

# Security Council renews UN mission in Afghanistan; debate highlights women's power

The Security Council on Thursday renewed the mandate of the United Nations political mission in Afghanistan for another year to continue providing assistance to the Government and the people of the conflict-plagued country.

"We have important tasks ahead of us this year," Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General's Special Representative and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)), told the 15-member Council, which voted unanimously to extend the operation's mandate until 17 March 2019.

Looking ahead, he noted that the Mission also focus on peace efforts, the upcoming elections and the Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan which the UN would host with the Afghan Government in Geneva on 28 November. He also noted that the Mission's critical work covers human rights and reforms, including anti-corruption.

On the political front, Mr. Yamamoto said that Afghan President Ashraf Ghani offered peace to the Taliban without preconditions, and laid out a path for negotiations with a series of concrete proposals to create space for the opening of talks.

"The offer of negotiation is on the table. It is now incumbent upon the Taliban to come forward with an offer of their own, and start direct talks with the Government to put an end to the suffering of the Afghan people," he said.

Expressing concern about some actions which could deepen divisions in society, Mr. Yamamoto stressed that political leaders need to put the national interest above partisan agenda.

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On the parliamentary elections scheduled for 2018 and presidential elections for 2019, he cited accelerated progress on voter registration preparations, but said timelines remain tight.

As for security, Mr. Yamamoto expressed a concern over the increase in civilian casualties caused by the Islamic State in the Khorasan Province, or ISKP. The ISKP has been expanding its geographical spread beyond its stronghold of eastern Afghanistan into the country's north.

He also said that in 2016 and 2017, 1.5 million refugees returned to

Afghanistan from neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan and Iran. But such large numbers stress the Government's ability to provide services. "This gap must be addressed before encouraging more people to move back to their homeland voluntarily," he said.

### **Afghan women's strength holds fabric of society together**

Mr. Yamamoto's remarks also highlighted the power of Afghan women as today's meeting organized by the Netherlands, the Council president this month, was held on [International Women's Day](#).



UN Photo/Loey Felipe

Sigrid Kaag, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands and President of the Security Council for the month of March, chairs the Security Council meeting on the situation in Afghanistan.

He said the UN is working with Afghanistan's electoral commission to ensure women's participation in all stages of the elections as candidates, campaigners and voters.

He also reported that the Afghan Cabinet has adopted the necessary amendment to the Penal Code to ensure that all provisions of the Elimination of Violence Against Women law continue to apply, giving Afghan women continuing legal protection from violence.

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"Women are also disproportionately affected by the conflict," he said, noting that last year, more than 1,200 women were killed or injured, mostly from ground fighting and suicide attacks.

The meeting was chaired by the Netherlands's Minister for Trade and

Development Cooperation, Sigrid Kaag, who led an all-women delegation.

Also addressing the meeting were Mariam Safi, Founding Director of the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS), and Habibi Sarabi, Deputy Chairperson of the High Peace Council – whom Mr. Yamamoto introduced as “two women with distinguished careers in working for the advancement of peace in Afghanistan.”

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## [New communications technologies essential to empower poor rural women – UN](#)

To mark [International Women’s Day](#), the three United Nations Rome-based agencies are spotlighting the role new innovations in information and communications technologies (ICTs) can play in expanding opportunities for rural women, who often find themselves “on the wrong side of the digital divide.”

In Rome on Thursday, the International Fund for Agricultural Development ([IFAD](#)), UN [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO) and World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) are leading the talks, which explores how women’s empowerment and greater equality are inseparable from achieving sustainable development.

“At IFAD we have seen how information communications technologies can be [powerful catalysts](#) for political and social empowerment of women, and the promotion of gender equality if rightly designed, accessible and usable,” said Gilbert F. Hounbo, IFAD President in his opening remarks at the IFAD-hosted event – highlighting how women’s empowerment and greater equality are inseparable from achieving sustainable development.

“At IFAD, we have seen how information communications technologies can be powerful catalysts for political and social empowerment of women, and the promotion of gender equality if rightly designed, accessible and usable,” said Gilbert F. Hounbo, IFAD President, in his opening remarks at the event, which the agency hosted.

Only 41 per cent of women in low- and middle-income countries own mobile phones, compared to 46 per cent for men. Nearly two-thirds of women living in the South Asia and East Asia and Pacific sub-regions do not own a mobile phone.

Rural women often lack access to health care, education, decent work and social protection.

