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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Tirumurti	(India)
<i>Members:</i>	China	Mr. Dai Bing
	Estonia	Mr. Lipand
	France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
	Ireland	Mr. Flynn
	Kenya	Mr. Kiboino
	Mexico	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
	Niger	Mr. Aougi
	Norway	Mr. Kvalheim
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. King
	Tunisia	Mr. Ladeb
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis
	Viet Nam	Mr. Dang

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Afghanistan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Deborah Lyons, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; and Ms. Shaharзад Akbar, Chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Ms. Lyons.

Ms. Lyons: I am extremely grateful for the opportunity of this special meeting on Afghanistan and the opportunity to brief the Security Council today. It is particularly important because Afghanistan is now at a dangerous turning point. Ahead lies either a genuine peace negotiation or a tragically intertwined set of crises: an increasingly brutal conflict combined with an acute humanitarian situation and multiplying human rights abuses.

Today we have an opportunity — an opportunity to demonstrate the commitment of the Security Council and the regional and international community that it represents to prevent Afghanistan from descending into a situation of catastrophe so serious that it would have few, if any, parallels in this century. Let me assure the Council that such a catastrophe would have consequences far beyond the borders of Afghanistan. I believe that the Security Council and the broader international community can help prevent the direst scenarios. But that will require acting in unity and acting quickly. It will require acting.

In the past weeks, the war in Afghanistan has entered a new, deadlier and more destructive phase. The Taliban campaign during June and July to capture rural areas has achieved significant territorial gains.

From that strengthened position they have begun to attack the larger cities. The provincial capitals of Kandahar, Herat and Lashkar Gah in particular have come under significant pressure. That is a clear attempt by the Taliban to seize urban centres with the force of arms. The human toll of that strategy is extremely distressing, and the political message is even more deeply disturbing.

Regarding the human toll, let me provide some evidence. Fighting has been especially severe in Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand province. Since 28 July, just a mere 10 days ago, at least 104 civilians have been killed and 403 wounded, as registered by the two main hospitals. Ground engagements and air strikes are causing most of the civilian harm. All roads leading to and going out of the city are closed by the Taliban. Hospitals have nearly reached full capacity and can no longer accept patients. The available food supply in the city is fast diminishing, which raises the possibility of an acute food shortage in the coming days as well as a shortage of medical supplies. In Kandahar, since the start of the offensive there, on 9 July, a month ago, more than 460 civilian casualties have been registered. Further to the west, in and around Herat, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has credible reports of more than 135 civilian casualties from the onset of the Taliban offensive. Let me quickly summarize that just in these three cases, I am talking of more than 1,000 casualties just in this last month.

In addition, homes, hospitals, shops, bridges and other infrastructure are being destroyed. In that dire situation, the United Nations and humanitarian partners continue to be present to assess, of course, the needs and, where possible, to deliver assistance where we have the access. But that is becoming increasingly difficult.

This is now a different kind of war, reminiscent of Syria recently or Sarajevo in the not-so-distant past. To attack urban areas is to knowingly inflict enormous harm and cause massive civilian casualties. Nonetheless, the threatening of large urban areas appears to be a strategic decision by the Taliban, who have accepted the likely carnage that will ensue. The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces are defending those cities. But that defence will also undoubtedly cause civilian casualties. Urban warfare will also inflict daily miseries when basic infrastructure such as electricity and water networks are damaged. These tactics may amount to a serious violation of international humanitarian law for which

individuals can be held accountable and may quickly amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The suffering caused by war comes on top of an already increasing humanitarian crisis, with severe drought affecting the country. Indeed, 18.5 million people, or nearly half of the country's population, are in need of humanitarian assistance. And yet, in the meantime, attacks on aid workers continue, with more than 25 aid workers killed and more than 60 injured in just the first six months of this year.

For the past three years, the members of the international community, including members of the Council and UNAMA, have dealt with the Taliban as a potential partner for peace. We have had numerous discussions with their political representatives in Doha aimed at ending the conflict and finding a true political consensus. Many of us have done this with some reservations but with relentless hope for the Afghan people. We have accepted this in the name of the peace that ordinary Afghans desperately need.

The Council will remember that there had been an expectation when the United States-Taliban deal was signed in February 2020 that we would see a reduction of violence. We did not. When the talks between the Afghan Republic and the Taliban began in September of last year, there had been an expectation that we would see a reduction in violence. We have not. There had been an expectation that, when international troops left, we would see a reduction in violence. We did not. Instead, despite significant concessions for peace, we have seen a 50 per cent increase in civilian casualties, with the certainty of many more as cities are attacked. There is a striking contrast between the activity on the battlefield and the quiet stalemate at the negotiating table in Doha, where we should be seeing the opposite — quiet on the battlefield and engagement around the negotiating table.

I have focused today on the war against cities because a party that was genuinely committed to a negotiated settlement would not risk so many civilian casualties, because it would understand that the process of reconciliation will be more challenging the more blood is shed. It would also recognize that it cannot risk the destruction of infrastructure that would be badly needed to rebuild the country once an agreement was reached. It should be made clear to the Taliban Political Commission that the exemptions to the travel ban and the high protocol with which they have been

received by many countries were in fact predicated on a commitment to, and progress in, the peace process.

What is reportedly happening in areas under Taliban control is also of great concern to us. It is heartbreaking to hear, for example, reports of summary executions, beatings and a clampdown on media. Radio stations in particular have stopped broadcasting. We also hear the fears voiced to UNAMA by many Afghan women. They tell us that they fear they will be killed if the Taliban return to power simply because they worked for the Government or a non-governmental organization. They fear they will not be able to access medical or educational services. These are the real concerns of people who are close to the edges of the Taliban advance.

Let me be clear, because I know that the Taliban also pay attention to what we say in these meetings — I am reporting comments that have been expressed directly to us, not incidents we have been able to fully confirm. We have also seen Taliban denials. But these reports that we are receiving from ordinary Afghans throughout the country are so consistent, uniform and urgent that we simply cannot wait for them to be proven before bringing them to the Council's attention. I would add that these fears seem also to be corroborated by the large numbers of people seeking to leave Afghanistan. We expect both irregular and legal migration numbers to double this year. This increase, logically, must either be a response to the prospect of greater conflict or the desire to not live under Taliban governance.

In speaking to Afghans, the impression I have now is of a population waiting apprehensively for a dark shadow to pass over the bright futures they once imagined. It is difficult for me to describe the mood of dread we are faced with every day. As one Afghan put it to us recently,

“We are no longer talking about preserving the progress and the rights we have gained; we are talking about mere survival.”

