

Bringing about the vision for a peaceful Afghanistan

Thank you, Mr President and to SRSB Lyons for the remarks. And I commend you, Mr President, for taking the initiative to invite Mr Mohseni to brief us today and to offer a perspective from Afghanistan's dynamic and, as you heard, a vibrant civil society and media.

I was really struck by his vision of a peaceful Afghanistan where the Afghan people can be free from war and able to reach their full potential. And I was also struck by the polling that he set out for us that tells us what the people of Afghanistan really want for their future. I think it's important that we in the Council listen to and reflect on that.

I thought his vision clarified the objectives for us of the Afghan peace process, which we're all eager to support.

We – Afghans and the international community – are not working towards an end to conflict alone, vital though that is. We are working to ensure that Afghans of all ethnicities, tribes, sexes, backgrounds can live in a country at peace; where they can trust well-governed, accountable institutions; where they can enjoy the full extent of their fundamental human rights; and where they can build their own futures for themselves, for their families and for their communities.

And for that reason, it's essential that the upcoming intra-Afghan negotiations are fully inclusive and lead to a long-lasting and sustainable peace.

This means ensuring effective and timely transitional justice for the victims of conflict and the protection and advancement of rights such as the freedom of expression, as Mr Mohseni has highlighted today.

It also means that groups who suffered so much under Taliban rule must be able to have confidence that their rights will be protected. That is why the UK, as co-chair of the Group of Friends of Women of Afghanistan, have made the participation of women and girls in the peace process and the protection of their rights such a priority here in New York, as well as in Afghanistan, to the work of our embassy in Kabul. And I take this opportunity to thank you, SRSB Lyons, for your participation in the Arria formula meeting on this issue that we co-hosted with Afghanistan, Germany and Indonesia in July.

This is the vision, and today we are closer than ever before to achieving this vision.

We were glad to hear from SRSB Lyons that the intra-Afghan negotiations will start within days. Afghanistan and its people potentially stand on the threshold of a new beginning. As SRSB Lyons said, we have more reason than ever to hope for an end to conflict. But we also stand at the beginning of a

process that will be long and challenging. It will require the support of all of us.

We commend the Afghan Government for taking bold steps in removing obstacles that have allowed this moment to happen. We commend also the negotiating team of the Islamic Republic for its preparations, including outreach to women's groups and other civil society actors across the country. We note the continuing efforts to form the Cabinet and the High Council of National Reconciliation and hope both can be fully established and begin their work swiftly.

But, Mr President, there are two sides to this negotiation. Let me emphasise that the Taliban, too, must demonstrate that they are a credible partner for peace. That means:

First, ending violence now. They cannot expect to be accepted back into Afghan society when they continue to attack and harm Afghan men, women and children.

Second, fulfilling the commitment to counter terrorism by breaking completely with all terrorist groups, including al-Qaeda, and condemning all acts of terrorism in Afghanistan, which continue to claim too many innocent lives.

And third, engaging in good faith in the upcoming negotiations.

The roles of the UK and the international community, Mr President. On the UK's part, we stand ready to provide our support at any stage of the upcoming peace process. We also lend our full support to the work of SRSB Lyons and the UN in supporting the talks.

As one of the largest donors in Afghanistan, the UK is providing assistance via the UN's Humanitarian Response Plan to combat Covid-19 and planning with partners how we can support Afghanistan in mitigating both immediate health impact and critically, as SRSB Lyons said, the severe socio-economic effects.

We are also working closely with Finland and the UN and other partners to prepare for the meetings later this year to secure Afghanistan's immediate financial stability and set out the future parameters of the international donor communities' medium-term support for Afghanistan.

Mr President, yesterday in London, the UK created the new Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. We will continue to bring the best of our diplomacy and development expertise to support the people of Afghanistan as they stand at this crucial juncture. And we join Mr Mohseni and SRSB Lyons in their pragmatic and cautious optimism.

Thank you, Mr President.