



Security Council

Seventy-second year

8147th meeting

Thursday, 21 December 2017, 10.30 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Bessho (Japan)

Members:

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| Bolivia (Plurinational State of) | Mr. Inchauste Jordán |
| China | Mr. Shen Bo |
| Egypt | Mr. Kandeel |
| Ethiopia | Mr. Woldegerima |
| France | Mrs. Gueguen |
| Italy | Mr. Biagini |
| Kazakhstan | Mr. Umarov |
| Russian Federation | Mr. Safronkov |
| Senegal | Mr. Seck |
| Sweden | Ms. Schoulgin Nyoni |
| Ukraine | Mr. Yelchenko |
| United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . | Mr. Allen |
| United States of America | Ms. Sison |
| Uruguay | Mr. Bermúdez Álvarez |

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2017/1056)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.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/2017/1056)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Canada, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; and Ms. Wazhma Frogh, founding member of the Women and Peace Studies Organization and member of Afghanistan's High Peace Council.

Mr. Fedotov and Ms. Frogh are joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Vienna and Kabul, respectively.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Her Excellency Ms. Joanne Adamson, Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/1056, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Yamamoto; Mr. Fedotov; Ambassador Kairat Umarov, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan, in his capacity as the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011); and Ms. Frogh.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Yamamoto: As this calendar year closes, we are still left to tackle the issue that concerns us most in Afghanistan: a convincing peace process to end the 40 years of conflict, which have left 39 per cent of the population under the poverty line, including 3.3 million in acute need of humanitarian aid.

One year ago in the Council, I called upon all Afghans to come together and find ways to build their own joint future. I also called upon each country of the region to help create an environment conducive to peace in Afghanistan and the region. We must use the upcoming winter months, when conflict levels tend to decrease, to advance on this issue before the cycle of violence is renewed next spring.

How can this be done? The Kabul Process meeting planned for 1 February offers an opportunity. At the meeting, the Government of Afghanistan is expected to present its strategic concept for reaching a political settlement with the armed opposition and seek the support of the international community. This chance must not be missed. The Government and the international partners must focus on how we can reduce the levels of violence next year. We must also seek commencement of a structured dialogue for peace. I once again call on the Taliban to express a clear willingness to begin negotiations towards a political settlement and to start the initial dialogue.

I welcome the increased consultations among the countries in the region about securing peace in Afghanistan. Countries in the region recognize that they have a common stake in the future of Afghanistan. Any regional consensus, however, must be built around a clear policy. Regional efforts for peace also need to be consolidated. That is why the Afghan Government's presentation to the Kabul Process conference is of such great importance.

Another crucial issue is the holding of parliamentary elections next year, followed by presidential elections in April 2019. The holding of timely, credible and accepted elections is indispensable to maintaining the constitutional order and trust in the representative system of government.

There has been, to be frank, insufficient progress on electoral preparations. The lack of progress, and intense criticism from electoral stakeholders, led the Independent Election Commission to vote

to remove its Chairman. The Commission needs to demonstrably advance on electoral preparations to regain its credibility.

On a positive note, on 6 December the Commission finally announced the modalities that it will use to conduct voter registration. If implemented as planned, the process will result for the first time in a single, complete voter register, as well as polling-station-based voter lists. This will significantly cut down on fraud by reducing the number of extra ballots that are distributed. The United Nations technical support team has been working closely with the Commission on the operational concept for voter registration and will assist the Commission in its implementation, though this is ultimately a process that must be owned and led by Afghan institutions. I should also like to underline security as a defining factor enabling credible and inclusive elections. The Afghan Government needs to have a thorough security plan for this democratic exercise.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) will continue its efforts to advance women's political participation. We recently convened 13 dialogues across the country in which women described in often poignant terms how their participation as voters and candidates was obstructed by corruption, conflict and conservative cultural norms. Based upon these experiences, women offered practical recommendations to bolster women's strong participation in the 2018 elections and beyond.

Despite an intense fighting season, recent efforts by the Afghan security forces to protect civilians have resulted in reductions in the number of civilian deaths and injuries caused by those forces during ground engagements. However, we remain concerned by the continued indiscriminate use of improvised explosive devices by anti-Government elements, as well as civilian casualties from air strikes by pro-Government forces. All in all, the number of civilian casualties remain at terribly high levels. I continue to receive disturbing reports of child recruitment by armed groups, mainly Da'esh and the Taliban. I urge the parties to immediately cease this unlawful practice.

Afghanistan's election to the Human Rights Council provides an opportunity for all national institutions, including the military, to deliver on public pledges to comply with its international legal obligations. As an initial step, I encourage the Government to ratify the

Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and to withdraw its reservations to the Convention.

We often overlook the impact of Afghanistan's economy on its society and the conflict. The significant reduction of the international military presence in 2014 led to a collapse in economic growth, from 10 per cent to minus 2 per cent. This year, Afghanistan is expected to record positive growth for the second year, but not enough to absorb the 400,000 young Afghans who annually seek to join the labour force. At the same time, the illicit economy is expanding, as demonstrated by the massive increase in opium production recorded by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in 2017. Narcotics trades are known to be a source of funds for insurgencies. We must pay more focused attention to those issues and reinforce our efforts.

If the vision of Afghan economic development is to succeed, the Afghan National Peace and Development Framework must be supported. The entire United Nations family is engaged in a continuing dialogue with the President on better aligning the work of the United Nations to support the Framework, providing value for money and demonstrating impact. The Government's goal is to reduce reliance on aid and secure its own tax base. That will require intense efforts to stimulate the private sector, reduce corruption and red tape, and build infrastructure that allows Afghanistan to benefit from its central geographic location. Once investment mechanisms and infrastructure are in place, Afghanistan's mineral wealth can be exploited. Achieving that goal is possible. The past year has seen important progress on infrastructure development, with an eye to connecting Afghanistan to Europe through the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus to the Arabian Sea.

Such developments demonstrate how Afghanistan's relationships with its neighbours present opportunities for prosperity. But there are also obstacles. I am particularly concerned about recent reports of increased military activities between Afghanistan and Pakistan. UNAMA has recorded some of the suffering caused by such activities on local residents, including civilian casualties, closures of education facilities and population displacement. I call on the Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan to find ways of collaborating more effectively to address that issue, which affects the populations of both countries.

The achievements in regional cooperation are encouraging, but the main dividends of regional

cooperation cannot be achieved until there is peace and stability in Afghanistan. I do not believe that this sequence can be reversed. In the coming months, there must be significant progress on election preparations, real attempts to reduce violence and a transition towards a credible peace process. Because of the cyclical nature of the conflict, opportunities that are missed in the next three months will, in all likelihood, be missed for the next year.

Before closing my remarks, we request members of the Council to lend their political and financial support to the implementation of the humanitarian response plan, which addresses 3.3 million people who are in need of such assistance.

We see the need to focus on seeking peace. The United Nations is ready to do whatever it can, from raising the importance of the issue, as I have tried to do today, to using good offices for mediation, should that be requested. I truly hope that empathy for the ongoing suffering of millions of Afghans will move us all to make the efforts necessary to achieve peace and realize the important opportunities that lie beyond a much-needed peace agreement.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Fedotov.

Mr. Fedotov: Like my friend and colleague, Mr. Yamamoto, I addressed the Council on Afghanistan a year ago (see S/PV.7844). At that debate, I reported that the *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016* of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) showed a worrying reversal in efforts to counter the problem of illicit drugs and highlighted the need to address that destructive threat.

Today, one year later, the situation has become much worse. Our *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017* shows unprecedented highs in opium poppy cultivation and production. Estimated production is up by almost 90 per cent to 9,000 metric tons. The area under poppy cultivation has risen to 328,000 hectares. Those are absolute records in the entire history of Afghanistan. Let us make no mistake — we are facing a genuine crisis and our response must be urgent, swift and decisive.

The expected surge in high-quality, low-cost heroin may have a number of negative consequences for Afghanistan, its neighbours and many other transit or destination countries. Increased opiate consumption

and related harms may be expected in many parts of the world. Afghanistan and the international community have struggled for many years to address the formidable challenges posed by drugs and the related threats of organized crime, terrorism and corruption. Recent analysis confirms the interregional links between organized crime and terrorist groups that exploit drug trafficking.

At the 2016 Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, partners of Afghanistan endorsed the ambitious reform agenda presented by the Afghan Government and pledged continued political and financial funding to support the country on its path towards stability and development. Nevertheless, we must recognize that in recent years attention has progressively shifted away from the threats posed by drugs. We must reverse that trend or risk the further expansion and destabilizing influence of non-State actors, organized criminal groups and violent terrorists. What priority steps need to be taken?

First and foremost, comprehensive counter-narcotics programmes that mainstream drugs in national development agendas are essential. That includes promoting alternative development in order to create new jobs, as well as access to education, financial services and markets for farmers and their families.

Secondly, in order to ensure effective operational responses to reduce supply, we must focus on all aspects of counter-narcotics capacity-building in Afghanistan, including support for intelligence-led investigations, controlled delivery, eradication programmes, the dismantling of opium processing labs, integrated border management, financial intelligence units and law enforcement, as well as prosecutorial capacities, in order to disrupt criminal networks.

Thirdly, we need to further strengthen regional and international cooperation in order to stop precursor chemicals from being diverted and trafficked into Afghanistan for the purpose of manufacturing heroin.

Fourthly, we must continue to build the interdiction capacities of key countries along trafficking routes with an eye to enhancing long-term effectiveness, rather than focusing on immediate seizures.

Fifthly, we need to intercept illicit financial flows and support effective prosecution, as well as asset confiscation and asset recovery.

Finally, prevention and treatment responses must be urgently scaled up, most of all in Afghanistan, which continues to struggle with the severe health consequences of opiate misuse.

UNODC is working with Afghanistan, neighbouring countries and the wider region to promote the integrated responses needed, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and the recommendations of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem. We are currently seeking to step up regional and interregional action to counter the increases in opium cultivation and production and respond to related threats of crime, terrorism and corruption. That includes comprehensive and inclusive support to implement the Afghan National Drug Action Plan 2015-2019, with Afghanistan in the lead.

But we cannot succeed without the engagement and renewed commitment, including financial commitments, of Member States. The international community cannot afford to do less. I thank the Council for the attention that it has given to this urgent problem. As always, UNODC stands ready to support the Council.

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

I now give the floor to Ambassador Umarov.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to brief the Council on the work of the Committee pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) pertaining to Afghanistan and the Taliban. I am also thankful to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for their support of the work of the 1988 Sanctions Committee.

The 1988 Committee's chief aim is to deter the Taliban and associates through the use of tools, such as a global assets freeze, global travel ban and global arms embargo. At the same time, the 1988 sanctions regime is intended to support the peace and reconciliation process, including through the use of the delisting process and the process of granting exemptions to enable listed persons to engage in peace and reconciliation negotiations and other approved activities. The existence of the 1988 sanctions regime matters to the Taliban. Removal from what the Taliban call the United Nations blacklist is consistently in the top three demands of the group.

In 2017, the 1988 Committee has delisted one reportedly deceased individual at the request of the

Afghan Government. No additional individuals or entities have been delisted this year, nor have any individuals or entities been added to the 1988 sanctions list. The Committee has reason to be optimistic in the coming months, as there are indications that the Afghan Government and other members may request the delisting of several individuals to further facilitate the peace and reconciliation efforts. In that context, the delisting of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar earlier this year by the Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida, and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities, as requested by the Afghanistan Government, has had a positive impact on the peace and reconciliation process. Since the delisting, Mr. Hekmatyar has been participating in the political process in Afghanistan, strengthening the prospects for reconciliation of other individuals in the future.

Ever since the death of the previous Taliban leader, Mullah Mansour, in 2016, the leadership ranks of the Taliban have continued to face internal friction, primarily between the pro-Mansour faction and the new leader Haibatullah Akhundzada, who is not yet listed. The Monitoring Team's latest report (see S/2017/409), submitted to the Committee in May, noted that the reasons for dissent are primarily the question of Haibatullah Akhundzada's ability to lead militarily and over the distribution of finance, in particular funds formerly controlled by Mullah Mansour.

But those internal dissensions have not affected the Taliban's military capabilities. As a result, 2017 has also been a difficult year in terms of security challenges. As in previous years, the Taliban have retained the ability to conduct attacks against Afghan forces, the Afghan people and the international presence in Afghanistan, in spite of the sanctions measures. Indeed, the Monitoring Team's report predicted a very challenging fighting season, with the Taliban potentially threatening several provincial capitals, both in the north and the south of the country. That has been borne out since then, indicating that despite considerable losses, the fighting strength of the Taliban has not diminished. Those clashes continue to be funded mainly by the narcotics economy and the illegal extraction of natural resources. The situation is also complicated by the presence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and foreign terrorist fighters in Afghanistan.

However, it is important to note that in spite of initial losses to the Taliban, Afghan Government forces have

managed to maintain control over provinces and district headquarters that initially came under heavy attack by the Taliban. That indicates that the Government's fighting capacity is improving, in no small measure due to the consistent support and assistance it has received from the international presence in Afghanistan.

While there are many structures and frameworks in place for the implementation of the 1988 sanctions regime, implementation is dependent not only on internal actors, but also on regional and international actors. The Committee would therefore like to encourage Member States to play a more active role in providing information that would help to keep the sanctions list as up-to-date as possible.

A worrying development has been the large-scale increase in opium production in Afghanistan, which continues to fuel the Taliban's activities. The *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017*, published in November by the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, highlighted an increase of 87 per cent in opium production, rising to 9,000 tons from its 2016 level of 4,800 tons. That clearly needs to be addressed, as Taliban involvement in illegal opium production and trade may have provided the group with an estimated \$400 million in annual income in 2016. Cutting off that financial stream would have a significant impact on the Taliban's ability to resource its offensive against the Government of Afghanistan.

The overall effectiveness of the 1988 sanctions measures also relies on close coordination with the Government of Afghanistan and region. One of the reasons why I travelled to Afghanistan in October as Chair of the 1988 and 1267 sanctions committees was to engage directly with interlocutors in the Afghan Government. I was pleased with the level of engagement the delegation received while in Kabul, including meetings with President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah and other senior Government officials. The meetings in Kabul showed that there is potential for greater use of the 1988 sanctions regime to deter the Taliban and support the peace process. Towards that end, I was briefed on the Government's efforts to identify Taliban members for potential delisting in the coming months in order to strengthen the peace and reconciliation efforts.