Another woman told us that she sometimes regrets that she had educated her daughter, as that had put her daughter in a more vulnerable position. For all of us who are parents of daughters, I can hardly think of a more despondent comment.

Afghans face this coming darkness with a sense of being abandoned by the regional and international communities. They expect far greater engagement and

visible support from the Council, which is mandated to maintain international peace and security. In that regard, the 3 August Security Council press statement (SC/14592) condemning the attack against the United Nations office in Herat was greatly appreciated by us for the show of support for UNAMA but, more important, for calling again for an end to the violence and a resumption of a meaningful peace process. This solidarity matters to Afghans. They need to see and hear more of it in actions and in words.

But there are also several important opportunities in the near future where our words and actions could help bring an end to this war. Next week there will be meetings in Doha of a number of the Special Representatives of key countries, including a meeting of the extended troika. And we, of course, will meet here again on 10 September for the regularly scheduled Security Council briefing on Afghanistan.

How can we use these opportunities to address the deteriorating situation that we face?

First, the Security Council must issue an unambiguous statement that attacks against cities must stop now.

Secondly, those countries that meet with the Taliban Political Commission should insist in those meetings on a general ceasefire and a resumption of the negotiations and should reiterate the position of the Security Council and that of the regional and international communities — that a Government imposed by force in Afghanistan will not be recognized.

Thirdly, as I already mentioned, the travel ban exemption on Taliban members exists in order to allow them to travel for the sole purpose of peace negotiations. The exemption is to be renewed on 20 September. Any further extension must be predicated on real progress on peace.

Fourthly, if the Taliban will not agree to the general ceasefire that the Afghans truly require, the Council and those States that meet with them must urge them to grant humanitarian access to areas they control and commit to humanitarian ceasefires in contested areas. At the same time, Member States should contribute to the severely underfunded humanitarian appeal for Afghanistan, which is currently only 30 per cent funded.

Fifthly, we need to put on notice the architects and perpetrators of the most serious violations of human rights. UNAMA strongly supports greater

efforts by the United Nations and the regional and international communities to find ways to hold the perpetrators accountable.

Sixthly, the Council should give serious consideration to providing the United Nations with a mandate that allows it to play — if requested by both parties — a greater role in facilitating the negotiations.

We will meet again to discuss Afghanistan in a little over a month. But we cannot wait. These next weeks will be decisive, but I am absolutely convinced that whatever happens on the battlefield — whether the Taliban take additional cities or whether the Government regains districts — the result will only prolong Afghanistan's agony. We, as the members of the regional and international communities so well represented here by the Council, must put aside our own differences on the question of Afghanistan and send a strong signal — not only in our public statements but also in our bilateral communications to both parties — that it is essential to stop fighting and negotiate, in that order. Otherwise, there may be nothing left to win.

I again thank the Council for this opportunity. The people of Afghanistan are listening.

The President: I thank Ms. Lyons for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Akbar.

Ms. Akbar: I thank you, Mr. President, for giving me this opportunity to address the Security Council. I would like to thank India, the President of the Security Council, and the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan for inviting me to provide a briefing about the ongoing conflict and the violations of international humanitarian law in Afghanistan. I know many Afghans across Afghanistan are waiting to hear the message and outcome of today's special meeting of the Council, as Afghan cities and villages burn in conflict; civilians experience extreme levels of harm and tens of thousands of families are displaced.

Since June 2019, this is the third time I have had the honour of addressing the Council. Each time, the situation in Afghanistan is more critical than before. The situation today could not be more urgent. The first six months of 2021 were the bloodiest six months for Afghan civilians since the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission started recording in 2009. Some 1,677 civilians, including women and children, were killed and 3,644 injured during that period. If the current rates of violence continue, I am heartbroken to

note that there might be a grim new record of civilian harm by the end of this year. With districts and now a provincial city falling to the Taliban, millions of Afghans are waiting in terror to see what comes next. Women, in particular, remember the past and present abuses of the Taliban against their freedoms and their persons, and dread what is to come. As the Council knows, many are joining the ranks of those trying to flee the worsening storm.

Taliban advances and an escalation of violence have meant that we in the Commission are verifying details of horrific war crimes on a daily basis. Let me give three examples from our work in recent weeks.

In Spin Boldak, Kandahar, our findings confirm that the Taliban dragged out and killed at least 40 civilians associated with the Government in a campaign of targeted, extrajudicial killings. Following media and human rights reporting, the Taliban imposed strict restrictions and would investigate people traveling to and from Spin Boldak to prevent full documentation of those atrocities.

In Malistan, Ghazni province, we can confirm that at least 27 civilians have been murdered in targeted killings by the Taliban. In one instance, the Taliban sought the help of an unarmed guard to move the bodies of civilians and then killed the guard in an attempt to remove eyewitnesses.

Meanwhile, in Helmand, as I speak to the Council now, residents of Lashkar Gah are stuck between Taliban attacks and Government air strikes, fearing for their lives every minute and deprived of access to their basic rights.

Again, as I speak to the Council today, I am mourning another attack on Afghanistan's young people. Dawa Khan Menapal, a Government official working on communications and a man known for his poetry, humour and generosity, was shot in broad daylight in Kabul today. That served as a chilling reminder to all civilian Government employees, as well as journalists and human rights defenders, of the frequency of targeted killings in the midst of the raging war. It is also a brutal reminder of the Taliban's refusal to acknowledge Government employees as civilians, as they continue to target and kill them in Kabul, Kandahar and Ghazni and across Afghanistan.

The ongoing storm of atrocities has already cost lives and has spread widespread terror and uncertainty, taking us further away from the possibility of peace.

In addition to daily violations of the laws of conflict, Afghanistan's human rights gains are under attack and rapidly shrinking as the conflict expands. One major and deeply concerning example is the rights of women and girls in areas captured by the Taliban. Women's access to education, markets and basic health services is limited and shrinking. Their basic human rights are being denied and repressed. Afghan women across Afghanistan are either reliving the nightmare of the Taliban era or living in the fear and trauma of soon reliving it if the tide does not turn and we do not get the opportunity to hold negotiations and participate meaningfully in them.

The situation is equally concerning regarding access to information and freedom of expression. With the media under pressure from both sides to the conflict, independent media in different provinces are shutting down as more districts fall to the Taliban. In that context, it is important to reiterate to the Afghan Government its obligations to protect independent media, freedom of expression and all fundamental human rights. As I said earlier, if the violence continues, much worse is to come for Afghans and, subsequently, for the region and the world.

