

Speech: Looking to the new year for progress to peace in Afghanistan

Thank you to the SRSG for his latest report and also to Mr Fedotov and to Ambassador Umarov for their briefings today. And thank you also, may I join other colleagues in thanking Ms Ghizaal Haress for her insights into the elections process and it's very helpful as others have said to have you here as we discuss this important issue.

Mr President I'd like to start by congratulating every Afghan who participated in October's Parliamentary elections in the face of violence and intimidation. I think they show what the Afghan Representative said but also say what the Dutch Representative said; there is a new generation of Afghans knocking on the door of a new Afghanistan. Peace needs to be durable and it needs to increase political, social and economic opportunities for every Afghan as the Afghan Ambassador makes clear. And I think that's a message that the Taliban need to hear loud and clear from all members of this Council because they live in an Afghanistan of the past and they live in an Afghanistan that no one wants to see return, and I think the Council can really help make that message understood and make it loud and clear.

And we call to that end Mr President, we do call on the Taliban to recognise that in the election the wishes of Afghans from across the country to have a say in their country's future and their strong desire for a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan have come through loud and clearly. In contrast we are forced once again to condemn the intimidation and condemn the attacks on civilians.

A number of speakers Mr President have looked forward to next year's presidential elections. It's important that the Afghan people get the transparent and credible presidential elections that they deserve next year. And there are I think, as today's debate and the report have shown, there are a number of technical and operational challenges that affect the election and which need to be ironed out, lessons learned and the necessary reforms implemented so that these issues are resolved before the next presidential elections. And I wanted in this context to welcome UNAMA's support for these efforts and their work to capture lessons learned. And as part of that process, can I urge the Mission to consider what more UNAMA could do and what additional resources UNAMA needs to strengthen support ahead of 2019 elections? And we would welcome Mr President, could I, through you, ask for an update from the UN on this issue in the new year?

Turning to peace, recent developments including the efforts of the new US Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation Ambassador Khalilzad who I used to know in this Chamber. His appointment, the creation of a High Advisory Board for Peace and the announcement of an official Afghanistan negotiation team offer a real opportunity to move the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process forward. And to give it the best chance of success, it's vital that all other peace efforts underpin Afghan efforts in a way that

reinforces the indigenous progress. And can I say that only any parallel process will simply risk undermining progress and empowering the Taliban. And I think the recent GA resolution on Afghanistan made clear that Member States in the UN want the efforts to be driven by Afghanistan and want all other efforts to reinforce the Afghan government's efforts in this respect. And it's critical that the international community gives that its full support. It's also critical that the countries in the region give it their full support.

I wanted to take a moment to commend the efforts of President Ghani and his government so far and to encourage them, as other speakers have said Mr President, to focus on inclusivity, particularly of women and youth and ensuring engagement at community levels in electoral and peace processes. And I think what Ms Haress said about women's rights and human rights is absolutely vital in this connection. It's important that we think about how we might approach supporting Afghanistan's reform and development after any peace settlement even if it seems today some time away. And today's briefing by Ambassador Umarov on the 1988 Sanctions Committee reminds us of the important role sanctions play in the pursuit of peace. But for a sanctions regime to be credible and effective it's essential that relevant procedures are followed at all times and in particular any requests for travel ban exemptions need to be submitted in a timely manner.

Others have mentioned the humanitarian situation. We join them in worrying very much about the dire situation and the food insecurity issue should only add impetus to the peace process. We call on all partners to do more, not just to respond to the current crises – particularly the ongoing drought – but to help strengthen the resilience of Afghanistan's most vulnerable people in the long term.

Mr President, I think we all know 2019 will be a critical year for Afghanistan and has a significant opportunity for progress on her path to peace and democracy. The United Kingdom is fully committed to supporting the Special Representative UN Mission in Afghanistan and the Afghan government to continue their important work to help the Afghan people, to help the government and to help the peace process.

Thank you.