“The global rise of information has deeply affected rural women in poor countries, who often find themselves on the wrong side of the digital divide: because they live in developing countries, in rural areas, and because they are women, leaving them more likely poor and vulnerable to economic and climatic shocks,” explained FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva.

“If the interests and needs of rural women and girls are addressed, there is significant potential for information and communication technology to foster gender equality and the improvement of rural livelihoods,” he added.

ICTs can go a long way to boosting economic opportunities for rural women. For example, mobile and smartphones, provide access to real-time prices, offering informed choices about where and when to buy and sell.

Studies indicate that when women earn money, they are more likely than men to spend it on their families’ food and children’s education.

“Digital technology can transform lives if we get it into the hands of the people who need it, and that’s why we’re working hard every day to help increase access for rural women,” underscored WFP Executive Director David Beasley.

“And every time one of those women farmers uses a WFP app to sell her crops, the prosperity of her family and her community improves and we’re another step closer to gender equity,” he elaborated.

International Women’s Day is a time to call for change and celebrate acts of courage and determination by ordinary women who have played an extraordinary role in the history of their countries and communities.

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## [UN seeks \\$80 million to support refugees in Ethiopia](#)

Two United Nations humanitarian agencies are jointly [seeking \\$80 million](#) to provide food assistance to refugees in Ethiopia, which hosts the second largest number of those in Africa.

In a news release issued Wednesday, the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) said that food ration was cut by 20 per cent last year to below the 2,100 kilocalories per day required to sustain an average person.

The agencies are warning of deeper cuts from April unless new funding is received in March.

“After fleeing conflict and deprivation in their home countries, refugees

deserve to be protected and supported,” said Samir Wanmali, WFP’s Acting Country Director in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia hosts more than 900,000 refugees, including those from Eritrea, Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia.

Without new contributions, 650,000 refugees living in camps could soon become even more hungry and may eventually face severe hunger that could put lives at risk.

Particularly at risk are young children who risk becoming stunted if they do not receive the right nutrients during the first 1,000 days of life.

“The malnutrition rates in the camps are already high – further ration cuts could have a devastating effect,” said UNHCR Deputy Representative Matthew Crentsil.

Recent assessments show that malnutrition rates among children under the age of five are above the emergency threshold of 15 per cent in nearly half of the 26 refugee camps.

Conflict and drought in neighbouring countries continues to force people to seek refuge in Ethiopia, which has a long tradition of hosting refugees. In 2017, nearly 110,000 refugees arrived in Ethiopia.

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## [International Women’s Day: The ‘time is now’ to transform global push for women’s rights into action – UN](#)

This year, International Women’s Day comes at a pivotal moment, and with a wave women’s activism – from the #MeToo movement to #TimesUp and beyond – exposing the structures that have allowed women’s oppression to flourish, the United Nations is urging the world to stand with rural and urban women activists to topple the remaining barriers to gender equality and empowerment.

“The historical and structural inequalities that have allowed oppression and discrimination to flourish are [being exposed like never before](#),” [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) said in his message on the [Day](#), marked annually on 8 March and this year

From Latin America to Europe to Asia, on social media, on film sets, on the factory floor and in the streets, women are calling for lasting change and zero tolerance for sexual assault, harassment, and discrimination of all



kinds, said the UN chief, declaring that achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls “is the unfinished business of our time, and the greatest human rights challenge in our world.”

“The activism and advocacy of generations of women has borne fruit,” he continued. “There are more girls in school than ever before; more women are doing paid work and in senior roles in the private sector, academia, politics and in international organizations, including the United Nations.”

However, some remaining serious obstacles include that more than a billion women lack legal protection against domestic sexual violence; over the next decade millions more girls will undergo genital mutilation; and women’s representation in parliaments stands at less than one quarter – and even lower in boardrooms.

“Where laws exist, they are often ignored, and women who pursue legal redress are doubted, denigrated and dismissed,” he lamented.

Noting that the UN should “set an example for the world,” Mr. Guterres recognizes that this is not always the case.

He did, however, point out some changes to address it, saying “We have now reached gender parity for the first time in my senior management team, and I am determined to achieve this throughout the Organization.”

Totally committed to zero tolerance of sexual harassment, Mr. Guterres added the UN’s plans to improve reporting and accountability, elaborating how the Organization is working globally to prevent and address sexual exploitation and abuse by staff in peacekeeping missions.