But the violence need not continue. The Council and its members still have the leverage to stop the bloodshed of Afghans and prevent catastrophes. The Council can save lives. We will need the Council to utilize the full range of political, diplomatic, human rights and humanitarian tools and interventions at its disposal to save lives and prevent further horrific atrocities. We urge the Council, the United Nations and international human rights mechanisms to respond with a greater sense of urgency to the Afghan calls for civilian protection, a ceasefire, an end to the violence and a meaningful and inclusive political process.

Following the horrific attack on a girls' school in Kabul on 8 May, the Commission called for a fact-finding mission to investigate the targeted killings of civilians in Afghanistan. In July, international and national human rights organizations urged the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Michelle Bachelet, to take action to support that call. In her public statement to the Human Rights Council, the High Commissioner noted the deterioration of the

situation and called for a preventive mechanism to be established. The European Parliament also expressed its support. The Afghan Government has now called for a special session of the Human Rights Council and a fact-finding mission. We support that request to recognize the urgency of the situation and to act now.

Some of the most important things that a fact-finding mission would offer the Afghan people include acting as a preventive mechanism and highlighting the urgency of the threat to civilians, including femicide, massacres of religious and ethnic minorities, threats to girls' education and targeted killings of human rights defenders. It would also keep victims and civilians centre-stage as Afghanistan heads towards a human rights and humanitarian crisis post-withdrawal, while establishing the facts, identifying perpetrators and preserving evidence with a view to ensuring accountability. A fact-finding mission could also propose remedies for victims, as well as effective prevention mechanisms.

My family and I sought refuge in Pakistan when I was a child, escaping the conflict and the Taliban's repressive regime. Some 24 years later, millions of Afghans are looking for a way out of Afghanistan as they do not see a future there. We cannot wait and watch as history repeats itself. I apologize if my remarks today were lengthy, repetitive or less than coherent, as I address the Council exhausted and in mourning, hoping that this time, speaking to this forum will make a difference. Afghans are watching, amid fear and despair, to see whether the Council and the international community will do all they can to revive our hope in peace.

The President: I thank Ms. Akbar for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Isaczai (Afghanistan): I am honoured to make this statement on behalf of my Foreign Minister, His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Haneef Atmar, who very much wanted to be here with everyone but could not travel to New York, owing to such short notice.

Allow me first to congratulate India on assuming the presidency of the Security Council and to commend France for successfully completing its term. I would also like to thank the Governments of India and of Norway and Estonia, as the co-penholders, and the rest of the Security Council members in responding

positively to our request to brief the Council about the alarming developments in Afghanistan.

This meeting also highlights the Security Council's commitment to ensuring that the people of Afghanistan are able to live in peace, security and dignity, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In that regard, I should like to welcome the Security Council press statement of 3 August (SC/14592), condemning the terrorist attack on the United Nations compound in Herat and the recent increase in the level of violence in the country. Let me also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Lyons for her thorough briefing and for highlighting the alarming threat and serious concern about the situation in Afghanistan.

We were compelled to ask for this urgent meeting, as the situation in Afghanistan has been rapidly deteriorating owing to the recent escalation of violence by the Taliban and its brutal military offensives on major cities and population centres in several provinces. In gross contravention of the Doha peace agreement, resolution 2513 (2020) and the regional and international consensus embodied in the joint statement of the extended troika of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process Ministerial Meeting, the Taliban have launched brutal military offensives that have already caused mass death, destruction, displacement and instability in Afghanistan and beyond.

Even more alarming are their attacks on cities, including Kandahar, Herat, Lashkar Gah, Ghazni, Sheberghan and Zaranj yesterday, as was just confirmed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. Millions of people are now vulnerable to indiscriminate shelling, death, injuries, destruction and displacement. Our cities and public infrastructure, which we have rebuilt with the Council's support over the past two decades, are now exposed to unimaginable levels of Taliban destruction.

In that deliberate act of barbarism, the Taliban are not alone. They are assisted by foreign fighters from transnational terrorist networks. Together, they are threatening peace, security and stability not only in Afghanistan but also our region and beyond. It is our collective responsibility to stop them from destroying Afghanistan and threatening the world community.

The scale, scope and timing of the Taliban's military offensive has taken on the dimensions of an invasion unprecedented in the past 30 years of the

conflict. Since mid-April, the Taliban and its affiliate foreign terrorist groups have launched more than 5,500 attacks in 31 of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan. The attacks have been launched with the direct support of more than 10,000 foreign fighters representing 20 groups, including Al-Qaida, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which entered our country and are fighting alongside the Taliban against our population and security forces.

There is mounting evidence that the East Turkestan Islamic Movement and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which have pledged allegiance to ISIL, fought alongside the Taliban in Faryab, Jowzjan, Takhar and Badakhshan provinces, where they are currently present with their families under the Taliban control.

The link between the Taliban and those transnational terrorist groups is stronger today than at any point in recent times. Just as indicated numerous times by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), pertaining to Afghanistan and the Taliban, the Taliban, contrary to their commitments under the Doha agreement, has not broken its ties with regional and international terrorist organizations.

In fact, those links are unbreakable, as they have been cultivated and built on shared ideology, interests, goals and intermarriage that have been translated into joint attacks and logistical and material support. The implications of allowing that network to continue to grow inside the country carry great security risks not only for Afghanistan but also for the wider region and even the world. It is a shared risk and concern for all of us. This is not the Taliban of the twentieth century coming from the isolated madrasas, but the manifestation of the nexus between transnational terrorist networks and transnational criminal organizations.

Their links to drugs, smuggling and the plunder of our natural resources are unprecedented, and those who encourage and participate with them, of course, are the beneficiaries. Therefore, this is not a civil war, but a war of criminalized and terrorist networks fought on the backs of Afghans. Importantly, the Taliban continues to enjoy a safe haven in, and a supply and logistics line extended to its war machine from, Pakistan.

Graphic reports and videos of Taliban fighters congregating close to the Durand Line to enter

Afghanistan, fundraising events, the transfer of dead bodies for mass burial and the treatment of injured Taliban members in Pakistani hospitals are emerging and are widely available. This is not only a flagrant violation of the sanctions regime pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), but also leads to the further erosion of trust and confidence towards establishing a collaborative relationship with Pakistan to end the war in our country.