At the same time, renewed efforts are also needed to list individuals and entities associated with the Taliban who are not yet on the sanctions list but who

carry out activities harmful to the peace and security of Afghanistan. The legal frameworks are in place to implement the sanctions measures, but structures are effective only against listed individuals who are identifiable. While there are many associates of the Taliban currently not on the list, some listed individuals lack sufficient identifiers that would enable the countermeasures to function more effectively. Those measures are effective not only within Afghanistan, but also and particularly against cross-border flows of money, narcotics, arms and foreign terrorist fighters. Those are challenges that extend to the wider region, and the sanctions regime can support the region in meeting those challenges.

The Committee is keen to assist the Government of Afghanistan in making wider use of the tools offered by the 1988 sanctions regime. In that respect, the Committee awaits the Government's proposals regarding the sanctions list updates. The Committee once again urges all Member States to assist in the sincere implementation of the sanctions measures to enhance its effectiveness. The Committee looks forward to continued close engagement with UNAMA, Afghanistan and regional States under the chairmanship of Kazakhstan in 2018.

The President: I thank Ambassador Umarov for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Frogg.

Ms. Frogg: I would like to thank you, Sir, the Japanese Ambassador and President of Security Council this month, for inviting me to participate in this meeting. I would like to congratulate the members of the Security Council on standing for peace and justice around the world. The people of my country have great hopes of this important institution on global justice.

In light of the ongoing armed conflict and sustained violence against civilians, especially Afghan women, it is particularly significant for me to be here. I have been advocating for women's participation in peace and security processes for the past 20 years, having previously worked for gender and human rights at the Ministry of Interior and Defence. I am currently one of the 12 women at the 70-member Afghanistan High Peace Council, but I am speaking as a civil society activist today.

The National Unity Government has appointed a number of Afghan women to leadership and management

positions in the Cabinet and as governors, judges and prosecutors, and has increased efforts to increase the number of women in the police and army. I would like to recognize the efforts of Afghanistan's First Lady in standing in solidarity with Afghan women.

Many Afghans, and I myself, see Afghanistan moving in the right direction. However, there are major concerns, especially about the convening of parliamentary and presidential elections on time. Afghans want an elected Government and elected members of Parliament and provincial and district councils, as those are important elements of checks and balance for effective governance.

While every Afghan is asking for democracy and justice, the impact of local armed groups, Taliban, affiliates of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) and some political figures have hampered the process for transitional justice and civil liberties for Afghanistan. We are still considered to be one of the most dangerous countries for media freedom and for journalists, and have not seen due processes to prosecute those elements that put the life of Afghan men and women journalists at risk.

Despite national and international commitments to women's empowerment in Afghanistan, only one woman in the Government of Afghanistan is female — the Minister of Women's Affairs — while the Afghan Parliament failed to elect another strong woman as the Minister of Mines and Petroleum. Also, there is a small number of female Deputy Ministers and Director Generals. It is a question not of lack of capacity, but of lack of political will.

In 2017, the Afghanistan Human Rights Commission reported more than 5,000 cases of severe violence against women in different parts of the country, while scores of such incidents go unregistered and unheard in areas where the Government and media have no access. Only one in three women can read and write. The Taliban and now the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) affiliates are targeting women and children indiscriminately to create fear and control in Afghan communities. Just last week, a woman was shot dead in public by the Taliban in Sar-e Pol, a northern province, her brother having been accused of having links to the Government. The ISIS-affiliated militants in Jowzjan province, which is also in the north, have reportedly taken away more than 300 children from their families to unknown training camps, and reports

of the provincial council members indicate that these children — as young as six or seven — are being taught how to become suicide bombers.

This year, we had more than 10 attacks on Shia mosques in Kabul and other provinces that killed and injured so many men, women and children. All of that happens while the pro-Government armed militant groups are still complicit in rape, abduction, forced marriages and the extortion of women in families in so many parts of the country. The political distance is widening between the centre and the provinces.

Afghanistan's national action plan on women, peace and security, in line with resolution 1325 (2000), was adopted in 2015 and was internationally celebrated at that time. It is of great importance and relevance to the lives of Afghan women, and yet it has not been operationalized at the national and provincial levels. The ongoing war is not being fought on the borders. It is being fought in our communities, in our markets and in our mosques. The Taliban assert their presence in our communities and the first attacks are against women. We are seeing our previous achievements relating to women erode. However, Afghan women do not have a role in decisions on how to combat insurgencies at the national or local level.

The changing nature of conflict is evident in Afghanistan — from an insurgency towards the brutal killing of civilians and women, in particular, to the radicalization of young men with violent extremist ideologies. And this continues at very local levels, where mothers and women can play a big role. Weak governance, the abuse of police and armed forces in communities, the lack of inclusion in local and national processes and the impact of young boys are key to the recruitment processes of the insurgents. The younger generation does not have a place for meaningful participation in political and Government structures, and the lack of jobs and justice is driving thousands of our youth to militancy and insurgency.

My organization has been documenting and reporting on the impact of armed conflict on women in communities. We received reports in August that around 47 young women and girls between the ages of 11 and 12 had been taken away by a group of ISIS affiliates in the north to an unknown area. The families and provincial Governments continue to deny this disappearance because it would bring dishonour on

the families and call into question the ability of the Government to protect its civilians.

As ISIS affiliates are emerging in different parts of the country, their brutality against women and girls has shocked us all. There are reports that last week, French and Algerian fighters had arrived in the north of the country to support the ISIS affiliates. That adds to the already identified foreign fighters from Pakistan, Chechnya and many Central Asian republics that are fighting alongside the Taliban and ISIS.

On the peace and security sector reform, while a negotiated settlement is the only solution for the end of ongoing armed conflict with the Taliban, the peace process needs to engage all Afghans from all walks of life and social groups to ensure the sustainability of the results. If insurgency is incentivized, many will resort to violence to get the same incentives. While the Afghanistan High Peace Council is mandated to facilitate a national level peace process, the Council itself is sidelined from the major political decisions that are taken at the Government leadership levels. Therefore, public trust in the High Peace Council has not yet strengthened and the organization's relevance and importance is still being challenged. That was revealed by communities during consultations in 24 provinces, carried out by the High Peace Council.

The security sector reform has started in the past few months within the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defence. We are seeing tangible results. The bad news is that the participation of women is still not the priority of reform. There are no women in the leadership and management positions of these institutions, when so many young women are risking their lives for these institutions as police officers and within the army. There is no systematic institutional support yet. We women do not have a seat at the Government's National Security Council, where most of the political and security decisions are made.

My recommendations follow. As the country is moving towards reforms and improving institutional capacities, the role and contributions of women should not be ignored. The national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000), if implemented properly and adequately, will bring women into national peace processes and help boost trust in the Government. Women, children and the elderly in rural areas suffer from the ongoing violence perhaps even more than men in Afghanistan, yet women and civil society are excluded from the peace

and security processes, especially when negotiating about the political peace being envisioned by the leadership of the Government. Lasting peace can be achieved only if women sit at the negotiation table with men so that communities can become the guardians of such an agreement. Women should be able to monitor the impact of settlements on communities.

Civil society groups must be better supported and resourced. The number of women's organizations closing is alarming, given that it these organizations are the ones that are raising the voices of Afghan women and that need funding and support to continue functioning. We call on the international community and members of the Security Council to ensure that specific funding is allocated for women organizations as part of the empowerment agenda and the implementation of the national action plan. Women's engagement in the peace and security sector is a priority for all of us, and the Security Council should call on the Afghan Government and its international partners to work alongside women's organizations to develop clear plans on how to increase the number of women and leadership in the management of the security sector and how to ensure a safe and enabling environment for women in the police and army.

Lastly, we call on the Security Council to ensure that the Afghan Government and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan develop, in consultation with the female members of the High Peace Council, clear procedures to engage and include Afghan women in the peace negotiations with the Taliban and other parties to the conflict at every stage in order to ensure meaningful participation. We look forward to our presence at the Kabul process and meaningful participation at other international and regional platforms from time to time.

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

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Sir, for convening today's debate on the situation in Afghanistan. We are also grateful to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report, as well as to my good friend, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his comprehensive briefing. We also thank United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Executive Director

Yury Fedotov and Ms. Wazhma Frogh for joining us here today.

As always, these debates provide an opportunity to take stock of the situation in Afghanistan, progress in related fields and challenges that remain. But above all, it provides a clear reminder of the symbiotic link between peace and stability in Afghanistan and security in the global arena. We are pleased with the new counter-terrorism focus on condition-based support to Afghanistan and addressing regional terrorist safe havens. That has brought new momentum and, more broadly, an opportunity for key regional and international partners to combat terrorism more decisively.

As we speak, the so-called fighting season of the Taliban and other terrorist groups has nearly ended. Terrorists have failed to make any notable gains on the ground and have suffered heavy losses in terms of manpower and morale. Pressured militarily, they have desperately resorted to soft-target attacks in urban areas. Our security forces have proven their effectiveness in countering terrorist elements in independently conducted operations. We continue to clear territory in different parts of Afghanistan from the presence of the Taliban, Da'esh and other terrorist groups.

As of late, a significant number of senior Taliban and Da'esh figures have been eliminated and captured, including financiers, planners and recruiters, while scores of attacks have been prevented and subverted. Alongside those gains, we are now working to double the size of our special forces and triple the size of our airforce, with support from our international partners.

Consolidating our gains and achieving sustainable peace requires a revamped diplomatic effort at the regional and global levels and an inclusive process of democratization domestically, leading our country in the right direction. To accomplish these tasks, there is a growing need to increase dialogue among regional and global Powers, leading to enhanced regional cooperation in developing mechanisms of verification and coordination to eliminate threats arising from terrorism and violent extremists.

In that context, Afghanistan welcomes recent expressions of readiness on the part of President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation to cooperate with the United States in Afghanistan in the areas of counter-terrorism and narcotics. We have always deemed such cooperation to provide win-win

opportunities to overcome shared challenges and achieve common gains. We hope that this development will help generate a new spirit of cooperation among all regional countries, free from rivalry and competing interests. It is our earnest hope that Afghanistan will be seen by all partner countries outside the prism of regional and international tensions. Let me assure the Council of Afghanistan's sincere intent to be a platform of cordiality and fellowship for all.

Substantial improvements in the context of Afghanistan-Pakistan bilateral relations and cooperation remain an issue of crucial importance. Recent collaborative measures, including the visit of a senior military delegation to Pakistan and the visit of a Pakistani parliamentary delegation to Kabul are noteworthy developments. We are awaiting positive outcomes on various outstanding issues, including violations across the Durand Line, which is currently a key hindrance to improving relations between our two countries. Under the pretext of receiving fire from our side, Pakistan's violations across the Durand Line, including indiscriminate artillery shelling, have continued unabated throughout 2017, resulting in the loss of innocent lives and the destruction of villages. Our proposal for engagement and operational coordination towards addressing those concerns has not yet seen any response.

At the same time, Afghanistan has the will and capacity to defend its territory and our patience should not be tested. We believe that confidence-building measures can be successful only when violations of that nature come to a complete halt. In a similar vein, we are also in communication on the imperative of addressing terrorists' regional safe havens, and hope to see positive developments on that front soon. We look forward to the upcoming trilateral meeting in Beijing next week between the Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan, Pakistan and China.

In the area of peace efforts, we remain focused on providing a peaceful, dignified and fulfilling life to all Afghans, free of conflict and insecurity. The Kabul process, now fully operational, provides an overarching framework to harmonize international and regional efforts to help advance peace efforts. We look forward to the next meeting of the process in February, at which we will outline our renewed strategy to counter terrorism and extremism and promote peace. That will be an opportune moment for the Taliban to change course, denounce violence and join the peace process.

Aside from regional dynamics and peace efforts, we know that sustaining and consolidating past achievements requires steady progress in advancing our reform agenda and in strengthening political consensus and national unity. To that end, the comprehensive dialogue under way is geared towards ensuring the credibility and transparency of future elections and achieving common understanding on a number of other pressing national issues, all of which bear crucial importance for long-term stability in Afghanistan. Success in that endeavour will require collective efforts on the part of the Afghan Government and the international community.

In recent times, we have seen a more proactive and productive engagement at the highest level between the United Nations and Afghanistan. We welcome the Security Council's Arria Formula meeting held in November, held under the theme "Partners for Afghanistan: linking security, development and peace in the Central Asian region", and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate's joint meeting with donor countries and Afghanistan, which underscored enhanced development and counter-terrorism measures.

In the broader context of the United Nations engagement in Afghanistan, the one United Nations vision is steadily progressing, in collaboration with the United Nations team on the ground. An adjusted United Nations role will go a long way towards ensuring greater coordination, coherence and efficiency among relevant United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, in accordance with the reform agenda of our Government and that of the Secretary-General.

Moreover, the adoption in November of General Assembly resolution 72/10, on Afghanistan, once again symbolized the international community's strong consensus on and support for stability and prosperity in my country. Further, our accomplishment in the Human Rights Council election and the successful adoption of two Afghan-initiated resolutions countering the threat posed by improvised explosive devices, as well as the International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism, show our active engagement and contribution at the global platform of the United Nations.

In order to uphold the General Assembly's resolution on Afghanistan in letter and spirit, its effective implementation is imperative. In the area of security and counter-terrorism, the implementation of

the sanctions regimes under resolutions 1988 (2011) and 1989 (2011) must improve if it is to succeed in helping turn the tide against terrorism. Those sanction regimes were put in place to restrict the operational capacity freedom of movement of terrorists, as well as the flow of material resources in the region, including illicit arms and cash, which end up providing oxygen for terror to thrive.

Yet, experience has shown that the sanction regimes are lax at best and struggle to achieve the results for which they were mandated. We hope that the necessary adjustments on the part of relevant members of the Security Council are made to enforce sanctions against terrorists and extremists. Among the outstanding issues to be addressed, the assets of former and current Taliban leaders must be frozen so that they do not fund the death and destruction of innocent civilians.

Furthermore, the listing and delisting of terrorist groups and associated elements must be based on existing evidence and proper technical appraisal, shielded from politicization and manipulation by certain States. We are looking forward to increasing our engagement with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (OCT). A relationship of mutual trust between OCT and the Government of Afghanistan will be pivotal as we strengthen our reliable partnership to eliminate terrorism in all its forms.

