

Intensifying international support for the peace process in Afghanistan

Thank you, Madam President, and thank you for convening this very important and timely meeting. May I, as others have done, extend my thanks to Special Representative SRS G Lyons for her expert briefing and also add my thanks to Executive Director Waly and Executive Director Akrami. And it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the presence of my dear friend, Hanif Atmar, the Foreign Minister of Afghanistan.

On 12 September, Madam President, Afghanistan took a significant first step on the road to peace, with the start of the peace negotiations in Doha.

However, progress has been desperately slow, and Afghanistan continues to suffer from debilitating levels of violence, against a backdrop of humanitarian needs exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As NATO's Resolute Support Mission comes to an end, I want to make it clear from the outset that the United Kingdom remains fully committed to Afghanistan and its people.

We will continue our enduring partnership with the Government of Afghanistan through our diplomacy and our development support, and we will continue to back its efforts to counter terrorism, with support for the security sector.

As we've already heard from colleagues at the UN Security Council, it is without a doubt true that if Afghanistan is to become the peaceful, prosperous and stable country that the Afghan people want and truly deserve, it is vital that the entire international community, including this UN Security Council, intensifies our support for the country.

Madam President, today I want to emphasise three key points.

Firstly, the United Kingdom condemns, in the strongest possible terms, the unacceptable levels of violence that innocent Afghans continue to suffer.

We are truly sickened by the ongoing spate of targeted assassinations – terror attacks on state officials, on civil society activists, on journalists, on humanitarian and healthcare workers, as well as women in prominent positions and yes, tragically, recently, on the HALO Trust, who were going about clearing mines from the lands of Afghanistan. They are heinous attacks and they undermine efforts to build peace.

Let us also be clear. The Taliban are responsible for most of the violence across Afghanistan, and it is therefore vital that we continue to leave them in no doubt: if the Taliban want a part in Afghanistan's future and the international community, then they must end violence and end violence now, whilst respecting the rights of the people of Afghanistan – girls and boys, men and women, of all communities of Afghanistan.

Secondly, the United Kingdom wants to work with our partners, with all of you, to energise the Afghan peace negotiations. As we've already heard in the call of SRSg Lyons, only a negotiated and inclusive settlement will ultimately bring about sustainable peace. And let us also be equally clear that the direct involvement of women in the peace process is not a choice. It is a must.

So the Taliban must engage meaningfully in peace talks and work towards a political settlement that protects the progress made in the country, including protections for women and minority groups. There can be no return to the intolerant and barbaric Emirate of the 1990's.

And in this respect, the UN has a pivotal and important role to play. The United Kingdom would welcome an enhanced UN role in the peace process, including in facilitating talks if all parties agree. And we are pleased to see Jean Arnault take up his role as the Secretary General's Personal Envoy. We are confident that the Special Envoy can build on the strong foundations laid by SRSg Lyons, and that together you can both help create the space and the opportunity for negotiations to progress.

Finally, we look forward to working with Council members on UNAMA's mandate renewal in September. The UK will support the continuation of UNAMA's role leading and coordinating international civilian efforts in Afghanistan.

The mandate must also give full scope to continue to support the Government and the people of Afghanistan on the road to peace.

Madam President, we are in no doubt about the immense challenges that continue to lie ahead for Afghanistan and the citizens of Afghanistan, but we remain hopeful that, inshallah, Afghanistan can become a more stable, peaceful and prosperous nation – a nation that respects the rights of all Afghans, a nation that respects the rights of all women, of all minorities, of all communities of Afghanistan.

This is a noble goal, but the right ambition to have. And I pledge, on behalf of the United Kingdom, that we stand ready to work with all of you towards the achievement of that goal.

Thank you, Madam President.