In keeping with the agreement of the leadership of Afghanistan and Pakistan in Tashkent last month, we urge Pakistan to help with removing and dismantling Taliban sanctuaries and supply lines and establish with us a joint monitoring and verification mechanism to make the fight against terrorism and international efforts for peace effective and credible. Let me reiterate that Afghanistan desires nothing but friendly relations and peaceful coexistence with Pakistan based on mutual respect for each other's sovereignty.

We are alarmed by reports and incidents of gross human rights violations by the Taliban and its foreign terrorist associates in almost half of our country. We are extremely concerned about the safety and security of people in cities under Taliban attacks and about the brutality that awaits them. I am glad that Ms. Shaharзад Akbar, Chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, shed further light on that. But shocking and heart-wrenching images and videos of the Taliban's brutality and cruelty against the civilian population and people suspected of working for the Government and international forces are emerging through social media, which are too graphic to even describe in my statement here.

Suicide bombings, summary executions revenge killings, death by stoning, the chopping of hands, the flogging of children, forced marriages and the restriction of the movement of women and girls are a common occurrence in areas under Taliban control, and are sanctioned by Taliban religious fatwas. Sadly, earlier today, Taliban terrorists killed one of our bravest sons of Afghanistan, Mr. Dawa Khan, who was the head of the Afghan media and communications centre. That is in sharp contrast to the Taliban's claim of moderation and respect for international law and even Sharia law.

Yes, the Taliban has changed, but for the worst. The members of the group have become more violent in their actions, cruel in the treatment of local population, more extremist in their thinking and revengeful against sympathizers of the Government. The imposition of

the Taliban's draconian rule has portrayed no positive change from the ideologies that dominated the thinking of the so-called Islamic Emirate of the 1990s and what is espoused by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and other extremist groups today.

The indiscriminate level of violence exhibited by the Taliban has exacerbated the already dire humanitarian situation in the country, caused by drought and the pandemic. Since the start of their offensive, more than 5,300 civilians, including 1,960 women and children, have been killed or injured, while thousands of others have been displaced. That adds to the burden of approximately 4.8 million people displaced in a country and 18.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. Those numbers could easily increase exponentially if attacks against big population centres and cities continue unabated. Therefore, the Council must act and prevent a catastrophic situation. The fall of 10 border crossings to the Taliban has led to the suspension of trade and a surge in the prices of primary goods, which is further adding to the misery of the population, affected by decades of conflict.

Taliban attacks have also come at a great cost to public infrastructure, signifying losses of millions of dollars and years of development investments. During this period, the Taliban has destroyed more than 260 public buildings, including schools, hospitals, bridges and communications towers. The Taliban's destruction of public and private infrastructure has deprived more than 13 million people of public services and has amounted to more than \$500 million in damage.

We are confident in the bravery and professionalism of our national defence and security forces to defend the Republic, which is the manifestation of our values and determination to fight for our homeland and for the future of our children. In recent days, we have witnessed an immense demonstration of support from Afghans, within and outside the country, for our security forces. Our defence of the Islamic Republic has turned into a national resistance movement and our people have loudly declared that they do not want to go back to the Taliban's dark era of 1990s.

Peace has been the most urgent need and demand of the Afghan people and achieving peace is the highest priority for the Afghan Government. To realize that, President Ghani has repeatedly called on the Taliban to adhere to a ceasefire and engage in meaningful negotiations. To support the peace talks, my Government

has offered a peace plan and made painful concessions, including the release of more than 6,000 prisoners, most of whom have returned to battlefields. However, the Taliban continues to defy and ignore the call of the international community and, more specifically, of the Council to cease hostilities towards our people and engage in meaningful peaceful talks.

As the departure of foreign troops from Afghanistan has almost been completed, it clearly shows that the Taliban and its foreign associates are fighting for power to turn our country once again into a safe haven for transnational terrorism, which will, no doubt, pose a threat to the region and the global community.

Against that grim and disturbing situation unfolding in my country, it is high time for the Council to use every means at its disposal to compel the Taliban to end its campaign of violence and terror against our people, prevent further bloodshed and urge the group to return to talks. We ask the Council to use existing tools, including the effective implementation of the sanction's regime under resolution 1988 (2011) and resolution 2513 (2020), to pressure the Taliban to engage in meaningful peace talks with the Government negotiating team. We request the Council to discharge its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations and to take all necessary measures to stop the Taliban's attacks on big cities and population centres.

Currently, the six cities of Herat, Lashkar Gah, Kandahar, Ghazni, Zaranj and Sheberghan are under Taliban attack and soon other cities, including Kabul, will be targeted. We ask the Council and call on the international community to take preventive measures, including the convening of a special session of the Security Council and the Human Rights Council, to avert a catastrophic situation of human rights violations and the large-scale displacement of the civilian population, which we have witnessed in the Middle East and in other conflicts around the world.

We have an opportunity to stop this now. We would like to request the Council and the Secretary-General to provide support to the ongoing peace talks in Doha and the regional and international meetings planned next week in Doha to achieve the goals of preventing Taliban attacks on cities and of reaching a political settlement and ceasefire.

We appreciate and support the role of the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy on Afghanistan, Mr. Jean Arnault, and Special Representative of the Secretary-

General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Ms. Deborah Lyons.

We call on our friends and partners to support our Government's new security plan to stabilize Afghanistan and protect the region and the international community against the scourge of international terrorism.

In conclusion, I would like to express my appreciation for the steadfast support of the members of the Security Council and their principled positions in difficult times for Afghanistan. I hope that today's discussions will not only contribute to the peace efforts under way in Doha but also send a strong message to the Taliban about the Council's determination to hold them accountable to their commitment and promises in finding a peaceful solution to the current conflict.

The President: I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Kvalheim (Norway): We are appalled by the assassination today of the Director of Afghanistan's media and information centre and express our condolences to his loved ones. There should be no impunity for that horrendous crime.

It is indeed timely that we meet today, and we thank you, Sir, for convening this meeting. I also thank Ambassador Isaczai, Ms. Akbar and Special Representative Lyons for their comprehensive and, I must say, deeply worrying briefings.

Let me express our appreciation for all United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) staff as they continue their difficult and dangerous work. The Council condemns the deplorable attack on the UNAMA offices in Herat on 30 July. We remain extremely concerned by the significant and increased loss of life, injury and displacement across Afghanistan in recent weeks.

