



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9521st meeting

Friday, 29 December 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. De La Gasca (Ecuador)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil	Mr. França Danese
China	Mr. Geng Shuang
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Mrs. Ngyema Ndong
Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
Japan	Mr. Yamazaki
Malta	Ms. Gatt
Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
Russian Federation	Ms. Evstigneeva
Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Nusseibeh
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Dame Barbara Woodward
United States of America	Ms. Browne

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Letter dated 8 November 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/856)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Letter dated 8 November 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/856)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2023/1056, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Japan and the United Arab Emirates.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/856, which contains the text of a letter dated 8 November 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it.

I shall first give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements before the voting.

Mr. Yamazaki (Japan): I deliver this statement on behalf of the United Arab Emirates and Japan, in our capacity as co-penholders on the situation in Afghanistan.

I would like to start by thanking the Ecuadorian presidency for scheduling this adoption today.

The report on the independent assessment on Afghanistan (see S/2023/856) was submitted to the Security Council in early November, in accordance with resolution 2679 (2023), which was adopted unanimously in March this year. Since the report's submission, Council members had multiple occasions to deliberate on the assessment and its recommendations, inside and outside this Chamber.

The United Arab Emirates and Japan firmly believe that the independent assessment serves as the best basis for discussions on our way forward. Based on that belief, we crafted a draft resolution (S/2023/1056) that shows the Council's stance on it, while listening carefully to the Council members' views. The draft

resolution before us is the product of our consultations, and we are ready for it to be put to a vote today.

Once adopted, the draft resolution will express the Council's strong determination to facilitate a new strategy to address a wide range of issues in Afghanistan and set the course for international mechanisms necessary to tackle them. In addition, I would like to emphasize that the draft resolution highlights the need to increase international engagement in a more coherent, coordinated and structured manner, as the independent assessment states.

By adopting this draft resolution, we will also demonstrate to the people of Afghanistan — including relevant authorities, women, girls and civil society — that the international community remains committed to a peaceful, stable, prosperous and inclusive Afghanistan. The country continues to face enormous challenges, and we should maintain and increase our attention on it.

Before concluding our statement, I want to thank all the members of the Council for their constructive and valuable engagement with the draft text and for their flexibility. We have maintained unity on the Afghanistan file this year, and we hope we can keep it that way as the end of the year is approaching.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Albania, Brazil, Ecuador, France, Gabon, Ghana, Japan, Malta, Mozambique, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

Against:

None

Abstentions:

China, Russian Federation

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The draft resolution received 13 votes in favour, none against and 2 abstentions. The draft resolution has been adopted as resolution 2721 (2023).

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

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): On behalf of the United Arab Emirates and Japan, I want to

express our deep gratitude for today's adoption. I thank all Security Council members for reinforcing, over the past year, our shared and enduring commitment to Afghanistan. I would also like to recognize Ambassador Feridun Sinirlioğlu and his team for their exemplary work on the independent assessment (see S/2023/856). Finally, and most important, I want to pay tribute to Afghans — women and girls, men and boys, Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Sunni, Shia, Christian, Sikh and Hindu — in all their remarkable ethnic and religious diversity, in the country and in the diaspora. I salute their irrepressible spirit and unyielding dedication to an Afghanistan at peace with itself, its people, its region and the world. I want to assure them that we too are dedicated to that Afghanistan.

At this time last year, the Taliban issued some of their harshest edicts to date. They banned girls from education beyond the sixth grade, and they soon followed that with bans on women working for the United Nations and for international non-governmental organizations. What was clear then — and is abundantly clear now — is that there is no coherent international strategy for Afghanistan. Afghanistan and its people — to be crystal clear, that includes its women and girls — are isolated, left to fend for themselves as their tragedy is instrumentalized by outsiders for performative virtue-signalling and cynical self-interest. Afghans struggle for basic needs such as food, shelter, health care, education and a decent living. A patchwork of well-meaning but unsustainable humanitarian assistance is all that stands in the face of total collapse.

Let today signal the beginning of the end for all of that. We have before us perhaps the last opportunity to change course on Afghanistan. It will require compromises from all.

Resolution 2721 (2023) sets in motion a principled and pragmatic international approach to Afghanistan. That approach centres on the interests of Afghans, while reflecting the need for regional and international buy-in. The implementation of the recommendations outlined in the Special Coordinator's report, at the very least, will bring coherence to an often ad hoc and reactive approach by the international community. It starts a challenging, but feasible, path towards a prosperous, peaceful, secure and stable Afghanistan, built by Afghans, for Afghans.