This year has seen major progress in the steady implementation of mega-regional projects that have visualized Afghanistan as a land bridge, business hub and trade and transit roundabout between Central Asia, South Asia, the Far East and the Middle East. The Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan and the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process have progressed steadily and helped elevate regional economic cooperation and sociocultural exchanges to new levels.

Recently, we have signed bilateral and other agreements with various countries of the region, including Turkmenistan, India and Uzbekistan, to scale up the level of trade, transit and other means of cooperation for mutual benefit. The materialization of multiple mega-regional projects demonstrates that, despite the continuous attempts of some to turn our location into a destabilizing force for the region and the world, terror cannot deter the course of development and prosperity of our country and the region.

In the area of human rights, we continue to make strides in civilian protection and the promotion of human rights, despite the effects of conflict. In this regard, we welcome UNAMA's second annual civil-military dialogue on the protection of civilians in Kabul. We are gravely concerned about the increasing attacks on mosques and worshippers. To combat this menace, which is trying to sow discord among our population, we have introduced measures to protect places of worship at risk. Furthermore, the President has endorsed an additional annex to the presidential decree on the prohibition of torture, thereby providing a legal avenue to victims of torture for redress. These developments are reflective of our resolve and commitment to upholding the rule of law for civilian protection and the promotion of equal rights for all in a free society.

Consistent with resolution 1325 (2000), the role of Afghan women is becoming more prominent in the peace process. The ongoing cycle of violence has exacerbated conditions for internally displaced persons (IDPs). In coordination with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the voluntary repatriation and other programmes are providing much needed assistance to returning refugees and IDPs. Additionally, we are working to create economic opportunities and to strengthen security, which would provide incentives for people to remain in the country and contribute to the rebuilding of their nation.

On the counter-narcotics front, we are working in close cooperation with UNODC to implement a national drug action that aligns law enforcement, education and public health in the light of existing challenges. We need a more sustained and integrated approach to better reduce the illicit production and trafficking of narcotics and organized crime, including money-laundering, corruption and the financing of terrorism. In this regard, we remain committed to expanding our cooperation with our allies on related areas. In the same vein, the recent increase in production should be seen in the context of the symbiotic link between the narcotic drug industry and the problem of terrorism and violence. We also reaffirm the need for a holistic approach to the drug problem that focuses on all facets, including production, trafficking and consumption, on the basis of the principle of shared responsibility.

Finally, as we approach the new year, let us reaffirm our resolve to consolidate the many achievements that have been made so far, while bearing in mind

that collective action within the framework of a more collaborative effort among all stakeholders, particularly countries in our region and beyond, provides the surest guarantee for our joint success. Let us therefore seize the opportunity before us for the benefit of peace and security, not just in Afghanistan, but rather for the stability of all our societies.

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

I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto; the Director-General of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Mr. Yury Fedotov; Ambassador Kairat Umarov, Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011); and Ms. Wazhma Frogh, founding member of Women and Peace Studies Organization and member of Afghanistan's High Peace Council, for their comprehensive briefings.

As the lead country of the Afghanistan file, Japan has been seeking a broad range of opinions from Member States, international organizations and civil society. I appreciate our colleagues, in particular Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, for supporting our work in the Council and useful inputs throughout 2017. During our term, we have tried to facilitate the Council's discussion on Afghanistan, taking into account the dynamic and changing situation on the ground. The Council successfully streamlined the text of resolution 2344 (2017) on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in March in order to crystallize the Mission's core mandate and critical issues we should address.

The strategic review of the Secretary-General in August provided the Council with important findings. It is regrettable that we were not able to have an opportunity to deeply discuss the way to incorporate those findings into the next mandate, but Japan believes that the next penholder and Council members will skilfully accomplish this task. The Council's mission to Afghanistan, which is scheduled in January, will give it first-hand information and fresh input conducive for upcoming discussions towards the next mandate renewal. We will follow these discussions with great interest after we have left the Council.

One of the most important findings of the strategic review is that Afghanistan is not yet in a post-conflict situation where sufficient stability exists to focus on institution-building and development-oriented

activities. This position obviously coincides with well-used concepts, such as “self-reliance” and “Afghan-led and Afghan-owned”. We have repeatedly expressed our full commitment to continuing our support for Afghanistan so that Afghanistan will achieve self-reliance to the point where donors no longer need to announce multi-year pledges.

It was noteworthy that Special Representative Yamamoto used the phrase “Afghan-led and Afghan-owned” in the context not only of the peace process, but also of the electoral preparations. Japan will extend the necessary support for such Afghan-led and Afghan-owned elections. Meanwhile, on the timing, we strongly call on the Government of Afghanistan to hold parliamentary and district council elections in 2018.

Sadly, the briefing by Special Representative Yamamoto today again revealed the harsh and volatile security situations in Afghanistan. In the short term, the tireless efforts of the Afghan security forces to push back the Taliban and conduct anti-terrorism operations are crucial, but in the long run only genuine progress on an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process will be able to provide significant security improvements.

Japan is aware of UNAMA’s potential role in the peace process. However, we do not see unity among regional stakeholders on this issue and are worried that the lack of common understanding may exacerbate the environment for the Afghan Government in advancing the peace process. Therefore, Japan hopes that the second round of the Kabul process in February next year will yield tangible steps and clarify the role of UNAMA in the peace process.

Today’s briefing by the Director-General of UNODC was alarming. Opium poppy cultivation and illicit trafficking of opiates fuel instability and violent extremism. Japan has been cooperating with the UNODC and some Member States on counter-narcotics and will continue such efforts. We are providing support to allow Afghans to fight poverty not with poppies but with the revival of their legitimate agricultural sector. We believe that Afghanistan’s expanded agricultural productivity allows it to export products to neighbouring countries, thereby strengthening regional cooperation.

Afghanistan possesses the potential for self-reliance. The Council and the international community are committed to extending support for Afghanistan in its efforts to move towards peace and stability and to undertake institution-building and development. We

should strive to see that commitment implemented and help provide for a better future for Afghanistan and its people.

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

Mr. Biagini (Italy): At the outset, I would like to thank the Japanese presidency for organizing this meeting and all of today’s briefers for their comprehensive presentations.

Italy aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

I would like to focus on two key areas related to the future of Afghanistan. The first is peace and reconciliation and the second is the upcoming electoral deadlines, especially the parliamentary elections scheduled for 2018.

Today more than ever, reconciliation between the Government and the Taliban insurgency represents the way to put an end to the Afghan conflict and ensure sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan. It will therefore be essential to make every effort to create the conditions for peace, while remaining cognizant of the complexities involved in achieving that objective. We are all aware of the difficulties of the current situation in Afghan, with high levels of violence and mounting civilian casualties. It is also clear that until now, insurgent groups have shown no willingness to negotiate with the Government. However, we have also noted positive trends over the past two years in terms of increasing ambitions for peace and reconciliation. Intensified diplomatic activity in that regard — first and foremost through the launch of the Kabul process, but also through the revitalization of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group — has shown that interest in the subject has intensified, along with a common understanding that achieving peace and reconciliation is a realistic goal, despite the many obstacles that remain.

Greater ambitiousness can create the momentum needed to pave the way for peace in Afghanistan, especially when combined with the involvement of a broader spectrum of international stakeholders, particularly countries of the region. In our view, if we are to advance the prospects for peace and reconciliation, it will be essential to enable two elements to coalesce — the intrinsically domestic nature of the process, which must be Afghan-led and -owned, and genuine support for the peace process from partner countries, especially

as reflected in the desire and interest of the countries of the region and the broader region generally to see Afghanistan stabilized. That will also require effective and tangible collaboration in the fight against terrorist groups and their activities, which constitute one of the main obstacles to peace. In that context, the role played by the countries of the region is key, and we hope that that partnership can live up to its potential. The strategy outlined by the Afghan Government with the launching of the Kabul process — which we fully support — must be complemented on the domestic front by a fully inclusive outreach to all components of Afghan society, ensuring the active participation of women and harnessing the full potential of institutions such as the High Peace Council.

That will help to advance a peace process that ensures respect for the Constitution and the rights of all Afghan citizens without distinction, and that will also help to protect the economic and social progress made over the past 16 years. We therefore hope that the upcoming second meeting of the Kabul process, due to take place in February, will result in tangible progress in the peace and reconciliation process, with the active support of all its Afghan partners.

Turning to my second point, next year's parliamentary elections are drawing closer. They represent a major opportunity for strengthening the legitimacy of Afghan institutions. The Afghan people have very high expectations in that regard, and so does the donor community. Ensuring transparent, inclusive and credible elections is therefore crucial. To that end, the relevant Afghan institutions must be able to urgently resolve all outstanding issues in the area of electoral reform, avoiding any further delays in promoting the broadest possible consensus within Afghan political parties and society as a whole. That also entails ensuring the tangible implementation of the National Unity Government's wider reform agenda, of which electoral reform is a key component. The continued fight against corruption and efforts to promote human rights, especially the rights of women, need a particular injection of a sense of urgency.

In conclusion, I would like to affirm Italy's full support and friendship to the Afghan Government and its people in the pursuit of peace, stability and development. First and foremost in that effort is our active participation in the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission, our development cooperation assistance and our support for all diplomatic initiatives that can

make a positive contribution to the resumption of the peace process.

Lastly, I would like to underline the key role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in the framework of the partnership between Afghanistan and the international community, and to recognize the tireless efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and his staff, who operate in very challenging conditions.

Mr. Shen Bo (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks you, Mr. President, for convening this debate on Afghanistan. I would also like to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and Ambassador Umarov, Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), for their briefings. I welcome the presence in the Council today of Ambassador Saikal of Afghanistan. China also listened attentively to Ms. Frogh's briefing.

Afghanistan is facing multiple challenges in critical economic and social sectors. China appreciates the fact that the Afghan Government has made a number of efforts to maintain security and stability in the country, promote its national reconciliation and advance economic development. We value the important role of neighbouring and regional countries in resolving the Afghan issue, and hope that the international community will continue to provide support and assistance to Afghanistan.

First, the international community should continue to support the capacity-building of the security forces in the country, as well as security-sector reform, with a view to combating the threats of terrorism, transnational crime and drug trafficking. The international community should step up its cooperation in combating terrorism and support the efforts of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and other regional actors in playing an active role.

Secondly, promoting national reconciliation is fundamental to settling the Afghanistan issue. All Afghan parties should prioritize the country's long-term interests and the well-being of its people by actively participating in the reconciliation process. The international community should promote the realization of broad and inclusive political reconciliation that is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned, and should also engage in with the relevant parties in Afghanistan with a

view to launching peace talks as soon as possible. We welcome the assistance provided by regional countries and relevant mechanisms in that regard.

Thirdly, enhancing the capacity of the Government is an important element in ensuring Afghanistan's development. China welcomes its efforts in the area of anti-corruption reform. The political parties in Afghanistan should work for greater unity and seek to resolve their differences through dialogue and consultations. The international community should fully respect the Afghan people's right to choose their political system and their own path to development independently while providing assistance to the Government targeted to improving governance on the basis of their own national development strategy and concrete needs.

Fourthly, the international community should honour its commitment to assisting Afghanistan and supporting its economic and social development. With the advantages represented by its geographical location and natural resources, there is great potential for Afghanistan's participation in regional economic cooperation. The relevant resolutions of the Security Council and General Assembly highlight the fact that parties should work to build a community of common destiny for humankind, in the spirit of win-win cooperation, and promote economic development through the One Belt One Road and other initiatives.

China applauds the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and hopes that it will continue to respect Afghanistan's sovereignty and ownership of its future, while continuing to promote the peace and reconciliation process and the economic development of the country. China has always played a constructive role in the Afghan peace and reconciliation process and in regional peace and stability. In June, Mr. Wang Yi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, visited Afghanistan and Pakistan and encouraged all three countries to establish a trilateral dialogue mechanism between their Foreign Ministers. The first round of the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan trilateral Foreign Ministers' dialogue will be held in Beijing on 26 December. Foreign Minister Wang Yi will be attending the event, which is the first dialogue to be held between the three Foreign Ministers. We hope that the meeting will enable them to build trust and reach a consensus that will help to improve the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The aim is also to promote cooperation between all three countries

so that they can work together to achieve peace, stability and development in the region. Together with the international community, we are ready to work tirelessly to achieve peace, stability and development in Afghanistan as soon as possible.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I thank Special Representative Yamamoto and other briefers for their important contributions.

While we align ourselves with the statement to be delivered later by the observer of the European Union, I would also like to make some observations in my national capacity.

We take positive note of the Afghan National Unity Government's recent accomplishments in addressing the country's challenges.

First, the Government has prioritized the Afghan-led and -owned national peace and reconciliation efforts involving regional stakeholders. We regard the Kabul process, launched this June under the initiative of President Ghani, as a unique forum for Afghanistan, its neighbours and the international community to discuss ways for achieving peace in this country.

Secondly, the Government has taken concrete measures to move forward the national reform agenda through the National Peace and Development Framework. We stress the importance of focusing particularly on promoting good governance, anti-corruption measures and security-sector reform. The Government's efforts to create an environment conducive to holding future parliamentary and presidential elections, by strengthening electoral institutions and improving the relevant legislation, are encouraging.

Thirdly, the Government is determined to take effective measures to fulfil its obligations under international human rights law in connection with its election to the United Nations Human Rights Council. We congratulate Afghanistan on its achievement and are ready to work side by side with their delegation to advance common objectives.

Fourthly, the Government is devoting considerable efforts to implementing the national action plan on women, peace and security throughout Afghanistan, which is crucial to creating a stable future for the country by eradicating gender-based violence and elevating women as full and equal partners. The upcoming 2018 elections should be taken advantage of

as a perfect occasion to increase women's leadership and participation in Afghanistan's political life.

Fifthly, the Government has strengthened effective regional cooperation aimed at stabilizing Afghanistan, with initiatives designed to shape the country as a trade, transit and transport hub and promote investment and infrastructure projects aimed at improving its economic capacities. These are welcome steps.

The other side of the coin is the importance of confronting the threat posed by terrorism, which remains a major destabilizing factor for the security situation, especially with the Taliban gaining strength and the affiliates of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant affiliates expanding their presence in Afghanistan. We encourage Afghanistan's regional partners to continue to redouble their efforts to suppress terrorist organizations and activities, especially with help of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission. A key aspect of those efforts will be to continue improving the overall capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces.