Let me be clear — the worrying deterioration of the situation has come about largely as a result of the Taliban's military offensive against district capitals and, more recently, against three provincial capitals in the west and south of the country. Those attacks are completely unacceptable. The Taliban must immediately end their ongoing military offensive. The recently reported abuses by the Taliban, including the execution of civilians in so-called revenge killings and the execution of prisoners of war, must stop. Some of those abuses may constitute war crimes and we condemn such acts unequivocally.

We are also seriously concerned by reported violations by members of the Afghan national security and defence forces. The importance of ending all violence and protecting civilians, especially children, cannot be overemphasized. Moreover, the targeting of human rights defenders and media workers is unacceptable and must stop. All parties must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law. Safe and unhindered humanitarian access remains crucial to protect and assist people in need. All allegations of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law must be investigated and perpetrators brought to justice.

There is no acceptable alternative to an inclusive, just and realistic political settlement, as the Council underscored in its press statement of 3 August. We all share a responsibility to put effective political and diplomatic pressure on the Taliban to engage in negotiations. We must make it clear that the pursuit of victory and establishment of a new Government by military force will not be accepted and that no one in the international community would support such a Government. Any political solution acceptable to the international community must uphold human rights for all, in particular women and girls.

While there is positive complementarity between the different formats supporting the peace process, including the United States and Europe meetings and what is known as the extended troika, it could also make a significant positive difference if the key international and regional stakeholders all joined together in one format to coordinate efforts and align messages. We encourage greater flexibility from the relevant capitals to make that possible.

In conclusion, let me say that Norway continues to support a strong role for the United Nations. We see the appointment by the Secretary-General of a Personal Envoy for Afghanistan and Regional Issues as a positive step. As we near the renewal of UNAMA's mandate, we look forward to consulting with all on how we, together, can enable the United Nations to play an even stronger role in supporting the Afghan people's pursuit of a political settlement.

Mr. Lipand (Estonia): I would like to start with by expressing our special thanks to Ms. Akbar and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission for their courageous work despite the current situation in Afghanistan. Hearing today about the deliberate

killings of civilians, including Dawa Khan Menapal, and the mounting civilian casualties was most troubling. I would also like to thank Special Representative Lyons for all her tireless work, in particular on supporting peace talks and on the humanitarian response. Attacks against United Nations personnel and compounds, such as the recent incident in Herat, are utterly reprehensible and may constitute war crimes, the perpetrators of which must be brought to justice. I also welcome the participation today of Ambassador Isaczai of Afghanistan.

Since the start of the ongoing Taliban offensive, in particular the assaults on population centres, the number of civilians killed or injured has reached the highest on record, with the Taliban responsible for the largest share of casualties. Half the population in Afghanistan is now in need of humanitarian aid; yet humanitarian access is shrinking, and humanitarian aid providers are being killed at an alarming rate. That worsening humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, which has been described in detail today, is human-made and could have been averted. Estonia reiterates the call, in particular on the Taliban, for an immediate ceasefire to save the Afghan people from more meaningless suffering. Only a negotiated political solution can lead to a sustainable peace in the country, as well as stability in the region.

The Security Council has been clear in its messaging. The Taliban and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan must meaningfully engage in a comprehensive and inclusive peace process in Doha. Parties must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians. There is no military solution to this conflict, and we do not support the restoration of an Islamic emirate.

I would like to reiterate that Estonia's commitment to the people of Afghanistan remains steadfast. We emphasize the importance of the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the peace process and wish to see that the outcome of the peace process preserves constitutional protections for the rights of women and minorities. We will continue our political and financial support, conditional upon the preservation of the country's human rights and democratic achievements. Any easing or lifting of sanctions must be in line with resolution 2513 (2020). The Taliban must first demonstrate a credible commitment to peace.

Estonia also welcomes the diplomatic efforts in Doha by Afghanistan's neighbours and regional Powers. We encourage intensified coordinated efforts that contribute to a lasting peace in support of the people of Afghanistan. Peace and stability in Afghanistan will provide new opportunities for development and growth for the entire region.

Mr. DeLaurentis (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Lyons and Ms. Shaharзад Akbar for their briefings, which were particularly sobering and important to hear. We also thank Ambassador Isaczai for participating today and for his comments.

The United States strongly condemns the increase in violent attacks in Afghanistan, in particular last week's attack on the compound in Herat of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the suicide bombing targeting the home of Afghanistan's Acting Defence Minister in Kabul. We express our deepest sympathy and condolences to those affected by those heinous attacks. In addition, there are credible reports of attacks and retaliation against civilians in other Taliban-controlled areas.

The alarming rise in violence and civilian casualties caused by the ongoing Taliban military offensives further erodes the advances that the Afghan people made in democracy and the rule of law over the past 20 years. The Taliban must hear from the international community that we will not accept a military takeover of Afghanistan or a return of the Taliban's Islamic emirate. The Taliban will be isolated and an international pariah if they choose that path, which would most certainly push the country to further violence and destruction. To echo the Council's press statement SC/14592, released earlier this week, and the United States-Europe group's 23 July statement, there is no military solution in Afghanistan, and a negotiated, inclusive political settlement through an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process is the only way forward for lasting peace and stability in the country. That process must include the full and meaningful participation of women.

We also recall resolution 2513 (2020), which states that Taliban lack of action to further reduce violence, make sustained efforts to advance intra-Afghan negotiations and otherwise cease to engage in, or support, activities that threaten the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, will affect the Council's review of the status of designations of individuals,

groups, undertakings and entities on the list established and maintained pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011).

We urge the Taliban to immediately halt its offensive, pursue a comprehensive and sustainable political settlement and uphold its commitments to protecting Afghanistan's infrastructure and its people, especially women, girls and other vulnerable populations. We also call on the Taliban to permit humanitarian organizations to continue their vital work in Afghanistan, particularly as the Afghan people suffer acutely from the effects of the coronavirus disease and drought, in addition to the violence.

Let me reiterate that we express our full support for an inclusive Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process, with the full and meaningful participation of women, that leads to a just and durable political settlement. A just and durable political settlement must be based, at a minimum, on the following five principles: first, inclusive governance; secondly, the right of Afghans to elect political leaders; thirdly, protections for human rights, including the rights of women, young people and minorities; fourthly, committing to counter-terrorism, including to ensure that Afghanistan does not again serve as a safe haven for international terrorists; and, fifthly, adherence to international law, including international humanitarian law. We emphasize that international support to any future Government will depend, at least in part, on adherence to those five elements.

It is in the interest of all of Afghanistan's neighbours to renew support for a negotiated settlement that brings the Afghan people the peace that they so urgently deserve and that creates a stable region. We welcome the role that the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy, Jean Arnault, is playing in support of that objective.

