

Speech: Call for the Need to Protect Women's Rights in Afghanistan

Thank you Madame President,

I would like to pay tribute to my Dutch colleagues for their tireless efforts to reach a consensus on this important resolution.

I would also like to thank all our briefers, and the Special Representative of the Secretary General, Ambassador Yamamoto, for his briefing and for his and his team's continued efforts in challenging circumstances.

Madame President,

I am delighted to share the chamber with so many women on International Women's Day. I am especially pleased that we are discussing Afghanistan today, as I had the privilege to spend several years in Afghanistan, working to support education for Afghan girls, and a future in Parliament for Afghan women. As Ms Safi and Dr. Sarabi have demonstrated in their briefings, and their own impressive work, women have a vital role to play in securing Afghanistan's future and we should all stand beside them.

Afghanistan cannot find a lasting peace with only half its population. The UN must maintain a strong role in promoting and protecting the rights of women across Afghanistan, and continue to support the Afghan Government to implement its National Action Plan for women, peace and security. Ensuring accountability and equal access to justice for all are essential to long-term peace and stability. We welcome the adoption of Afghanistan's revised penal code and the clarity it brings. We encourage the Government of Afghanistan to ensure its full implementation in line with the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women which we hope will continue to be used to guarantee Afghan women the protection and accountability they deserve.

Madame President,

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan is an essential mechanism to support Afghanistan's recovery from conflict. The continued presence of UNAMA, and the resolve, resourcefulness and skill, with which its staff support the Afghan people, are a strong signal of the international community's commitment.

The United Kingdom welcomes the Secretary-General's decision to host a Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan in Geneva on the 28th of November.

Implementing the findings of the strategic review and the Secretary General's report of August 2017 will allow UNAMA to be as efficient as possible and to adapt as circumstances change. I am pleased to see that this is reflected in the resolution before us today and I hope it will send a strong signal to the Mission's hardworking personnel that we fully support them.

Madame President,

UNAMA's mandate to support peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan remains at the core of the mission. This will only be delivered sustainably through a credible, inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political process, where all Afghan citizens, whatever their background, can resolve grievances through dialogue.

Of course, for peace to be sustainable it must be inclusive. The strong focus on the involvement of women in peace and security in this Mandate renewal is particularly welcome. With inclusiveness in mind, we highly commend the bold offer laid out by President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah and Afghanistan's National Unity Government at the recent Kabul Process for Peace and Security meeting. We welcome the credibility, flexibility and openness of this offer, which gives the Taliban the opportunity to be part of a political process towards peace. While the Council was not able to reflect these recent developments in the Mandate renewal, I hope that we will find another opportunity to endorse it and lend our full support to these Afghan-led efforts.

Finally, the UN must play a strong role in supporting free and fair elections. Elections, both this year and next, are an opportunity for the nation to communicate their aspirations to the political parties. These elections are a crucial point at which political trust can be renewed and stability forged. We commend the progress made by Afghanistan's Independent Electoral Commission towards electoral reform, and we encourage them to redouble their efforts to ensure that voter registration is completed according to an agreed timeline. We hope that UNAMA will support these efforts fully.

Madame President,

In conclusion, we fully support UNAMA and we welcome the renewal of its mandate today. As a Council, we have collectively endorsed the importance of inclusion, including of women, and of upholding and promoting human rights. We call on all parties to engage meaningfully in a political process to bring lasting peace and stability to the people of Afghanistan.

Thank you very much.