Eradicating terrorists' sanctuaries and depriving them of sources of financing, especially from the narcotics trade, is vital. With regard to the latter, the recent findings of the *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017* of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime are extremely alarming, since poppy cultivation and opiate production have skyrocketed this year. The revenue boost allows the Taliban to spend more on the insurgency and to hire fighters and equip them better. Without concerted counter-efforts and with demand on the rise worldwide, poppy cultivation will remain an attractive source of income for Afghans.

Another related complex challenge in Afghanistan continues to be the protection of civilians, among whom casualties continue to be extremely high. We urge the Government of Afghanistan to effectively implement its recently approved national policy on the prevention and mitigation of civilian casualties in order to prevent indiscriminate shelling and bombing from creating collateral victims, especially among women and children. Moreover, with the deepening displacement crisis in Afghanistan, the national authorities and humanitarian aid donors should address the needs of internally displaced persons and returnees in order to provide access to basic services and support their sustainable reintegration.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm Ukraine's full support to Afghanistan's unity, sovereignty and

territorial integrity, and to its endeavours to combat the scourge of international terrorism. Ukraine also greatly values the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in helping Afghanistan to cope with its security, economic and development challenges and enact national reforms aimed at creating a sound foundation for peace, security and prosperity, both in the country and the wider region. In that regard, we would like to reiterate our strong support to the Secretary-General's efforts to strengthen the Mission's mandate, in line with UNAMA's strategic review (S/2017/696), so as to enable it to carry out its responsibilities effectively.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank all our briefers, particularly Ms. Wazma Frogh, who embodies the voice of women and civil society that is so essential to building a lasting peace in Afghanistan.

France associates itself with the statement to be delivered later by the observer of the European Union.

I will limit myself to four main comments. I would like to begin by stressing France's great concern about the persistent tragically high level of violence and suffering in Afghanistan and the presence of terrorist groups in the country, particularly Da'esh. That state of affairs and its consequences are worrying and should compel us to redouble our efforts to put an end to them. As the report (S/2017/1056) of the Secretary-General points out, it is civilians, particularly women and children, who are suffering and continue to pay the heaviest price. The Afghan forces, whose commitment and determination I should commend once again, are fighting the Taliban and the terrorist groups bravely and striving to better protect civilians. However, the continued armed clashes and terrorist attacks are still severely destabilizing to the entire country. France takes the establishment and proliferation of terrorist groups, particularly Da'esh, in Afghanistan and the region. We fully share the determination of the Afghan authorities and our allies to combat terrorism and its financing. This anti-terrorist effort, if it is to be successful, must be supported by all countries in the region.

My second comment has to do with the importance of ensuring that the Afghan Government continues the reforms it has begun with the aim of establishing democratic governance that can better serve the population. This relates in particular to electoral reform. Progress has been made in this area and

preparations for the parliamentary elections have begun, in particular through the Independent Electoral Commission. Nevertheless, much remains to be done in order to ensure the crucial goal of holding free and transparent elections in 2018 in accordance with the official schedule, as Mr. Yamamoto has just emphasized. France encourages the Afghan authorities to continue those efforts, with the support of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

The reforms aimed at combating corruption are also going in the right direction. However, I would like to take advantage of Mr. Fedotov's presence today to briefly discuss the narcotics problem. Drug trafficking continues to fuel the illicit economy, fund the Taliban insurgency and terrorist groups and threaten the health of many Afghans. The latest *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017* of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime highlights some disturbing trends that Mr. Fedotov also just mentioned. Despite progress in the programmes for eradicating poppy production in a growing number of provinces, the report estimates that the area under cultivation has increased and that this year's potential opium production, at around 9,000 tons, is almost double that of last year. France calls on the Afghan authorities to redouble their efforts in that area, with the support of the international community and the United Nations. In that regard, the Paris Pact Initiative continues to be the preferred forum for exchanges among all countries affected by the trafficking of drugs produced in Afghanistan.

On the human rights front, the situation of women and children remains very precarious. The Afghan Government must not relax its efforts to implement its commitments to women's rights. With a view to the parliamentary and presidential elections, to be held in 2018 and 2019, respectively, the full participation of women in the electoral processes as voters and as candidates will be essential.

My third comment concerns the pursuit of a negotiated political solution to the conflict and the long-term stabilization of Afghanistan. France hopes that Afghan actors will re-engage in the peace process as soon as possible, with the support of the countries of the region and of the international community. The sincere commitment and unambiguous support of all Afghanistan's neighbours to peace are essential to this work. We ask everyone to make a renewed effort in that regard, as well as concrete commitments. France took note of the announcement of a new meeting of the

Kabul process early next year and hopes that that will make it possible to bring together existing initiatives under the authority of the Afghan Government.

My fourth and final remark relates to the importance of strengthening United Nations support to Afghanistan, and in particular that of UNAMA, around the four pillars reaffirmed in this summer's strategic review — first, helping to establish peace in Afghanistan; secondly, facilitating the involvement of countries in the region; thirdly, guiding the dialogue between the Government and the Afghan political forces; and fourthly, coordinating international assistance. During the Security Council's visit, a few weeks from now, France looks forward to the opportunity to discuss with the Afghan authorities and the actors on the ground the ways that the international community can continue to support Afghanistan.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate France's full support to the Afghan Government and the efforts of the United Nations in their pursuit of lasting peace for all Afghans. Lastly, I would like to commend Japan's work and leadership on this issue throughout the year.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are very grateful to the briefers, Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and Mr. Umarov, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan, for their thorough analysis of the evolving situation in Afghanistan. Their briefings constitute a good basis for today's discussion. We note the selfless work being done by the entire United Nations team in Afghanistan. For our part, we would like to make the following comments.

The Government, the armed forces and the people of Afghanistan continue their courageous efforts to overcome the challenges to their security, both old and new. Having suffered a crushing defeat in the Middle East, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is moving to other regions. The main centre where the terrorists are concentrated is now Afghanistan. There are clear signs that ISIL is putting down roots in the country. A recent result of ISIL's strengthened presence was the seizure by militants of new areas in the north of the country. Additional ISIL groups are moving into the area. The secret to the jihadists' successful infiltration is material and military support coming from outside sponsors. We call on the Afghan authorities and

the leaders of foreign presences in the area to take determined steps to rid the country's northern regions of terrorist elements, which represent a serious threat to the security of our partners the Central Asian States. This cannot be tolerated. It is important that Kazakhstan, as a member of the Security Council, is drawing general attention to the developing situation on the ground.

We are also very concerned about the deteriorating drug situation in Afghanistan. As Mr. Fedotov rightly noted, the figures in UNODC's most recent report confirm that unfortunate trend. We are seeing an increase in drug crime and terrorist activities. The situation requires an immediate ramping up of efforts on the part of the international community. We urge everyone to consider the robust efforts of the Collective Security Treaty Organization in that regard.

The efforts to counter terrorism in Afghanistan have been going on for 16 years, but the situation remains difficult and military personnel and civilians are still dying. The task of ensuring sustainable development has become harder. The entire system of international efforts there should be rebuilt, based on the principles of cooperation and good-neighbourliness. Counter-terrorism efforts should be supplemented by robust steps aimed at national reconciliation.

We wholeheartedly support the view of the Secretary-General that there can be no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. The emphasis must be on negotiations to pave the way for rapid national reconciliation. However, that will be possible only through collective, mutually respectful efforts. There is no place here for competition, hidden agendas or mutual reproaches. We must refrain from unilateral projects, or the situation will deteriorate into a vicious circle. We support the efforts of all initiatives to renew peace negotiations between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban leaders and to achieve national reconciliation in the country, led by the Afghans themselves. But the evolution of the political and military situations means that with the surge in terrorist threats emanating from Afghan territory, it will be essential to include the country's neighbours, including the Central Asian States, in the reconciliation mechanisms. In our view, the Moscow format has in fact achieved that in practice, along with the revived mechanism of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Afghanistan Contact Group in its new format. The principle of an honest, equal partnership,

based on the efforts of such forums, can help to achieve the desired goals.

Afghanistan is at the threshold of a new electoral cycle. We sincerely hope that the elections will take place in a secure, united atmosphere. Afghan society cannot be allowed to become polarized. The elections should lead to consolidation and enable the country to close this bloody chapter in its history.

To sum up, we want to note that Russia and Afghanistan are historically linked through friendship. President Putin has emphasized clearly that the central Government in Kabul needs the support of the international community, and we are ready to provide that support, including by helping to train national personnel in law enforcement and the armed forces and in establishing essential arms and military technical systems. In that context, we are open to cooperating actively with the United States and other international and regional parties.

Russia has contributed significantly to Afghanistan's development on every front as a major donor and a consistent supporter of the Afghan people's efforts to find lasting peace. We have a deep-rooted interest in ensuring that Afghanistan becomes a source of stability, prosperity and sustainable development, which accords with our national interests and with regional stability.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we would like to thank Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto, Mr. Yury Fedotov, Ambassador Kairat Umarov and Ms. Frogh for their informative briefings today.

Bolivia welcomes the progress made by the National Unity Government of Afghanistan, which continues to promote reform measures and emphasize security-sector reform and the national dialogue process. We note the complex situation in which the electoral preparations are taking place and the willingness demonstrated by the various political groups, which continue to come together around the holding of parliamentary and district council elections. We understand the difficult prevailing political equilibrium; however, we trust in the commitment to democracy demonstrated by the people of Afghanistan to date.

On the other hand, Bolivia expresses its deep concern at the instability in the security situation, in particular the increased number of armed clashes

between Government and anti-Government forces. According to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/1056), during the reporting period the number of such confrontations increased by 62 per cent as compared to the same period in 2016.

We also find it alarming that, as the report states, it was only recently that one of the most violent weeks occurred, where four complex attacks were carried out by the Taliban throughout the country using sport-utility vehicles as suicide bombs. These caused the deaths of more than 100 people, including members of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and Afghan civilians. In that regard, we wish to highlight the prioritization by the Government of the implementation of its four-year plan for security sector reform as a key component of its overall security strategy. We would also highlight the efforts of the Government and the people of Afghanistan in general in their fight against terrorism and Da'esh.

With regard to the issue of internally displaced persons and refugees, it is hardly encouraging that, during the reporting period, approximately 33,000 people were displaced by the conflict. To date, the overall number of displaced persons exceeds 318,000. We call for joint efforts to assist the return and reintegration of those who have been displaced to their places of origin. We hope that international organizations will continue to provide effective and tangible aid, bearing in mind that the repatriation of refugees and internally displaced persons must be voluntary, safe and in dignified conditions, all while observing the principles of international law.

Along the same lines, we highlight the work being carried out by mine removal personnel, under the leadership of the Afghan Directorate for Mine Action Coordination and the United Nations Mine Action Service. They have declared 15 communities free of mines, which has allowed more than 230,000 people to move freely within their communities and facilitated the improvement of agricultural activities and access to markets. We reiterate that anti-mine action, especially in the area of defusing and removing anti-personnel mines and other explosive remnants of war, is essential for the displaced civilian population to be able to return to their homes.

Bolivia also wishes to echo the Secretary-General's observation that the only path to lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan is a negotiated solution with the

constructive participation in diplomatic efforts for peace, with a view to promoting the interests and welfare of all Afghans. In that regard, we call on regional partners to reinforce their commitment to robust cooperation in promoting stability and prosperity, thereby fostering an environment conducive to dialogue. Along the same lines, we are encouraged by the statements made during this past period at the meetings held in various cities, such as Ashgabat, Baku, Brussels, Moscow and Samarkand, among others. The importance of regional cooperation was underscored, along with the need for a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan.

Similarly, Bolivia considers it very important to carry out a Security Council visit Afghanistan so that this organ can gain first-hand information, allowing it to strengthen its cooperation with Afghanistan.

Finally, we wish to express our support for the political dialogue in Kabul. We are convinced that this process must be inclusive and guided by and for Afghans, making it clear that there is no military solution to the conflict.

Ms. Schougin Nyoni (Sweden): I would like to align myself with the statement to be made later on behalf of the European Union and its member States.

Let me begin by thanking Special Representative Yamamoto, Executive Director Fedotov and Ambassador Umarov for their comprehensive briefings. Let me also extend a special welcome to Ms. Frogg and thank her for bringing the voices of Afghan women into the Chamber today.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/1056) underlines the continuing instability and volatility that affect the lives of the Afghan people on a daily basis. At the same time, as Special Representative Yamamoto pointed out today, opportunities exist to break the cycle of violence that has afflicted the country for four decades. I would like to make three points today.

First, only the Afghan people, working together, will determine the future for Afghanistan. An Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process remains essential. We therefore welcome the Afghan Government's strong commitment to engage in the political process. The upcoming meeting in the Kabul process will be an important step towards creating an environment conducive to that. We strongly encourage the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to actively support the efforts of the Afghan Government

to ensure that the Kabul meetings result in a sustainable peace process.

During her visit to Afghanistan in October, the Swedish Foreign Minister met with representatives from all parts of society and underlined the importance of an inclusive peace process. Ensuring that the whole population — meaning both men and women — can participate effectively is vital for the achievement of sustainable peace, as is the active participation of civil society.

The regional context is important, as many of the challenges facing Afghanistan cannot be dealt with in isolation. We urge all stakeholders, especially Afghanistan's neighbours, to assume responsibility and to work together towards a political settlement. There is tremendous potential in increased regional cooperation, and we welcome the engagement of the Central Asian States in that regard.

It is imperative for Afghanistan's future stability that parliamentary elections take place in 2018 and presidential elections in 2019, as announced, and that the elections be conducted in an inclusive, credible and transparent manner. Every effort must now be made to ensure that difficulties are overcome and that elections take place. We welcome to the Secretary-General's emphasis in his report on women's participation in elections. We urge the electoral management bodies and the Afghan Government to take all the necessary steps to ensure women's full participation in the elections, as both voters and candidates.

Secondly, respect for human rights and international humanitarian law is vital to the achievement of sustainable peace. We congratulate Afghanistan on its election to the Human Rights Council. As an elected member of the Council, we expect Afghanistan to uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights.

We deplore the recent execution of five prisoners, and urge the Government to reinstate the de facto moratorium on the death penalty with a view to abolishing this cruel and inhumane punishment.

We appreciate the efforts of UNAMA in the area of human rights, not least pertaining to its work on children and armed conflict and civilian casualties. We encourage them to continue that important work.