In conclusion, I would like to express my appreciation for the efforts taken by partners and allies to maintain international civilian and diplomatic operations in Afghanistan. We are thankful to those that have stepped up in that critical role. As we continue with our military withdrawal from Afghanistan, we want all Afghans to know, as President Biden has stated, that we remain committed to a strong partnership with the country and its people.

United States security assistance continues to Afghan forces, as does our development and humanitarian aid to the Afghan people. We will continue our diplomatic engagement in support of

peace. We urge the Afghans to remain resolute and to know that the international community is behind them.

Mr. Aougi (Niger) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the A3+1, namely, Kenya, Tunisia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and the Niger.

At the outset, I would like to thank Ms. Deborah Lyons, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and Ms. Shaharazad Akbar, Chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, for their briefings on the latest developments in Afghanistan.

The A3+1 reiterates its support for the stabilization efforts and good offices deployed in the quest for a solution to the Afghan crisis, which has been developing in a particularly concerning way recently. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan and thank him for his statement.

Following decades of war, destruction and desolation, the Afghan people today yearn for peace. That yearning is deep-seated, and Afghans demonstrated it by welcoming with great hope the start of the intra-Afghan peace talks in September 2020 in Doha. Unfortunately, those talks are at a standstill, and hostilities are raging throughout the country. The A3+1 stresses that the military option will not lead to a lasting solution acceptable to all Afghan parties. We therefore call on the Taliban and the Afghan Government to immediately cease hostilities in order to give the Doha talks a better chance of success. Moreover, we must redouble our diplomatic efforts at the regional and international levels to help facilitate the restart of the intra-Afghan peace negotiations.

The A3+1 deplores the loss of life and suffering endured by the civilian population as a result of the latest outbreak of violence following the decision of the international forces to leave the country by the end of September. The already precarious humanitarian situation could further worsen with the displacement of populations fleeing the ongoing fighting between the Taliban and Government forces in several provinces of the country, including Kandahar, Helmand and Herat.

We reiterate our condemnation of the attack against the United Nations compound in Herat on 30 July. We also condemn the suicide attacks committed on

4 August in Kabul and call on the warring parties to ensure the protection of civilians and above all put an end to hostilities and accord priority to dialogue.

Afghanistan now more than ever needs the support of the entire international community to help it through this critical period in its history. Afghanistan must not fall back into a full-blown civil war, at the risk of losing all the democratic, social and development gains achieved in recent years. While achieving peace requires a settlement between the parties, we must ensure that the peace process does not legitimize the resort to military interventions or an association with terrorist organizations through political recognition.

As we near the twentieth anniversary of the 11 September attacks, we would recall how the Taliban were removed from power because of their support for Al-Qaida. The Council must now prioritize the creation of incentives and red lines that would compel the Taliban to cease using terrorism for political ends.

We would recall the Council's decision to split the Al-Qaida and Taliban sanctions list in response to the efforts of the Afghan Government to negotiate a peace process with the Taliban and establish national reconciliation in Afghanistan. The goal was to provide a lifeline for those members of the Taliban who renounce violence and disassociate themselves from Al-Qaida. The Council must therefore demand that the Taliban embrace peace, cut its ties with Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, and engage in a peace process that will transform Afghanistan into a peaceful country.

The A3+1 welcomes and fully support the good offices of the United Nations and of the United States, Russia, China and Pakistan troika, as well as the other diplomatic efforts made by neighbouring countries to reduce tensions in order to reach a negotiated solution to the crisis. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that the quest for peace must not be at the expense of the rights of Afghans, in particular those of women and children and Afghan ethnic and religious minorities.

At a time when attention is focused on the deteriorating security situation, the A3+1 would also like to highlight the importance of finding an urgent and sustainable solution to the serious humanitarian crisis that already exists in the country. The effects of decades of conflict, combined with those of climate change and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, have created a situation where more than

a third of the population is now food-insecure, with a large percentage of those affected being children. It is therefore crucial to mobilize the additional resources necessary to address the situation and call on donors to honour the pledges they made in the framework of the Afghan humanitarian plan.

Similarly, the A3+1 is concerned at the fact that the growing insecurity in Afghanistan could hinder the Government's efforts and divert its attention from the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic at a time when more contagious variants of the virus are circulating around the world. We would like to emphasize here that the timely delivery and deployment of vaccines is urgently needed to protect the Afghan population during these challenging times.

In conclusion, the A3+1 suggest that we ask ourselves the following question: what message are we sending if we abandon Afghanistan at a time when the country is on the brink of the abyss? Simply put, letting Afghanistan fall back into chaos could send a signal to terrorists and insurgent groups there and in other parts of the world that they can gain legitimacy and power through the use of force.

We believe that if the Security Council is to truly fulfil its mission of maintaining international peace and security, all possible efforts should be made now to ensure that the main perpetrators of the violence immediately put an end to their offensive and engage resolutely in the quest for a negotiated, inclusive and lasting political solution.

Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We express our gratitude for the briefings delivered by Ms. Lyons and Ms. Akbar and for the statement made by the representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Ghulam M. Isaczai.

As we have heard, the situation in Afghanistan is critical. The recent military advances of the Taliban have had a very serious impact on the people and have made increasing numbers of Afghans wish to flee their country in the face of a future that is, quite frankly, grim.

Mexico deplores the deliberate attacks perpetrated against human rights defenders, humanitarian workers, health-care personnel, the media and minority groups. For that reason, Mexico notes with grave concern the stagnation of the intra-Afghan dialogue in Doha. We express our support for the efforts undertaken

by the international community at the bilateral and multilateral levels to lend new momentum to the peace process and encourage parties to resume dialogue. We will closely follow the outcome of the meeting of the extended troika to be held in the coming days, as well as the efforts of Mr. Jean Arnault, the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy on Afghanistan and Regional Issues.

The international community cannot and must not allow the gains of the past two decades to be lost. The common position must be clear — the rejection of a return to an Islamic emirate that could be a sanctuary once again for terrorist groups and the refusal to accept a territory in which the rights of women, children and minorities are not respected. The future of Afghanistan must be decided democratically by all Afghans and not imposed unilaterally by force.

Mexico recognizes the challenges faced by the Afghan Government, which is tenaciously defending its national project. The resilience of the Afghan people, who continue to fight for an inclusive, democratic and peaceful Afghanistan in the most adverse conditions, is admirable. We recognize the difficulty of achieving dialogue under such adverse circumstances and in a context of severely deteriorating security.

