

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.”