Attacks against humanitarian and development workers, health-care professionals, medical transport,

hospitals and other medical facilities, as well as schools, continue and are deeply concerning. Such attacks not only impede efforts to aid the people of Afghanistan, but infringe upon their enjoyment of the right to education, health and life, which are crucial in building sustainable peace. In addition, civilians continue to bear the burden of the conflict, with women and children increasingly under threat. We are equally deeply concerned about the increased recruitment of children by armed groups, in particular by the Taliban, and call for an immediate end to that practice.

Finally, I would like to reiterate our strong support for the outcome of the strategic review of UNAMA and the Secretary-General's recommendations. It is now important that the recommendations be implemented without delay. With its unique field presence, UNAMA can contribute to making a tangible difference on the ground and provide important support for efforts to attain lasting peace. An integrated United Nations approach, linking together peace, development and human rights work in Afghanistan, is crucial to delivering results. Our expectations for UNAMA in that regard are high.

Sweden's assistance to the people of Afghanistan has remained steadfast for over four decades. Afghanistan is Sweden's single-largest development-cooperation partner, and our support will continue, including for reform efforts aimed at building strong and independent institutions. The Afghan people can count on our continued backing as they advance their efforts to build a peaceful, stable and inclusive future.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank Special Representative Yamamoto and Under-Secretary-General Fedotov for their informative briefings. We highly appreciate the commitment and steadfastness of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in working in such a complex environment.

Despite the measures taken by the Afghan Government and the international community, the security situation in Afghanistan remains fragile. As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/1056) indicates, this year has seen an increase in the number of armed attacks by various terrorist groups. One area of particular concern for the Central Asian States is the increasing level of terrorist activities by the Afghan faction of the Islamic State in the northern provinces of the country. The increase in drug production in the

country in 2017 is alarming as well, because it has a negative effect on the entire region, besides fuelling the operations of terrorist groups.

Kazakhstan welcomes the adoption of the Afghan national peace and reconciliation strategy presented by Afghanistan's High Peace Council, as well as the steps taken by the Government to implement the national action plan on women and peace and security. We welcome the remarks made in that regard by Ms. Frogh. Our delegation also welcomes the intensified efforts of the Afghan Government and its regional and international partners to achieve a political settlement and durable peace in the country. Those efforts include the Kabul process and the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, which is made up of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States of America and China, on the Afghan peace and reconciliation process. Of equal significance is the work of the International Contact Group, the Moscow consultations and other initiatives. We should also acknowledge the steps taken by regional organizations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia, the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre, the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, and the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan.

As we have maintained, the nexus between security and development is clear. In that regard, Kazakhstan remains an ardent supporter of a regional approach and integration. My country actively invests in developing regional transport infrastructure and provides humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. Approximately 56 railcars of humanitarian goods are to be delivered at the end of this month. We are confident that close economic cooperation among the countries of the region will facilitate the integration of Afghan citizens into the reconciliation process, thereby reducing their involvement in organized crime and opium production. All of that will have a positive impact on the situation in the country and in the region as a whole.

Expanding cooperation between Afghanistan and the Central Asian States would also significantly strengthen the country's potential, thereby contributing to economic growth, increasing trade and creating more opportunities. The economic integration of Afghanistan is therefore the key to the prosperity and security of the region. In that regard, we commend the seventh Regional Economic Cooperation Conference

on Afghanistan, held in Ashgabat in November, during which the measures to promote the peaceful development of Afghanistan and strengthen a mutually beneficial economic partnership in the region were reviewed. The conference in Samarkand was also quite constructive in that regard.

We welcome the signing of the Lapis Lazuli Corridor Agreement by Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. The new route will connect Afghanistan with Europe and create trade, transit and investment opportunities. We also commend the work on the extension of the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway to Afghanistan; the railroad project of China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iran; as well as the establishment of a tripartite agro-industrial consortium involving Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. We support China's One Belt One Road initiative, which will bring not only economic growth and prosperity to our region, but also more security.

I would like to end on the positive note: the close partnership that exists between UNAMA and the Afghan Government, which is absolutely necessary for ensuring sustainable peace and stability. Let me once again reiterate our full support for the Government and the people of Afghanistan in achieving lasting peace and reconciliation, and offering solidarity with their aspirations for progress and prosperity.

Mr. Bermúdez Álvarez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto; the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Mr. Yury Fedotov; Ambassador Kairat Umarov; and Ms. Wazhma Frogh for their briefings. I also thank Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal for his comprehensive statement.

As stated in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/1056), Afghanistan continues to face multiple political, electoral, economic and security challenges, which require a unified vision and greater efforts to achieve a political solution to the conflict. For that reason, the support of the United Nations and the international community to the National Unity Government of Afghanistan continues to be crucial for the long-desired consolidation of peace in the country.

Uruguay reaffirms its support for the Government of Afghanistan, as well as for a peaceful, Afghan-led resolution to the conflict. In that respect, we continue to encourage that Government to persist in its efforts

to achieve lasting peace based on the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity. The lack of dialogue and progress towards a peace agreement between the Afghan Government and the Taliban continues to wreak havoc on Afghan society. The conflict in Afghanistan has no military solution. The parties should come together to find political alternatives. It is necessary to continue to make every effort to put an end to the cycle of violence and to take the path to establish dialogue between the Government and the Taliban. Without the firm will of all the parties, there can be no end to this long and cruel conflict. The Kabul process, which is intended to bring about genuine reconciliation among the Afghan people, requires the support of the international community. We therefore recognize this process of cooperation for peace and safety, as well as the interest demonstrated by Afghanistan's partners in its execution.

We encourage the Afghan Government to continue with programme of reform, with a focus on ensuring strong and independent institutions and a solid democratic process. The consolidation of democratic institutions with a view to achieving the stability of the country is fundamental. In that context, we must highlight the role of Afghan women and their direct participation in the peace process and security and development reform efforts. To ensure that discussions in the realm of decision-making reflect the concerns and needs of the whole population, the voices of women should be heard.

It is worrying that the humanitarian and security situation, as well as the violence, that are affecting the Afghan civilian population continue to cause instability and serious consequences. The protection of civilians, especially of women and children, is a priority and demands respect for their ability to enjoy their fundamental rights. All parties to the conflict should respect humanitarian principles, human rights and international humanitarian law. In that respect, Uruguay reaffirms its call for full compliance with the provisions of resolution 2286 (2016) concerning the protection of the wounded and the sick, and medical facilities and personnel. Those responsible for such crimes should not continue to enjoy impunity. Anyone who commits such crimes should be held accountable for their actions.

It is crucial that the Government of Afghanistan and the international community continue to work together to counter the challenges facing the country

and to build a peaceful, stable and prosperous future. Afghanistan needs the ongoing support of the United Nations, of Member States and of all concerned parties in the interest of improving the security situation of the country. It is also crucial that efforts to counter the threat of the terrorism currently afflicting the country be stepped up. To promote the stability, security, development and prosperity of Afghanistan, and the entire region of Central Asia, greater cooperation and regional integration are also necessary.

Uruguay wishes to express gratitude for the work carried out by the United Nations in Afghanistan in particular. Furthermore, we acknowledge the dedication and work of the Special Envoy and all UNAMA staff to promote inclusive peace initiatives and to support the Afghan people, under very difficult circumstances. Lastly, Uruguay wishes the upcoming Security Council mission to Afghanistan, led by Kazakhstan, every success.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I would like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto and the other briefers.

Earlier this week, President Trump unveiled a new United States national security strategy, which embodies the concept of principled realism. Nowhere is that approach more evident than with this Administration's regional strategy towards Afghanistan. The strategy demonstrates clearly this Administration's commitment to Afghanistan and to a peaceful future for the region. The American people are justifiably impatient with the conflict in Afghanistan, which has been ongoing for 16 years now. The President's policy makes it clear that the United States does not seek a permanent military presence in Afghanistan.

We will continue to support the Afghan Government and security forces in their fight against Al-Qaida, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) and the Taliban. We will continue to work to ensure that terrorists do not exploit Afghanistan's territory as a safe haven. But, critically, our support will not come with an artificial time limit. We will instead base our support on a realistic assessment of conditions on the ground. The additional military resources and authorities ordered by President Trump are having an impact on the battlefield.

The United States, working closely with our Afghan partners, has made significant progress against ISIS in eastern Afghanistan. Together we have maintained

persistent pressure on ISIS, while significantly reducing its territory and eliminating one third of its fighters. Enhanced United States support has also bolstered the confidence and ability of our Afghan partners. For the first time since 2014, the fighting season has passed without the Taliban threatening to seize a provincial capital. The United States does not intend to prolong the war through its military games, but rather to accelerate the peace.

We are committed to an Afghan-owned peace process. Our strategy recognizes that the path to peace is through negotiations. The Taliban and other spoilers cannot win on the battlefield. Our actions on the battlefield make that plain. Peace will come only through political settlement that results in the Taliban abandoning violence, cutting ties with international terrorism and accepting the Afghan Constitution. In other words, the United States, the Security Council and the international community stand united in their pursuit of the same overarching goal in Afghanistan — a durable political settlement that leads to a lasting peace.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan will play an important role in the process. As the Mission has done so much to document, it is the Afghan people who continue to pay the highest price for the war. United Nations support for civilians, including electoral reforms, strengthening Afghan institutions, human rights and women's issues, will continue to be critical in the years ahead. Afghanistan's neighbours must also help.

Our South Asia strategy recognizes that there can be no enduring peace in Afghanistan without its neighbours being fully engaged and actively committed to that goal. The United States has reinvigorated regional diplomacy to support our commitment to a negotiated settlement. We stand ready to work with any nation ready to play a constructive role in Afghanistan. We will partner with any Member State willing to contribute to Afghanistan's security, stability, economic development and fight against terrorism.

It is also clear that there remains much to be done to combat opium production, which fuels instability in Afghanistan. We share the Secretary-General's deep concern about the shocking 63 per cent increase in poppy cultivation in Afghanistan between 2016 and 2017. Increased poppy-growing means increased revenue for the Taliban and extremist groups to wage their insurgency. The United States supports the Afghan

Government's efforts to curtail opium production, bolster law enforcement and expand alternative economic opportunities for the Afghan people. We call on all nations to join in that effort.

As our President stated, America will lead. We will not impose our way of life but we will champion our values, without apology. We will seek partnerships based on those values. We will seek alliances based on cooperation and reciprocity. We will hold our own partners in the Afghan Government to account for implementing the reforms and taking the steps necessary to lay the foundation for a comprehensive peace. That is our contribution to finding a political solution in Afghanistan. We share the world's impatience to end the conflict there. But that impatience can be an asset, if it is directed towards renewed efforts to bring peace to the people of Afghanistan.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The Senegalese delegation would like to begin by thanking you, Sir, for convening today's meeting on Afghanistan, given the leading role that your country plays in Afghanistan.

I would also like to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA); Ambassador Kairat Umarov, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan and Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011), concerning Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities; Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; and Ms. Wazhma Frogh, founding member of the Women and Peace Studies Organization and member of Afghanistan's High Peace Council, for their clear briefings. I would also like to welcome our colleague and friend, Mr. Mahmoud Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, whose detailed statement was of particular interest to my delegation.

My delegation remains concerned about the fragile situation in Afghanistan, which is becoming increasingly tense because of the upcoming legislative and local elections to be held in July 2018. The preparations for those elections are plagued by organizational challenges. I would like to take this opportunity to call upon Afghanistan's political stakeholders to work towards peace and to do what is necessary to prevent the situation from spiralling out of control. They must guard against the worsening of the country's security

situation, which is already dire given the lack of progress in talks held with armed groups and ongoing clashes in much of the country between Government forces and such groups, including, regrettably, terrorist groups.

Civilians, including Afghan Turks, remain the main targets of the asymmetrical attacks carried out by the Taliban and the fighters of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. It is clear that the high level of violence has claimed numerous lives, in particular among the civilian population, including many women and children, and has an adverse effect on the country's human rights, humanitarian, economic and social situations. In that environment, we commend the vital presence and efforts of the international forces in Afghanistan.

The efforts of the Afghan Government to promote national dialogue, combat insecurity and protect civilians are equally important, as evidenced by the recruitment of 2,500 guards to protect places of worship.

My delegation also welcomes the progress in the fight against torture, and we encourage Afghan troops to increase and improve their efforts concerning women's participation and empowerment, including access to justice. The convincing plea that was just been made by Ms. Frogh on increasing the participation of women and young people is worthy of a great deal of interest. We believe that the Afghan authorities, together with their multilateral and bilateral partners, including UNAMA, must provide the greatest possible support for the implementation of the 2025 Afghanistan national action plan on women and peace and security.

On the humanitarian front, the situation is improving, with 30,000 displaced persons this year. That is why we commend the joint efforts of the United Nations and its partners towards ensuring regular delivery of humanitarian assistance, although that has sometimes been at the expense of the lives of the personnel involved, to whose memory we pay tribute.

On the economic area, Senegal welcomes the positive progress in the fight against corruption, which has significantly contributed to the healthy economy, thanks to the efforts of the Afghan authorities, which we encourage and congratulate. We echo the satisfaction that has also been voiced in international forums.

However, we must continue to fight against drug trafficking, an area in which indicators have even worsened, according to the relevant Afghan ministry and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The

report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/1056) indicates that there has been an increase of 63 per cent in areas under cultivation and an increase of 87 per cent in opium production. That is all the more concerning given that illegal trafficking in opium constitutes a significant source of financing for armed groups and terrorists.

I would like to specifically mention UNAMA and all United Nations personnel, and take note of their tireless efforts to promote national dialogue and to protect women and children.

Senegal's mandate on the Security Council is coming to an end, and I would like to reaffirm the hope of my country to see Afghanistan involved in a political process that is as inclusive as possible, with a view towards ending a conflict that has devastated the country for so long, which would end the suffering of its people and resolutely propel Afghanistan towards peace, stability and sustainable development. That hope is based on the effectively charting and implementing the Kabul process, which is a process that Senegal strongly supports, as it constitutes a unique framework for coordination, integration and alignment of the many and varied initiatives — be they national, bilateral or multilateral — that are currently under way in, or planned for, Afghanistan.

For only the Government and the people of Afghanistan can, and should, be the masters of their destiny by integrating and taking ownership of the fruitful opportunities in the region and the international community generally. I am certain that the Group of Friends of Afghanistan, in which the Japanese delegation plays a driving role, and the Security Council members, will help to make the Kabul process the main platform for seeking peace, security and sustainable development in Afghanistan.

Mr. Kandeel (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express my profound appreciation to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Yamamoto, for his very clear and enlightening briefing.