I conclude by acknowledging the delicate and complex work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. I express our support to the Mission in its efforts to coordinate and facilitate humanitarian assistance and to protect and promote the human rights of children affected by the conflict, in particular with respect to the progress made on advancing the women and peace and security agenda, the impacts of which on the empowerment of Afghan women must be preserved.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Ms. Deborah Lyons, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for her thoughts and views. We believe that UNAMA plays an important role in coordinating international efforts in Afghanistan. We listened carefully to the statement and assessment of Ambassador Ghulam M. Isaczkai, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations. We also thank Ms. Shaharzar Akbar, Chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, for her briefing.

The deteriorating situation in Afghanistan is a matter of increasing concern. Against the background

of the withdrawal of foreign troops, the balance of power is cause for concern. We have received horrific reports of an escalation of violence. Civilians, including women and children, are victims of the ongoing conflict on an almost daily basis. Today we learned about the murder of the Head of the Government media and information centre. We would like to express our sincere condolences to the families and the friends of all the innocent civilians killed in Afghanistan.

Domestic political instability in recent years has contributed to the persistent terrorist threat in the country. During this period, Afghanistan saw the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province, whose terrorist attacks continue to roil the country. The militants maintain sleeper cells in the north and east and are bolstering their capacity to increase their influence in the country and to spread their terrorist activities from Afghanistan to the Central Asian region. The production of illicit drugs is also growing at a record pace.

The risk of militants infiltrating the region, including under the guise of being refugees, must cause concern for our Central Asian neighbours. We are in regular contact with all five Central Asian States. As never before, cooperation is proceeding in the framework of regional organizations — the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), including the CSTO Working Group on Afghanistan and the renewed mechanism of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group.

It is clear that there is no military solution to the Afghan situation, but given the lack of progress on the negotiation track, the prospect of Afghanistan sliding into a full-scale and protracted civil war is unfortunately very real. The most important task today, therefore, is the expeditious launch of substantive negotiations.

Russia has done a great deal to launch the process of national reconciliation and direct intra-Afghan dialogue. We continue to work with both sides to that end. On 2 July, we held talks in Moscow with the Afghan delegation, headed by Mr. Hamdullah Mohib, National Security Adviser to the President of Afghanistan, and on 8 and 9 July, we met with a delegation from the Taliban Political Commission. We trust that the upcoming meeting in Doha on 11 August in the troika plus Pakistan format will give an additional impetus to the peace process.

We are convinced that the consolidation of all international and regional efforts is more important than ever. We must do all we can to find sensible compromise solutions that take into account the interests of all ethnic and religious minorities. However, the question of the country's future political composition can be decided only by the Afghan people. In any case, the call to continue to show flexibility — not in words but in deeds — should be directed to all parties. We believe that insisting on mutual recrimination will hardly help achieve that goal.

A united and stable Afghanistan, free from terrorism and illicit drugs, is necessary — not only for the Afghans but also for the entire region. It is the key to Afghanistan's economic development and prosperity.

Mr. Dang (Viet Nam): I thank Special Representative Deborah Lyons and Ms. Shaharзад Akbar for their comprehensive briefings. I welcome the presence of the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan and thank him for his statement. I would like to focus today on four points.

First, we are deeply concerned about the situation on the ground. Violence and civilian casualties have reached the highest levels since the beginning of the year, while intra-Afghan peace negotiations have shown very limited progress. We would like to reiterate our position that there can be no military solution to the current crisis. Sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan can be achieved only through a comprehensive and durable political settlement. In that regard, it is crucial that the relevant parties achieve a permanent ceasefire as soon as possible, thereby putting an end to the ongoing violence and creating an environment conducive to the current peace negotiations.

We also call on the relevant parties to continue to set aside their differences, build confidence and reach a timely political settlement to the conflict, with the full and meaningful participation of Afghan women and youth. We note with appreciation the joint operation between the parties on 18 July to accelerate high-level engagement in order to find a timely solution, and we look forward to seeing practical progress.

Secondly, we strongly condemn the attacks on civilians, including women, children, students, humanitarian workers, civil servants and United Nations personnel, over the past month. Those attacks are unacceptable. We express our deep condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government

and the people of Afghanistan. It is imperative that all relevant parties fully respect international humanitarian law and immediately stop targeting civilians and civilian objects, particularly those that are indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. We strongly condemn the attack on the United Nations compound in Herat on 30 July. The safety and security of United Nations personnel and compounds must be ensured. We also share the concern about the increasing negative impact of the conflict in Afghanistan on the security situation in the region, especially the countries neighbouring Afghanistan. It is therefore equally important to prevent the further exacerbation of that impact and address the related challenges for the sake of peace and stability in the region.

Thirdly, we share the deep concern about the increasingly dire humanitarian situation in the country, which has reached a critical level of food insecurity that affects more than 50 per cent of the population of Afghanistan. We call on the United Nations and regional and international partners to continue to strengthen their humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan in that regard in order to ensure its projected needs are met. At the same time, the international community should continue to support the Government of Afghanistan in promoting socioeconomic development and the reconstruction of the country.

We commend the efforts to improve economic development, livelihood assistance and the health-care system of Afghanistan during these difficult times marked by the coronavirus disease pandemic. We are waiting to see further support for the country in its fight against the pandemic, including with regard to the vaccination process. We also commend the Mine Action Service and its partners for their continued efforts to facilitate mine clearance and risk education activities in Afghanistan.

Fourthly, the support of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and of regional and international partners will remain critical to promoting tangible progress in peace talks. We look forward to the outcome of the upcoming meeting of the extended troika to be held in Doha on 11 August. We also wish to see further collaboration between UNAMA and the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General on Afghanistan and Regional Issues in supporting the peace process.

In conclusion, Viet Nam would like to reiterate its full support for the pursuit of peace, stability and development in Afghanistan. We reaffirm our support for the work of the United Nations, UNAMA and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Lyons.

Mr. Flynn (Ireland): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Deborah Lyons for her deeply worrisome but very important briefing. I also thank Ambassador Ghulam M. Isaczai of Afghanistan for his participation here today. I would like to express my appreciation to Ms. Shaharзад Akbar for addressing the Security Council once again and for her sobering words.

I want to begin by joining others in condemning in the strongest terms the recent attacks in Afghanistan, including on the United Nations compound in Herat last Friday. We also join others in condemning the assassination of Dawa Khan Menapal. Our thoughts are with the families of those killed. We wish those injured a swift recovery.