This has been a productive year for the Security Council on Afghanistan. Amid increasing division and

polarization, we have largely maintained unity on this file. I wish to continue inviting incoming and current Council members to strive for such progress. It is an important file worth that unity. In our admittedly brief experience, we have found the purpose of the Council repeatedly validated by the potential and practice of diplomacy. It has been an extraordinary honour and a privilege to serve with Japan as co-penholder on Afghanistan, and they have our full confidence and support as they continue leading on this file next year.

Ms. Browne (United States of America): The United States is committed to promoting peace, stability and human rights in Afghanistan. Resolution 2721 (2023) sends a clear message to the Taliban, the Afghan people and the world. It shows that the Security Council supports a process by which Afghanistan is integrated into the international community by meeting its international obligations. The resolution also demonstrates the United Nations continued support for the people of Afghanistan, and the results of the independent assessment (see S/2023/856) provide clear recommendations to address the challenges ahead.

We remain concerned about the Taliban's repressive edicts against women and girls and their unwillingness to foster inclusive governance. Those decisions risk irreparable damage to Afghanistan's society and move the Taliban further away from normalizing relations with the international community.

The United States strongly supports the resolution's call for a United Nations Special Envoy on Afghanistan. A Special Envoy will be well-positioned to coordinate international engagement on Afghanistan, including with relevant Afghan political actors and stakeholders, to achieve the objectives laid out in the resolution. Altogether, resolution 2721 (2023) is a step forward in moving all sides in a more constructive direction.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): First, I would like to start by thanking the co-penholders — the United Arab Emirates and Japan — not only for their tireless efforts on this important text, but also for their creativity and tenacity, which led to the Council mandating the independent assessment on Afghanistan (see S/2023/856), which was very ably executed by Ambassador Feridun Sinirlioğlu.

As we have said multiple times in the Chamber, we should seize the momentum of the independent assessment, with the hope of shaping Afghanistan's current negative trajectory. At the same time, the

Taliban have a responsibility to meet their international commitments, including via the immediate reversal of policies restricting women's rights and fundamental freedoms. We therefore encourage all parties, including Afghan and international stakeholders, to take forward the independent assessment's recommendations, working towards an Afghanistan that is at peace with its people, its neighbours and the international community.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): On behalf of the three African members of the Security Council — Gabon, Ghana and Mozambique (A3) — I express appreciation to Japan and the United Arab Emirates for their efforts, which culminated in the adoption of resolution 2721 (2023). The common resolve of the Council in addressing the concerning situation in Afghanistan has been reflected in our emphasis on the indispensable role of women, the pivotal function of the International Contact Group and the unique contribution a Special Envoy of the Secretary-General could make in complementing the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

Today, as we reaffirm our commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan, the A3's vote in favour of this resolution underscores our dedication to fostering a peaceful, stable, prosperous and inclusive future for all Afghans. The resolution just adopted is not merely procedural, but also touches on several critical areas of concern. In that regard, we call on the Taliban to reverse their discriminatory policies towards Afghan women and girls. They must act to immediately restore the rights of all Afghans to education and employment — rights that are enshrined under international law and critical for Afghanistan's full integration into the international community.

We also encourage the convening of Special Envoys and representatives on Afghanistan, which will present an invaluable opportunity to deliberate on the recommendations stemming from the independent assessment (see S/2023/856). During the envisaged international meeting, the A3 encourages frank and robust discussions that will lead to pragmatic actions for increased international engagement, coherent and coordinated efforts and actionable steps to ameliorate the humanitarian, political and security situation on the ground.

With respect to the role of UNAMA, the A3 reaffirms support for its mandate and ongoing efforts.

The road ahead for Afghanistan is fraught with challenges but it is a road that we must traverse with Afghans, while demonstrating our resolve, commitment and unequivocal support that the rights, hopes and dreams of the Afghan people cannot and must not be ignored.

As we look forward to a future of renewed engagement with Afghanistan, we hope that the recommendations of the independent strategic assessment will help us move our actions from the shadows of pessimism towards a shared humanity and responsibility for an Afghanistan in which peace is enduring, development is sustainable, governance is inclusive and every woman, man and child can live with dignity and hope. It is in that spirit of optimism and a sense of duty that the A3 voted in favour of the resolution. We stand ready to work with all Member States and the Afghan people to usher in a new chapter of resilience and renewal for Afghanistan.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): In March, the Security Council mandated the Secretary-General to conduct an independent assessment to promote coordinated positions and actions by the international community on Afghanistan. China thanks the Special Coordinator and his team for their work. We are of the view that the recommendations contained in the assessment report (see S/2023/856) are worthy of careful study.

China has always maintained that when addressing hotspot issues, actions taken by the Council and the Secretary-General, including the appointment of Special Envoys, should be based on thorough communication with the countries concerned and be respectful of their views. We are therefore of the view that the Council's follow-up to the independent assessment should also be taken in full communication with the Afghan authorities, while being respectful of their views, with decisions to be made after extensive consultations with various stakeholders.