Because of the interest in, and demand for, stability between Central Asia and the Middle East, Egypt commends the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan in combating terrorism, as well as its relentless efforts to establish sovereignty over its territory. At the same time, we welcome the preparations that are under way for the mid-2018 elections. We also support the Afghan

authorities in their social and political efforts to uphold security and promote development. However, we would like to emphasize the following areas.

First, at the heart of security there is a collective commitment to fighting terrorism in all its guises, within the framework of an international counter-terrorism strategy, and to fighting extremist ideologies, particularly given the escalation of unprecedented security incidents and terrorist attacks in Afghanistan this year. With that in mind, we encourage partners to engage in close cooperation at the national and international levels with the Afghan authorities in order to combat drug trafficking, especially trafficking in opium. Those efforts must go hand in hand with efforts to combat terrorism, as drugs are a major source of financing for terrorist organizations and armed groups.

My second point concerns development in the light of economic and investment initiatives that are undertaken by neighbouring countries and regional and strategic projects. At the head of those initiatives are the Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference and the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan concerning the economy and cooperation.

Thirdly, in political terms, there must be support for the Afghan Government to uphold internal peace and reinforce national dialogue, particularly within the Quadripartite Coordination Mechanism.

Fourthly, with regard to international affairs, a strategic review was recently conducted of UNAMA to evaluate the Mission and its effectiveness. The review corroborated the central importance of UNAMA. With that in mind, we welcome the crucial mission undertaken by the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia.

Fifthly, on regional issues, particularly the role of organizations and regional entities in Central Asia, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, it is important to connect efforts with the positive results of the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan held last year, and as a follow-up to the commitments that were a result of the Conference.

I would be remiss if I did not stress the importance of moving towards the definition a United Nations vision that is integrated and that includes all of the elements that I have just outlined, in order to uphold peace and stability and to ensure development and prosperity in Afghanistan and the region of Central Asia.

Mr. Woldegerima (Ethiopia): I would like to start by thanking the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2017/1056) on the situation in Afghanistan and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We appreciate the briefing by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto. We recognize the critical role played by UNAMA, United Nations agencies and the international community in supporting the Afghan people and the National Unity Government. We are also grateful to Ambassador Umarov, Executive Director Fedotov and Ms. Wazhma Frogh for their briefings.

Afghanistan still faces multiple and complex challenges to its security, stability and development. Its people continue to pay a heavy price because of the instability and violence affecting the country. We note from the report of the Secretary-General that the security situation remains highly volatile. That is further compounded by the increasing activities of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in the country, which has claimed responsibility for numerous attacks over the past three months.

With regard to the political situation in the country, we note the continued and cooperative relationships among the top leadership, and the efforts of the National Unity Government in building credibility around its reform agenda are commendable. In that context, the important measures taken by the National Unity Government to fight corruption and enhance accountability and electoral reforms are encouraging. The holding of peaceful and democratic parliamentary and district council elections within the set time frame is indeed important. We note the activation of the Independent Election Commission and progress made in the preparations for the elections. Furthermore, we appreciate President Ghani's increased political outreach aimed at enlisting opposition movements so as to ensure greater political inclusion.

However, the fact that there have been no significant steps in efforts to move the peace process with the Taliban forward remains a source of concern. Undoubtedly, the long-term security and stability of Afghanistan can only be ensured through a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation and political process. We welcome the National Unity Government's bilateral and multilateral engagement with neighbouring countries and the international community with a view to making the regional environment more conducive

to facilitating the peace process. In that regard, the efforts of UNAMA aimed at promoting and supporting peace-talk initiatives, reconciliation, dialogue and support for social and economic development with full respect for the country's sovereignty and leadership, remain very important.

Without sustaining inclusive economic growth and development, the peace and security challenges faced by Afghanistan cannot be effectively addressed. That is why the National Unity Government needs coordinated and comprehensive support from the international community in order to move its political reform and national development priorities forward, as envisaged in the Afghanistan national peace and development framework. It is vital that the international community sustain its engagement and deliver on its various commitments in that regard.

Lastly, concerning the engagement of the Security Council, we welcome the recent visit by the Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) to Afghanistan and the Chair's engagement with the leadership of the country. Next month, under the Kazakh presidency, the issue of Afghanistan will be high on the agenda of the Council, and we look forward to the high-level ministerial discussion on the matter.

I should like to conclude by once again expressing our support for and solidarity with the people and the Government of Afghanistan in their Herculean task of addressing the many challenges and threats facing their country, as well as in the difficult process of fostering peace and stability through reconciliation, dialogue, inclusive growth and development.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I thank the Secretary-General and Mr. Yamamoto, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for the latest report on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2017/1056). I also thank all of our briefers.

As the Secretary-General's report acknowledges, Afghanistan continues to face many challenges to its peace and stability. However, it is important to recognize the significant progress that has been made. Some 6.4 million children now attend school, the country has a democratic Government, and Afghan security forces are fighting to protect their fellow citizens. We remain committed to supporting the Afghan people on their path towards peace and prosperity bilaterally and through the United Nations. The United Kingdom will

spend up to \$1 billion by 2020 to support the Afghan Government's work to improve security, the quality of life and access to education.

I will take this opportunity to focus on three important elements of peacebuilding in Afghanistan: the holding of timely elections, the Afghan-led peace process and the protection of human rights.

First, credible, inclusive and timely elections are essential for long-term stability. We remain committed, together with the international community, to supporting the Afghan Government's efforts to deliver parliamentary and district elections in 2018. We call on the Government and the electoral management bodies to deliver the elections that the Afghan people deserve.

There is no purely military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. The only viable option for achieving lasting peace and stability is an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. The Taliban must choose to engage with that process. We welcome the actions taken by the United Nations, including by the Secretary-General and his Special Representative, to act on the recommendations in the strategic review of UNAMA, which recognized the importance of placing peace efforts at the forefront of the United Nations work. The Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation will convene its second meeting in early February, and we call on all parties to engage constructively with the Afghan Government through that process so as to give Afghanistan the best hope of achieving peace.

It is also encouraging that human rights remain an essential part of UNAMA's mandate, and I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for highlighting the United Nations work to support the meaningful participation of women in the upcoming elections. In that regard, I would like to thank Ms. Wazhma Frogh for her compelling briefing, and we pay tribute to her many years of tireless activism in support of women's rights in Afghanistan. Her invitation to brief the Security Council today demonstrates the importance that we place on those issues.

The United Kingdom is supporting Afghanistan so as to prevent violence against women and girls, improve girls' education and ensure women's full participation in political and economic life. We are also mentoring the trainers of future female leaders at the Afghan National Army Officer Academy. The Council's adoption of resolution 2344 (2017) ensures that women and peace and security remain at the heart of the United

Nations work in Afghanistan, and we welcome the Afghan Government's work on its national action plan on women, peace and security, while urgently calling for its full implementation.

With Afghanistan's recent election to the United Nations Human Rights Council — on which we congratulate that country once again — we look forward to working with Afghanistan to promote and protect human rights around the world, including through the fulfilment of its international human rights commitments.

Looking ahead to next month, we fully support Kazakhstan's decision to prioritize Afghanistan and Central Asia during its presidency of the Council. We look forward to working with Kazakhstan, Council members and regional and international partners to support the efforts of Afghan President Ghani and his Government to build peace and security, with a particular focus on regional connectivity and sustaining peace.

The instability in Afghanistan inflicts tremendous suffering upon the Afghan people. The international community can help to change that. If we work together, the people and the Government of Afghanistan can build the harmony and prosperity that have been inaccessible for many decades.

The President: I now call on the representative of Germany.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I thank you, Sir, for giving us the opportunity to participate in today's debate. I would like to take up what you said earlier in your national capacity with regard to Afghanistan, namely, that, first and foremost, the peace process and elections have to be driven by Afghanistan and Afghan-owned. I fully support that.

I thank Mr. Yamamoto, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his briefing. I want to join my Italian colleague in commending Mr. Yamamoto and his team for working in circumstances that are not easy, and we are full of admiration and support. We therefore support his agenda with regard to reforming the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, as well as the priorities that he is setting — as he explained earlier this morning — with regard to concentrating on the elections, which will be key. We share his belief that the

goal of holding transparent, fair, credible and inclusive elections is essential to strengthening trust in Afghan democratic institutions. They will be indispensable for a peaceful and stable future. Furthermore, in that context, as others said earlier, including my French colleague, I support the Special Representative's emphasis on women's participation in the elections. Holding the elections as quickly and smoothly as possible will also be very important so as to provide the opportunity for the comprehensive political process to succeed, and that is where he placed his second priority, which we fully support.

We appreciate that Afghanistan has taken the lead in efforts to bring about peace by launching the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation. We fully support a credible, comprehensive and inclusive political process. Once again, I believe it is very important that women, youth and civil society be included, in the peace process. Furthermore, it is very important that regional players are involved. In that regard, I would like to congratulate my Kazakh colleague for his activities and increased regional role and for his intention to put that situation at the centre of his presidency of the Security Council in January, including through a trip to the region.

I would also like to return to what the briefers said. I was struck, as were many others, by the fact that both Mr. Fedotov and our Kazakh colleague in his capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) highlighted the increase in opium production. That is a very serious development. If that trend continues, it will have even more detrimental effects on terrorism, organized crime and corruption, and it will undoubtedly impact the peace process, because, of course, Da'esh and, in particular, the Taliban benefit from it. I can therefore only support what the Ambassador of Kazakhstan said in appealing to Member States to play a more active role in listing persons who are responsible for the opium industry.

I would like to echo my British colleague in recognizing the work of and statement by Ms. Wazhma Frogh. I can only support what she said in strongly highlighting the need for greater women's participation in Afghan public life. Their stronger participation in Government, the National Security Council, the armed forces and all institutions is key. The Afghan Ambassador mentioned that they are working hard on getting more women into Government, but I think much more can still be done. I can only point to my

own country as an example, where women serve as the Chancellor and as the Minister of Defence. Perhaps in a few years we will see the same thing in Afghanistan.

The second point raised by Ms. Frogh regarded children. We are witnessing, as we have in other areas such as Iraq and Syria with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), that the Taliban are recruiting children. That is something that we have to stop. We must see to it that we create alternatives so as to ensure that children receive education and are not drawn into terrible tasks. We know the brutality of the ISIS fighters. We know that from the fate of the Yazidis. Likewise, with regard to violence against women: what we now see in Afghanistan, we have already seen to a terrible degree in Iraq. I would therefore commend the Afghan Ambassador for what his Government has achieved. My British colleague just highlighted all the progress that they have achieved. I can only commend that and yet encourage them to improve in a number of areas, such as Afghan-Pakistani relations, which are very important and should be further improved.

I would also like to highlight and commend Afghanistan's election to the Human Rights Council. What the Ambassador said in that context was very encouraging. There are, however, two concrete points that I would like to make in that regard: Afghanistan should abolish the death penalty, and it should join the Convention against Torture. Though the Ambassador said that a lot is being done in that context, I believe that formally subscribing to that Convention would be an important development.

I should like to turn briefly to my country, Germany. We will remain very committed to Afghanistan. Our Ministers of Defence and for Foreign Affairs just visited Afghanistan. We continue to be a major troop-contributing country to NATO's Resolute Support Mission, with 1,000 German troops on the ground. In that context, I would like to explicitly commend the United States for its renewed engagement, which is key, as is what was said with regard to not setting an artificial timeline. That is key because such timelines encourage the Taliban to simply watch the clock waiting for us to leave. That is very important. We continue to support the Afghan Police. We have spent considerable sums on stabilization efforts, contributing \$250 million annually for development and more than \$20 million for humanitarian aid.

Germany remains firmly committed to advancing stability, peace and development in Afghanistan and the region. We co-hosted the Arria Formula meeting in November. We work with the Afghan Government and national partners but, at the same time, I would also like to say that we need to see more, visible progress so as to convince our people in Germany to continue to commit soldiers and money to Afghanistan.

In conclusion, I would like to align myself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): Another year has passed, another year has come to a close, yet the suffering of the people of Afghanistan continues. Indeed, during the past year, as the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/1056) observes, Afghanistan continues to face multiple political, economic and security challenges in an exceedingly uncertain and fraught environment.

Lest we forget, I recall that the war and the violence and terrorism that afflict Afghanistan and threaten the stability of the entire region are the consequence of foreign military interventions, occupation and imposed wars.

The peoples of Pakistan and Afghanistan are bound by the unbreakable ties of history, faith, blood and language, as well as mutual interdependence. When the people of Afghanistan needed refuge, the Pakistani people opened their homes and their hearts to them. Close to 3 million Afghans still reside in my country as refugees. The peace and stability of our two countries are intertwined. My country has a vital interest in a peaceful, stable, united and prosperous Afghanistan. Pakistan stands ready to support the Government of Afghanistan in its efforts to address the multiple challenges it faces.

In order to strengthen relations with Afghanistan in all spheres — political, economic, defence, education and culture — Pakistan proposed a comprehensive Afghanistan-Pakistan action plan for solidarity last month. The action plan aims to promote constructive and meaningful bilateral engagement through the establishment of working groups on political, economic, military, intelligence and refugee issues. It is evident that securing the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and preventing cross-border terrorism is essential for

both countries, the region and the world. That can be achieved only through constant vigilance, effective management and real-time communication. Nor should terrorism be allowed to provoke clashes between our border security forces.

We need regular contact between the armed forces and intelligence agencies of the two countries so as to prevent any violent incidents along our long and porous border. It is to that end that the Armed Forces of Pakistan and Afghanistan have agreed to place Liaison Officers in each other's army headquarters and establish ground coordination centres. The success of such initiatives requires reciprocity, trust and good will. We hope the Afghan Government will work constructively with us to address the challenges that endanger our collective security and stability.

Apart from the conflict between the Afghan Government and the Taliban-led insurgency, a new and toxic threat has emerged in Afghanistan: the presence of a number of terrorists from various parts of the world: the Taliban Movement of Pakistan, members of which have fled my country, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and other groups, which have all now adopted the umbrella of Da'esh.

Those terrorists are now located in the 40 per cent of Afghan territory that, according to a recent United States Department of Defense report, is either out of Kabul's control or is contested. It appears that Da'esh's core, under pressure in Iraq and Syria, may be relocating to these ungoverned spaces in Afghanistan. According to the Secretary-General's own report (S/2017/1056), Da'esh remains resilient in Afghanistan, having claimed responsibility for recent attacks in Kabul.

