Peace in Afghanistan is possible and we must all seize this opportunity.

In conclusion, let me again express my appreciation to Special Representative Yamamoto for his work over the years and his commitment to strengthening the legitimacy of Afghanistan's electoral process and supporting the country's peace process.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

As there are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers, I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.