A forcible appointment of a Special Envoy, with disregard for the views of the country concerned, may lead not only to the Special Envoy being unable to discharge their functions, but may also heighten antagonism and confrontation between the international community and the Afghan authorities, which would be completely at odds with the message sent by the independent assessment to increase constructive engagement with the Afghan authorities.

It is obvious that Council members now remain divided on the follow-up implementation of the assessment report and that the Afghan authorities, for their part, still have reservations on some recommendations. It therefore appears hasty for the Council to force through the adoption of a resolution, which could have counterproductive effects.

China and the Russian Federation expressed those concerns in consultations and proposed constructive amendments to the draft text on relevant issues. However, they were not taken on board. It is deeply regrettable that we were forced to abstain in the voting on the text just now. It is our hope that, going forward, the Secretary-General will proceed with caution when it comes to the appointment of Special Envoys, continue to strengthen communication and interaction with the Afghan authorities and strive to find the right solutions.

Afghanistan's history in the past two decades has proven, time and again, that externally imposed solutions will end only in failure. The real solution to the Afghan issue ultimately lies with the Afghan people themselves. In that process, the international community should effectively communicate and engage with the Afghan authorities to provide support and assistance in a constructive manner.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation abstained in the voting on resolution 2721 (2023), on the independent assessment report on Afghanistan (see S/2023/856). We are grateful to the United Arab Emirates and Japan, as co-penholders on the Afghan file, for their efforts in preparing the resolution. We greatly appreciate the personal contribution of the entire United Arab Emirates team to promoting a comprehensive approach to Afghanistan, which is laid down in the assessment report drafted by the Special Coordinator, Mr. Feridun Sinirlioğlu. As we have repeatedly stated, many of the ideas contained in it resonate with the general approaches of regional partners to resolving the situation in Afghanistan. The imperative remains ensuring sustainable peace and security in the country, because that is the key to stability in the region and beyond.

We share the authors' desire to change the status quo and move the international community towards the increasing of pragmatic cooperation with the de facto authorities, which would make it possible to provide broad support in eliminating the negative consequences of military intervention, restore sustainable support for

the country's development and prosperity and facilitate international reintegration. We are pleased that the text contains provisions on pressing issues, including the elimination of terrorist and drug threats, the provision of humanitarian assistance, respect for human rights and the importance of creating an architecture of cooperation in order to make political and humanitarian activities and action in the field more coherent, as well as a substantive road map.

We still believe that there is a need for patient and broad discussions of the recommendations, including consultations with the de facto authorities. It is important to carry out a sober assessment of the situation on the ground, taking into account the reaction of the Taliban itself. We have been talking about that from the very beginning, and progress on the Afghan file will depend on it. Attempts to impose on Afghanistan development paths and to force it to sing to someone else's tune, including under the auspices of the United Nations, are counterproductive and unlikely to foster results. The history of the country includes many sad examples of such efforts.

In that regard, we proceed from the assumption that the Secretary-General will consult with the de facto authorities when appointing the Special Envoy and will take into account the views of all Council members. That is a fundamental condition on which we have insisted from the very beginning. We would like to be absolutely clear: we will not support his decision without agreement from the de facto authorities. We firmly believe that only a coherent and patient dialogue with the de facto authorities and the rejection by some Western donors of the usual rhetoric and manipulation of humanitarian aid can move the solution to the Afghan problem out of the deadlock. Russia, for its part, will continue to provide all the necessary support for the implementation of that task and cooperate with all partners who pursue the same goals.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): France is convinced of the usefulness of a unified strategy in Afghanistan. In that regard, the independent assessment led by Special Coordinator Sinirlioğlu (see S/2023/856) provides a useful input for the discussions to be held among the stakeholders. That is why France voted today in favour of resolution 2721 (2023), submitted by the United Arab Emirates and Japan, whom we thank. Through this resolution, France recognizes the importance of further structuring the international

community's political and humanitarian coordination in Afghanistan.

France will help to draw up a road map, making it possible to reconstitute an Afghanistan that respects its obligations within the international community. However, let us bear in mind that the demands set on the Taliban by Security Council resolution 2593 (2021) remain the unavoidable condition for the international community to engage with the Taliban. France condemns the systematic persecution of the Afghan people by the

Taliban. The segregation policy excludes them from life in their country, thereby hampering any chances of reconstruction. France will continue to follow the situation closely in order to ensure that the five demands, particularly the demand regarding respect for women's rights, continue to guide our work. The Security Council must also pay scrupulous attention to that and to the full implementation of resolution 2593 (2021) in all of its dimensions. Our credibility depends on it.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.