We are deeply concerned at the presence of Da'esh in the Afghan provinces bordering Pakistan, Iran and Central Asia. This poses a threat not only to Afghanistan but also to all its neighbours. It is the responsibility of the Afghan Government and the international coalition to root out Da'esh and associated terrorists from Afghan territory and prevent them from launching attacks against Afghanistan's neighbours.

The growing nexus between illicit drugs and terrorism is an additional dimension of the security threat to the Afghans and to the country's neighbours. There has been an unprecedented and alarming rise in drug cultivation and production in Afghanistan. The latest report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and

Crime refers to a record rise in poppy cultivation and opium production. The Afghan Government and the international coalition must endeavour energetically to eradicate drug production and its links with terrorism.

But the central question in Afghanistan today is the following: do we choose the path of war, or do we opt for the path of peace? The international community is unanimous in its view, and so is the Secretary-General, that sustainable peace is achievable only through a negotiated end to the long war.

Pakistan has long proposed this as the most viable course to end decades of conflict and suffering in our neighbouring country. Sixteen years of war, waged by the world's most powerful forces against an insurgency of irregulars, has not yielded a military solution. This failure cannot be explained away by alleging the existence of safe havens for the insurgency across the border. There are no such safe havens. The only havens that exist for the insurgents and for Da'esh and other terrorists are within the 40 per cent of Afghan territory that is outside the control of Kabul.

Peace will not be restored by the continuing resort to military force. Indeed, it is evident, after years of war, that neither Kabul and the coalition nor the Afghan Taliban can impose a military solution on each other. The promotion of a political settlement and the pursuit of a military solution are mutually contradictory and mutually incompatible. You cannot kill and talk at the same time.

Another resort to the military option will not produce a result different from the past. It will not break the impasse, much less yield a political settlement. Priority therefore must be given to efforts to achieve peace through dialogue and through reconciliation.

We urge the Taliban to abandon violence and enter into a dialogue to seek a negotiated settlement. But the other side, too, must display a genuine desire for dialogue and not expect to bludgeon the insurgency into an enforced settlement. While the international community, including Pakistan and Afghanistan's other neighbours, can help in promoting a peace process, obviously the principal responsibility to revive or initiate a dialogue rests on the Afghan parties themselves. Peace cannot be achieved until the Afghan parties themselves conclude that there is no military solution to the conflict and commit themselves to pursuing a genuine dialogue for peace and reconciliation. This quest for peace through negotiations must be the priority objective for

the Afghan Government, for the Afghan Taliban, for Afghanistan's neighbours and for the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): I would like to express our appreciation to the briefers for their comprehensive presentations as well as to His Excellency Ambassador Saikal for his statement. We also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/1056).

Today I will focus on five points.

First, we would like to emphasize the need to consolidate the achievements of the past 16 years in Afghanistan. The Afghan Government and people need the international community's sustained support. It is vital to deliver on the commitments that we made in this regard.

Secondly, we attach importance to the functioning of the National Unity Government. Unity among every segment of Afghan society is key to the success of our endeavours to achieve peace, security and stability in Afghanistan. Further fragmentation of Afghan society would be detrimental to both the Afghan Government and the interests of the international community.

Thirdly, we must bear in mind that Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation efforts are key to lasting peace and security in the country. Turkey will maintain its contributions to the security and development of Afghanistan as well as its support to Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace efforts. We will continue to support the Afghan Government as long as our help is needed.

Fourthly, increased cooperation among the countries of the region is imperative for success in Afghanistan. We firmly believe that this cooperation can be secured only through dialogue and stronger engagement. Accordingly, Turkey will continue to contribute to regional cooperation, including through the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, of which we will assume the co-chairmanship in 2018. Our vision for Afghanistan is that of a peaceful and stable country that enjoys good and cooperative relations with its neighbours and the world, as it is at the centre of major regional projects.

On this understanding, we believe that the signing of the transit and transport cooperation agreement, the Lapis Lazuli agreement, in Ashgabat last month has

also solidified the basis for regional cooperation by bolstering trade.

Last but not least, we acknowledge and appreciate the important role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in standing with the Afghan people and coordinating the efforts of the international stakeholders in Afghanistan. Turkey will continue to support UNAMA's activities and efforts in this regard.

In concluding, I would like to underline that the Afghan people deserve a better future. Our continued commitment and support will renew the hopes of the Afghan people on this path.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Ibragimov (Uzbekistan): First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this quarterly debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), as well as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Tadamichi Yamamoto; the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Yuri Fedotov; and the Ambassador of Kazakhstan for their informative briefings.

We in Uzbekistan are closely following the situation in Afghanistan, because the prospects of stable and sustainable development in Central Asia are inextricably linked to the achievement of durable peace in that country. We therefore fully support the notion that there is no military solution to ensuring the stability of Afghanistan. The only way to peace is a direct dialogue among the central Government and the main domestic political forces, without preconditions. An Afghan-led inclusive peace process under the auspices of the United Nations is essential for achieving long-term peace and stability in the country.

We in Uzbekistan also agree that today the international community should look at Afghanistan not as a source of regional problems, threats or challenges, but as a strategic opportunity that could serve as a solid foundation for promoting multifaceted cooperation that will be conducive to our common prosperity and well-being.

Uzbekistan continues to support and actively participate in all current international formats of dialogue aimed at facilitating the improvement of the situation in Afghanistan and its socioeconomic

development. In particular, over the past year high-level delegations from Uzbekistan have taken part in various events pertaining to Afghanistan, including the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, in Ashgabat; the Heart of Asia — Istanbul Process, in Baku; the Moscow-format meetings and the Kabul Process; and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Afghanistan Contact Group, in Moscow.

Uzbekistan recently also supported the creation of a new consultative meeting format, Central Asia+Afghanistan, to discuss a wide range of regional issues as well as to develop joint measures for ensuring peace and sustainable development in our region.

For the past year, the new Government of Uzbekistan, under the leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has also intensified bilateral dialogue with Kabul. This year alone the two Heads of State met several times on the sidelines of international forums. Three weeks ago, President Ghani paid an official visit to Uzbekistan. As a result of that visit, more than 20 documents were signed. Those documents are aimed at the expansion of cooperation in political affairs, trade, economic, investment, transportation, communication, education and other areas. Among those documents were documents that provided for the creation of a joint commission on security issues, the construction of a railroad from Mazar-e-Sharif to Hairatan, the construction of an electric transmission power line, collaboration on transporting cargo, as well as other projects.

In addition, the parties involved have also concluded more than 40 contracts, which include provisions on supplying Afghanistan with electricity, agriculture and pharmaceutical products, as well as with construction materials, means of transportation and others goods from Uzbekistan. Today, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan visited Kabul and had a meeting with officials from the Government of Afghanistan to discuss issues related to how practically to implement the agreements that were reached during President Ghani's aforementioned visit to Uzbekistan.

Last month, regular flights between Tashkent and Kabul started to operate with a view to facilitating bilateral exchanges. The two countries have also agreed to open an Afghan consulate in the Uzbek border city of Termez. The Government of Uzbekistan has also been taking coherent steps to galvanize the support

of the international community to efforts to integrate Afghanistan closely into regional economic networks.

In particular, last month, Uzbekistan hosted an international conference on ensuring security and sustainable development in Central Asia. That conference was hosted under the auspices of the United Nations. Foreign Ministers from the five Central Asian States and Afghanistan, as well as high-ranking officials from other countries, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and various international organizations participated in that forum, which contributed to its success. In the final communiqué, representatives supported initiatives aimed at backing the peace process in Afghanistan, promoting the reconstruction of socioeconomic infrastructure and more actively integrating the country into global economic networks. Participants also supported the proposal for the Central Asian States to draft a mutually agreed-upon General Assembly resolution on enhancing regional and international cooperation aimed at ensuring peace and sustainable development in the region and the active involvement of Afghanistan in that process.

Currently, given the importance of developing a transportation and communication network for developing the economy of Afghanistan, Uzbekistan is planning to convene an international conference on the situation of Central Asia within the system of international transport corridors, which will provide strategic perspectives and help seize unrealized opportunities. That conference will take place in Tashkent next year. We hope that those two initiatives will receive the support of all Member States.

In conclusion, I would like to underline that in Uzbekistan, we strongly believe that Afghanistan must remain at the heart of the global agenda. Its integration into regional and global economic networks is a key prerequisite for establishing durable peace and stability in the country. Uzbekistan therefore reaffirms its readiness to continue with its close collaboration with all Member States, both in bilateral and multilateral forums, in order to bring about peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Bonser (Canada) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, as

well as the other briefers, for their engaging briefings. There are three themes that I will address today.

First, the full and equal participation of women in all facets of Afghan society is essential. The future of Afghanistan rests on the potential of its people, and durable peace and security cannot be achieved without the active and substantive participation of all members of society. Although there has been progress in women's rights, women continue to be at a disadvantage in Afghanistan.

(spoke in English)

As we look forward to 2018 and the forthcoming elections, I am sure that we can all agree on the importance of encouraging and supporting the meaningful participation of women, both as candidates and as informed voters. It is essential that the election process be inclusive, transparent and fair if it is to yield credible results. That goes hand-in-hand with strengthening of the representation of women in governance structures. For political stability, economic progress and development, Canada strongly supports the view that women must join men at the centre of decision-making at all levels of Afghan politics, society, and economy.

That brings me to my second theme: the importance of economic development. There are many mechanisms that seek to support economic progress and regional integration in South and Central Asia. The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan are two of them. Co-hosted by Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, which I sincerely thank for their efforts, both events are illustrative of the important role that regional and international actors can play alongside our Afghan counterparts in promoting our common interests, in particular regional stability, economic integration and, ultimately, the creation of conditions for peace and prosperity.

My third and final theme is the peace process in Afghanistan. Fighting in Afghanistan intensified in 2017, taking an unacceptable toll on the civilian population. Peace negotiations between the Afghan Government and the armed opposition, especially the Taliban, are necessary. Canada fully supports an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace process. It is my hope that the Kabul Process will bear fruit and that the level of violence that we have seen of late will diminish.

Canada looks forward to participating in the next Kabul process meeting in February 2018.

To conclude, I would be remiss if I did not mention Canada's deep concern over the deterioration of security in Afghanistan, particularly the impact of that instability and insecurity on women and children. We look to Afghanistan's neighbours and partners to continue to work with the Government of Afghanistan with a view to increasing gender equality, economic integration and regional stability and to advancing peace negotiations. All of that is vital to the pursuit of peace and security in Afghanistan.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Ms. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for Japan's excellent contribution as the penholder in our discussion on Afghanistan. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is honoured to be the new penholder, starting in January 2018. We are looking forward to working closely with Security Council members, Afghanistan, regional countries, donors and others in order to ensure that our contribution will be meaningful, and we hope to build on the excellent work of Japan.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

I would like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto and the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Mr. Fedotov, for their dedicated work, as well as Mr. Umarov, the Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan, and Ms. Wazhma Frogh for their valuable briefing. We also thank Ms. Frogh for her meaningful contributions to the High Peace Council.

We appreciate the thorough report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2017/1056). Many people have spoken today of the developments described in that report, such as the continued threat of terrorism, the steep increase of the cultivation of drugs and the lack of meaningful progress on the peace process, all of which underline the need to stay focused on supporting peace and stability in Afghanistan. I will not repeat what has been said by many already, but I would like to focus today on three issues for today's debate, in the spirit of the important work carried out by Ms. Wazhma Frogh on women, peace and security.

First of all, I want to focus on the leadership of the Afghan Government with regard to the empowerment of women. Secondly, I want to focus on the role of the United Nations, including the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), in strengthening the position of women in Afghanistan. Thirdly, I want to focus on the commitment of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan, with a special focus on women's rights.

Two months ago, a team of six Afghan girls visited the Netherlands to participate in the artificial intelligence summit, where they presented a self-built solar-powered robot that can help farmers in the field. The difference couldn't be greater between now and the era defined by the Taliban's rule, when women were marginalized to the point of complete invisibility. Today, Afghan women can, and indeed do, become engineers, police officers, judges, politicians, civil-society activists and teachers.

But the potential of Afghan women is far from fulfilled. Increasing women's participation in all aspects of Afghan society will contribute significantly to a more stable and prosperous Afghanistan. We therefore welcome the personal leadership of both President Ghani and First Lady Rula Ghani, who made women's empowerment a top priority. We particularly welcome the national action plan on women, peace and security, and the national priority programme for women's economic empowerment. We call on the Afghan Government to continue to fund and implement those programmes with much vigour and determination and to continue to consult civil-society organizations in that process.

Secondly, I would like to address the role of the United Nations. The Kingdom of the Netherlands agrees with the Secretary-General that the international community's support to Afghanistan should remain focused on peace and stability, as he outlined in his report (S/2017/1056). Here, the role of women is again of great importance — their voices should be heard and will add value to the process. An Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process can achieve lasting results only when women and youth can participate in a meaningful way. In that respect, the United Nations should lead and inspire by example. We encourage UNAMA and the Council to follow up on the recommendations of the Council's Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, which met on 5 December. In particular,

we call on UNAMA to redouble its efforts to increase the number of female local staff in the Mission.

Thirdly, allow me to turn to our lasting commitment to Afghanistan. Sixteen years ago, Afghanistan became one of the Kingdom of the Netherlands' closest partners in security and development cooperation. The position of Afghan women has been and will remain a major focus of our partnership in a decade of increasing Afghan ownership and leadership. To support the Afghan national action plan on women, peace and security, we have contributed to its local implementation through the €2 million Safhe-Jaded programme, which contributes to increased security and justice for women and girls. Let me conclude by reaffirming, once again, our continued support for Afghanistan and our readiness to contribute to the work of the Council on supporting peace, security and development in Afghanistan during our membership in 2018.

The President: I now give the floor to the Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Ms. Adamson: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

The EU strongly acknowledges the crucial role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and all the United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people, encouraging peace and reconciliation, monitoring and promoting human rights, and helping to improve the credibility, integrity, inclusiveness and sustainability of electoral processes, as well as in coordinating the international community's assistance. The EU wishes to have the closest and strongest relationship with UNAMA, in a spirit of transparent and open cooperation on the ground and in international formats for the ultimate benefit of Afghanistan.

The European Union remains fully committed to supporting an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. The EU takes note with interest that the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process, consisting of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and the United States, has started to reconvene for the first time in more than a year and

welcomes the preparations for the Kabul Process meeting, scheduled for 1 February.