“We at the United Nations stand with women around the world as they fight to overcome the injustices they face – whether they are rural women dealing with wage discrimination, urban women organizing for change, women refugees at risk of exploitation and abuse, or women who experience intersecting forms of discrimination,” maintained the Secretary-General.

Noting that women’s empowerment is at the heart of the [2030 Agenda](#), he affirmed that progress on the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) means “progress for all women, everywhere.”

“Gender inequality and discrimination against women harms us all,” he underscored, saying that that gender equality “is not a favour to women,” but a human rights issue in everyone’s interests.

He asserted that investing in women lifts up communities, companies and countries.

“Women’s participation makes peace agreements stronger, societies more resilient and economies more vigorous,” he detailed, adding that discrimination against them is “detrimental to all.”

The UN chief stressed the need for transparency and accountability if women are to reach their full potential to lift up communities, societies and

economies.

“Stand with women, listen to them and learn from them,” Mr. Guterres urged.

## **Time is Now: Rural and Urban Activists Transforming Women’s Lives**

In her message for the Day, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of [UN Women](#) explained that this year’s theme captures the life of the women activists whose passion and commitment have brought change over generations and won women’s rights.

“What we see today is a remarkable gathering of [strength among women](#) all over the world, demonstrating the power of speaking with one voice, as they call for opportunity and accountability, drawing momentum from grassroots networks and coalitions that stretch right up to government leadership,” she said.

She credited feminist leaders, spotlighting Asma Jahangir of Pakistan and UN Women’s Regional Goodwill Ambassador for Africa Jaha Dukureh of the Gambia for their powerful work.

She pointed out that healthy societies have a mix of voices that provide checks and balances – important for good decision-making – and saluted those who speak out for justice.

“We commend the women who spoke out in the International Criminal Court where their testimonies have held to account those who used rape as a weapon of war,” Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka asserted.

“We celebrate activists who campaigned for equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people, and we recognize those who advocated for legal reform,” she added.

The feminist movement must continue to increase its diversity to support and shape the agenda – including young men and boys, who will learn to value and respect women and girls and change the way men behave.

Recognizing the power of stereotypes to influence how people are valued, she held sway that a movement of women that can address these issues is critical, “but we also need a movement of male feminists” as a means to alter the way women are heard and seen.

“Today’s activists must empower those most likely to be left behind, the majority of whom are women, as our latest report, [Turning Promises into Action](#) reveals,” she said.

She encouraged stronger support for women’s political activism and a broader space for their civil society voices as a combined effort will better target those who need change most.

“The culture of gender-based poverty, abuse and exploitation has to end with a new generation of equality that lasts,” Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka concluded.

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## Women's prospects at work still 'a long way' from being equal to men's – UN report

Despite notable progress on closing gender gaps over the past 20 years, women have less access to jobs, are more likely to take low-quality employment, and face barriers to management positions, a United Nations labor report has found.

The women's labour force participation rate worldwide stands at 48.5 per cent in 2018, 26.5 percentage points below that of their male counterparts, according to the [World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for Women 2018 – Global snapshot](#), released Wednesday on the eve of [International Women's Day](#).

The report, authored by the UN International Labour Organization (ILO), also shows that the global unemployment rate for women is six per cent for 2018, about 0.8 percentage points higher than that for men.

Altogether, for every 10 men in a job, only six women are employed.

"Despite the progress achieved and the commitments made to further improvement, women's prospects in the world of work are still a long way from being equal to men's," said Deborah Greenfield, ILO Deputy Director-General for Policies.

"Whether it is about access to employment, wage inequality or other forms of discrimination, we need to do more to reverse this persistent, unacceptable trend by putting in place policies tailored to women, also taking into account the unequal demands that they face in household and care responsibilities," she added.

In regions such as the Arab States and Northern Africa, female unemployment rates are still twice as large as men's, with prevailing social norms continuing to obstruct women's participation in paid employment.

However, women in Eastern Europe and North America register lower unemployment rates than men.

Women also face significant gaps in the quality of the employment they are in. They are more than twice as likely to be contributing family workers. This means that they contribute to a market-oriented family business, but are often subject to vulnerable conditions of employment without written contracts, collective agreements and respect for labour legislation.

As a result, women are still overrepresented in informal employment in



developing countries.

The report notes that globally, four times as many men are working as employers than women in 2018. Women continue to face barriers in accessing management positions.

“Closing gender gaps in the world of work thus should remain a top priority if we want to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030,” concluded Damian Grimshaw, Director of the ILO Research Department.