

Speech: “Afghanistan needs to be united now more than ever. Afghanistan needs to be looking to the future in hope, not in fear.”

Thank you Mr President.

Let me join others in welcoming Special Representative Yamamoto back to the Council. At the outset I'd like to reiterate the UK's full support for him and for the vital work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

Sadly, as he and the Ambassador from Afghanistan have made clear, these are trying times for Afghanistan. The horrific truck bomb three weeks ago in Kabul was a stark reminder of the threat that ordinary Afghans face as they go about their daily, peaceful lives.

It's a threat that we read about, that we watch on the news, or hear about in this Chamber. And yet, the proximity of the attack to the British Embassy and other diplomatic missions in Kabul really brought home to us the barbarity of those who seek to terrorise Afghanistan. And sadly, Mr President, it was once again the innocent Afghan men, women and children who bore the terrible toll of this attack.

In response to this horrific tide of violence, the United Kingdom stands in solidarity with the people, the government and the armed forces of Afghanistan. We stand in solidarity, knowing what it means to endure terror in our streets, knowing what it means to stand up to those who seek to divide us.

And whether in the streets of Kabul, or of Manchester or London, our message must be clear and unwavering; enough is enough. These attacks must come to an end. All support to those who commit such terrible acts must come to an end.

For Afghanistan, this means the region working together to create the conditions for a more stable future for Afghanistan. It means continuing to prioritise an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process; one that leads to a political settlement that ends the violence.

It means acknowledging the successes the Afghan government has made in such challenging circumstances. And it means Afghans working together to protect these gains in the face of such huge challenges.

Because, Mr President, Afghanistan needs to be united now more than ever. Afghanistan needs to be looking to the future in hope, not in fear. The people of Afghanistan need to feel they have a stake in that future.

We believe that holding parliamentary elections, based on a credible and

realistic timeline, would be an important step towards creating that stake, towards creating broader political inclusion. The setting of a date would be good news and should act as a catalyst for the necessary reforms to be undertaken and processes to be put in place with due speed to ensure that elections are free, fair and transparent.

We welcome President Ghani's work to reshape and reenergise his government's efforts in pursuit of peace. As the tragic events in Kabul remind us, now is the time for action – for implementation of the structures and the processes that will bring progress on this daunting but essential issue.

Afghans from across the country, its ethnic groups, and its socio-economic divides have a stake in this process and need to be embraced and included in pursuit of a national consensus on peace. We encourage meaningful dialogue with all sections of society including women and girls.

In all this the UK believes the UN has a crucial role to play; whether by helping ensure the rights of Afghan people are protected and upheld or by supporting the Kabul Process and its vital work building a regional consensus on peace. I want to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his role in facilitating the launch of the Kabul Process earlier this month. This was the first step in a long journey that will need to emphasise both the security and the political tracks, and which will require energy and commitment from all of us to sustain, including from the United Nations.

As such, we look forward to the outcome of the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. UNAMA is at the heart of the international community's work on Afghanistan. It is more important now than ever that the mission is properly configured and empowered to deliver the maximum effect on the issues that are so crucial for Afghanistan's future, whether its efforts to support the government's pursuit of peace or its work to uphold the human rights of the people of Afghanistan.

Thank you.