The EU supports the Kabul process on peace and security and other meaningful international efforts feeding into the Kabul process initiative aimed at establishing a genuine Afghan peace and reconciliation process. The EU expects the Kabul process meeting on 1 February to yield concrete results and pave the way towards further constructive discussions. We also welcome all initiatives mounted in close coordination with the Kabul process aimed at creating a conducive environment for such a process, and the EU calls on all parties, including the regional stakeholders, to engage in working towards constructive solutions.

On 16 October, the Council of the European Union adopted a new EU strategy on Afghanistan, setting out our vision of how the European Union will support Afghanistan, both in addressing its formidable challenges and in bringing about positive change in the lives of ordinary Afghans. The strategy lays out a path for a coherent, ambitious and forward-looking strategy for EU engagement and partnership. It focuses on four priority areas critical to achieving progress, namely, promoting peace, stability and regional security; reinforcing democracy, the rule of law and human rights and promoting good governance and women's empowerment; supporting economic and human development; and addressing challenges related to migration.

The new EU strategy is one of several steps taken to reinforce the European Union's strong commitment to Afghanistan more than a year after the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, held in October 2016. In addition, the provisional application, as of 1 December, of the EU-Afghanistan cooperation agreement on partnership and development establishes a formal bilateral relationship between the EU and Afghanistan.

As the United States has also recently adopted a new strategy on Afghanistan and South Asia, let me emphasize that the EU will continue to work together with the United States and the international community in support of lasting peace, security and stability in Afghanistan. Respect for human rights and democratic elections continues to be a focus for the dialogue between the EU and the Afghan authorities and for the actions of the EU in the country. In that regard, the EU congratulates Afghanistan on its election to the Human Rights Council.

The EU maintains close contact with human rights defenders in Afghanistan. In general, the EU has a high expectation of the Afghan authorities that they will seek to advance the protection of human rights. In that context, however, the EU is extremely concerned by the execution of five prisoners on 29 November — the first executions to take place in Afghanistan since February 2015. We therefore call on Afghanistan to re-establish its moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty. Human rights will be, from now on, part of the structured dialogue between the EU and Afghanistan under the cooperation agreement on partnership and the development framework that I have just mentioned.

With regard to elections, the EU and its member States welcomed the announcement by the Independent Electoral Commission of the date for the parliamentary elections in Afghanistan, which are to be held in 2018. That announcement was reassuring for both the Afghan people and the international community as a sign of the further democratization of the country. However, there are signs that the process has been slowed down by both technical and political difficulties. All efforts must be deployed now to resolve those difficulties and make those elections possible in the announced time frame, and ensure that they are held in a democratic, inclusive, transparent and credible manner. The EU and its member States remain committed to supporting the Afghan electoral process. The EU has committed €15.5 million to assist the parliamentary and district elections, alongside other members of the international community and under the coordination of UNAMA.

Regional cooperation is key to lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region. Threats of terrorism affecting all countries of the region can only be confronted with increased political, economic and security cooperation. Such cooperation is indispensable for sustainable development. Afghanistan continues to engage with its neighbours through international forums, such as the Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and the regional economic cooperation conference on Afghanistan. The EU supports such regional forums aimed at facilitating economic and political cooperation among all regional stakeholders.

In June 2016, Federica Mogherini, Vice-President of the European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, presented the global strategy for the European Union's

foreign and security policy. Its main objective is to strengthen the relations of the EU with a “connected Asia”. It is noteworthy that, through the deepening of its trade relations, the EU is becoming the largest market for a number of Afghanistan’s neighbouring countries. The EU also stands ready to accompany the efforts of the Afghan authorities to develop international trade and investment, including with the EU and its member States.

The EU and Afghanistan continue to engage in a comprehensive dialogue on migration. The implementation of the EU-Afghanistan joint way forward is part of that discussion, with several planned common actions related to the fight against smuggling and trafficking in human beings and awareness-raising activities on illegal migration. Discussions are also under way to take stock of the implementation of the reintegration assistance programme adopted in 2016, with a view to ensuring a sustainable reintegration of returnees from both the EU and neighbouring countries. By the end of this year, the total amount of €78 million allocated to Afghanistan will have been mobilized, and the activities will have been launched.

The EU support will be soon complemented by a new regional programme on migration and forced displacement with a budget of about €200 million, of which — as in 2016 — Afghanistan is the main beneficiary. It will include activities at both the country and the regional levels to address the challenges of migration and forced displacement, including support for Afghan refugees, internally displaced people and returnees.

In October 2017 UNAMA reported a six per cent decrease in the number of civilians killed and wounded in the conflict this year, compared to the first nine months of 2016 — a year that saw record highs in harm to civilians. However, beyond those horrific figures, it is extremely worrying that the proportion of women killed and injured is on the rise, and extreme harm to civilians continued to be inflicted amidst a worsening toll from suicide attacks and a greater impact on women and children. We call on all parties to protect the civilian population, especially women and children, in line with international humanitarian law and human rights standards. We also need to continue to protect the vital role played by humanitarian agencies and respect their impartiality and humanitarian space as they work to address the most urgent needs of the most vulnerable. In view of the threat posed by the many mines and

improvised explosive devices to the population, the EU also encourages Afghanistan to maintain the current demining pace.

Insecurity and instability are also fuelled by the illicit cultivation and production of and trafficking in narcotics. We have seen alarming United Nations figures indicating significant increases in opium production. We encourage the Government of Afghanistan to continue to forcefully implement its national drug action plan, with the full support of the international community and in close cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and other relevant regional frameworks, such as the Paris Pact initiative.

In conclusion, the EU continues to consider UNAMA to be a key partner in efforts to achieve a lasting peace in Afghanistan. UNAMA has an invaluable role to play in ensuring the broadest possible international support for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process. The EU will continue to support those efforts with all the means at its disposal.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to express my appreciation to Japan for organizing this debate on the situation in Afghanistan. I also thank the Ambassador of Afghanistan for his statement. Finally, I would like to thank Mr. Yamamoto, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his briefing and for presenting the latest report of the Secretary-General, as contained in document S/2017/1056.

Unfortunately, security and instability remain the major challenges for Afghanistan. According to the Secretary-General’s latest report, despite a minor four per-cent decrease in incidents, the security situation has remained highly volatile, as conflicts between Government and anti-Government forces have continued throughout most of the country. The report also highlights one of the most violent weeks in recent times, when terrorist elements staged coordinated attacks in several locations.

Iran continues its full support for the promotion of security, stability, and comprehensive and sustainable development in Afghanistan. The security situation in Afghanistan has a direct impact, in our view, on the security of our borders and the region. Iran also

reiterates its support for any Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, Afghan-controlled reconciliation and peace process and stands ready to participate as a regional actor in all such ongoing processes.

The Afghan National Unity Government is at the forefront of the fight against terrorism, in particular against the Taliban, Al-Qaida and Da'esh and its affiliates, as well as other terrorist and extremist groups and criminals, including those involved in the narcotics trade. Greater sustained support on the part of the international community is needed to support the Afghan Government in that fight, as well as to address its complex security, economic and political challenges.

Strengthening our regional cooperation with Afghanistan is a priority and represents a major step towards consolidating peace and economic activity in the region. We welcome and urge further efforts to strengthen the process of regional economic cooperation, including measures to facilitate regional connectivity, trade and transit. In that context, we welcome the first consignment of goods from India to Afghanistan through Chabahar Port in November 2017. Afghanistan and Iran also continued their bilateral efforts to finalize a comprehensive partnership agreement, with a second round of working committees taking place in Kabul on 8 October. Water, security, and refugee and migrant issues have been discussed at the deputy ministerial level.

The challenges facing Afghanistan and our region are interconnected. We are very concerned over the findings of the *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017* of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which indicate an 87-per cent growth in opium production in the course of this year. That information is especially alarming when we take note of the fact that narcotics serve as a major source of income for the terrorist groups. The international community needs to support the relevant international and regional projects and activities, including those carried out by Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan within the framework of the triangular initiative to counter narcotics.

For more than three decades Iran has hosted millions of Afghan refugees, sharing our resources and services with them, including basic commodities, public health and public education at all levels. Iran continues to participate in the work of the Tripartite Commission in order to plan for the voluntary, safe,

dignified and gradual repatriation of Afghan refugees. Success in voluntary repatriation depends, first and foremost, on providing for the reasonable needs of repatriated refugees in Afghanistan and underscores the necessity for mobilizing more international support for that purpose. A stronger coordinated approach between the Government, donors and the United Nations, and an overall strategy for addressing the combined needs of the displaced and returnees are crucial in making the repatriation of Afghan refugees more effective.

We support UNAMA and other United Nations agencies in their efforts to provide development and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan through a comprehensive plan. Sustained ownership and partnership with the Afghan Government are needed in order to best utilize UNAMA and the United Nations system for the delivery of necessary services in priority areas, as advised by the national Government.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Lal (India): Thank you, Sir, for organizing this debate. We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto and the other briefers for their insights into the continuing difficult situation faced by Afghanistan.

The deterioration in the security situation in Afghanistan over the past few months is a matter of serious concern. Terrorists continue to attack the most vulnerable, including the sick in hospitals, children in schools, worshippers in mosques and even mourners at funerals. Terrorist groups have also gained territory. The continued resilience shown by the Afghan people and security personnel has been exemplary, but the better future that people hope for still appears distant.

Our regular consultations and the work done by the Council have not been enough to effectively reverse the situation on the ground. It has been painfully clear for a long time that the security situation in Afghanistan has implications, not only for the region, but also for the entire world. It is not simply a local problem. While new threats emerge from Da'esh, the Security Council cannot even decide whether to list the new leaders of the Taliban or to freeze the assets of the slain leader of the group more than a year after the issue was brought to its attention.

The support for terrorist organizations like the Taliban, the Haqqani network, Da'esh, Al-Qaida and

its designated affiliates, such as Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed from outside Afghanistan, must be forced to stop. All safe havens and sanctuaries available to such groups outside Afghanistan's borders must end. The Security Council has an important responsibility in that regard in our collective interest.

The rise in opium production and the increase in the areas under opium cultivation in Afghanistan, as highlighted in the report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, are cause for serious concern, especially given their role in perpetuating the cycle of terrorism. This drug trafficking is not a local concern. The international networks that control this illegal trade have to be identified and tackled. The problem needs to be addressed through verifiable measures and actions.

The Security Council can effectively utilize the sanctions regime under resolution 1988 (2011) in the context of funds that the terrorist networks are generating. This has not happened. We welcome the recent visit of the Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) to Afghanistan and the upcoming visit by the Security Council to the country early next month. We need to go after the leaders of the terrorist organizations. We need to investigate and designate the illicit drug-trafficking business in the country.

Support for an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled peace and national reconciliation process, within the framework of Afghanistan's Constitution, has to be pursued with all sincerity. Any meaningful progress requires the cessation of violence, the renunciation of links with international terrorism, and respect for the rights of common Afghan people, especially women and children. While the international community's commitment to Afghanistan is renewed every year through various international efforts, including those of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, respect for Afghanistan's sovereignty and its direction and ownership of the peace processes should be paramount.

We congratulate Afghanistan on its recent, first-ever election to the Human Rights Council. Afghanistan's active engagement at the United Nations on various issues of importance continues to grow.

Development cooperation is one of the most significant aspects of our long-standing friendship with Afghanistan. Recent visits to India by President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah

in the past three months have provided impetus to the wide-ranging new development partnership that both our countries launched in September. This covers diverse areas, including education, health, agriculture, infrastructure, renewable energy, drinking-water supply and human resource development. Our people-to-people contacts extend from colleges and cricket fields to trade and investment.

The importance of connectivity and transit for trade and energy linkages to bring peace and prosperity in Afghanistan, a land-locked country, is clear. Regrettably, normal overland transport and transit access between Afghanistan and a large economy like India's have been blocked for many years. This hurts the welfare of the Afghan people. We are working with our partners to address this issue. Last month, the first consignment of wheat-grain assistance from India reached Afghanistan through Chabahar port in Iran. This marks the beginning of a new era of enhanced, reliable and robust connectivity for Afghanistan.

The challenges are well known. The tools available to the Council and the international community to address them need to be utilized effectively. This requires collective will and targeted action.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Mr. Yardley (Australia): I thank Special Representative and all the briefers today for their valuable briefings.

Australia congratulates Afghanistan on overcoming significant security, political and humanitarian challenges in 2017, and notes the progress made on key reforms, particularly on anti-corruption and in the security sector. We encourage sustained attention to the challenges of the security environment, establishing a credible peace process and the response to continuing high levels of internal displacement.

We welcome the Afghan Parliament's recent confirmation of 11 ministerial nominees to bring more certainty to domestic politics, but were discouraged by the failure to gain confirmation for the single female nominee. Conducting parliamentary elections in 2018 will be crucial for political credibility. We encourage Afghanistan to continue to work towards timely, free and fair elections, and welcome the United Nations commitment to providing electoral support.

The worrying trend of increased drug production identified in the recent report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime will also require increased attention in order to avoid undermining security and development gains.

While the security and political phases of transition are important, it is essential that Afghanistan's economic transition not be neglected. It is critical to long-term stability. We are encouraged by growing regional economic cooperation, which has seen Afghanistan build closer trade partnerships with its neighbours through 2017. We look forward to the Kabul process meeting in February 2018 as a means of continuing to draw together different peace initiatives into a coherent and comprehensive Afghan-owned and led peace process. We would also welcome enhanced engagement between Afghanistan and Pakistan and urge that priority be given to strengthening this bilateral relationship, which is vital to regional stability.

Australia continues to work with partners in support of the international response to Afghanistan's challenges. We welcomed renewed international

commitments to Afghanistan in 2017, including the United States and European Union strategies on Afghanistan and the bolstered commitment of NATO and its partners. Australia also contributed to that effort, modestly increasing our military contribution to the Resolute Support mission during 2017.

This has been a year of reflection and realignment for the international community's approach in Afghanistan. We urge full implementation of the recommendations of the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and inclusions flowing from these in the Mission's renewed mandate — especially initiatives that address gender issues.

Australia appreciates the significant contribution of United Nations agencies and their staff in Afghanistan, and we would like to thank them for their close cooperation as development and diplomatic partners throughout 2017. As we move into 2018, we look forward to a refreshed approach. We have a window of opportunity to use the momentum of 2017 and see tangible progress for Afghanistan.

The meeting rose at 1.45 p.m.