There is a real urgency to our discussion today. As attested to so powerfully by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Lyons, the Council needs to come together and needs to act. The Afghan people are suffering devastating levels of violence. Afghanistan has been the most dangerous country in the world for civilians and children for some years, but the mid-year report of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) on the protection of civilians has documented record levels of civilian casualties, as Ms. Akbar also highlighted. The scale of the recent violence we have seen against civilians is truly shocking.

The Taliban must end its military offensive, which is causing such suffering, commit to a comprehensive ceasefire and engage constructively in peace negotiations to reach a just and inclusive political settlement. The Doha process has the support of the international community and remains our best hope for achieving the peace that the Afghan people so clearly demand and deserve. We deeply regret the failure of the Taliban to engage meaningfully in talks. We reiterate that there can be no military solution. Violence begets only violence. Nowhere have we seen that more than in Afghanistan.

Both sides must commit to a better future for Afghanistan and a negotiated settlement that guarantees inclusive governance; human rights protections, especially for women, young people and minorities; and adherence to international law, including international

humanitarian law. Afghanistan must never again become a haven for international terrorism.

We know that, in order to succeed, Afghanistan's peace process must also be inclusive and led and owned by Afghans. In order to achieve that, all Afghans — men, women, young people, minorities and civil society — must be allowed to participate equally and meaningfully in shaping their future. Ireland stands by resolution 2513 (2020), on Afghanistan. Together with our European Union partners, our position on current and future support for the Afghan Government requires adherence to the principles set out in the 2020 Afghanistan Partnership Framework.

We strongly encourage Afghanistan's neighbours and regional States to support the Afghan people and use their influence to promote a lasting peace that benefits all. We welcome the engagement of the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy on Afghanistan and Regional Issues in building a regional consensus.

Let us be clear. The deliberate targeting of civilians constitutes a war crime, and it must end. All parties must uphold their responsibility to protect civilians, especially children. The perpetrators of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses and violations must be brought to justice. We share the deep concern expressed by others about the troubling human rights situation. The past two decades have seen the emergence of a vibrant Afghan civil society, which is now under threat from deliberate and disturbing attacks. Ireland unequivocally condemns those attacks, which target the very fabric of Afghan society.

Violence and intimidation against women and girls is threatening their ability to participate in all aspects of Afghan society. The Security Council must stand with them. Ireland and Mexico will host a meeting of the Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security on Afghanistan this month to advance the efforts of the Council to address the situation facing Afghan women.

The surge in violence is increasing the number of internally displaced persons, as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General noted, and is exacerbating the profound challenges faced by the more than 18 million people who are in need of humanitarian aid in Afghanistan and were already grappling with devastating food insecurity and the effects of the coronavirus disease pandemic. Humanitarian actors need access and protection.

In conclusion, I would like to say to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Lyons, that I pay tribute to UNAMA's work in such extremely difficult circumstances. The United Nations commitment to hold firm and serve the people of Afghanistan is unstinting. We look forward to working with Council members on the UNAMA mandate renewal over the coming weeks.

We, the international community, must continue to stand with the people of Afghanistan to collectively and urgently find a way forward that meets their aspirations for peace and protects their rights.

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Sir, for convening this meeting at a particularly critical time for Afghanistan. I thank Deborah Lyons and Shaharзад Akbar for their especially poignant briefings. I also welcome the presence of the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan among us.

France condemns in the strongest terms the recent and increasing number of attacks that have plunged into mourning Afghans and the United Nations, whose compound in Herat was affected last week. The assassination of the Head of the Afghan Government's media and information centre has just been added to the long list of abhorrent crimes that have been committed over the past weeks. We heard from Ms. Lyons, Ms. Akbar and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan about the gravity of the situation.

As we have said many times in this Chamber, the current level of violence is unacceptable. Peace cannot be achieved in the midst of chaos, violence and barbarity. With every new attack, the chances for peace are weakened. We therefore call on those responsible for the violence — the Taliban — to end their military offensive and immediately halt the violence, as they pledged to do. Peace will not be possible without a ceasefire already in place to ensure peaceful discussions.

Recent reports, in particular those of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, whose truly outstanding work I commend, show an increase in attacks against civilians and the level of brutality. The protection of civilians, especially women and children, and civilian infrastructure are an absolute priority. I reiterate that we cannot allow those responsible for those violations to go unpunished. They must be held accountable for their crimes. There can be no impunity for gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. We know who is responsible for the barbarism — the Taliban. The group has made

commitments and we expect it to honour them, be they to reduce violence or to sever all ties with terrorist groups. I recall that the list of individuals and entities subject to the measures imposed by the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) can be modified only in light of a genuine commitment to peace on the part of all those on the list.

The worsening situation compounds an extremely worrisome humanitarian context. The impact of the coronavirus disease epidemic, as well as that of drought, continues to be felt in Afghanistan. Attention must be paid to the suffering of the Afghan people and assistance must be provided. To that end, access for medical and humanitarian personnel to all those in need, as well as their protection, must be guaranteed. Respect for international humanitarian law, human rights and freedom of the press by all parties is non-negotiable.

Finally, I would like to recall that lasting peace is not possible without respect for certain conditions. Talks must take place in a calm and trusting environment, in the presence of all those concerned and based on the democratic gains of the past 20 years. Women, in particular, have their place in the process and we expect that all negotiation formats convened allow for their full participation.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that France is determined to walk with Afghanistan and all its partners on the road to peace.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I thank Special Representative Lyons and Ms. Akbar for their briefings. I welcome the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan.

First, it is clear that the Taliban's military offensive has entered a new and more dangerous phase, with the risk of civil war and implications for Afghanistan's neighbours. There is evidence of summary killings, Government officials dragged from their homes and assassination, including, tragically, yesterday of Dawa Khan Menapal, the director of Afghanistan's media and information centre. We send our condolences to all the bereaved families.

We are also concerned about evidence of Taliban human rights abuses, including of minority groups and women, forced marriage, using civilians as human shields and attacks on United Nations buildings. Those acts could constitute war crimes and we will work with international partners to hold the Taliban to account.

The Security Council, therefore, should leave the Taliban in no doubt that there will be consequences for the group if it continues to pursue this military offensive. There can be no military solution to this conflict. For our part, the United Kingdom will not recognize a Taliban Government that comes to power by force. If the Taliban wants political power, it needs to engage meaningfully in a peace process. We are clear, too, about the standards we expect any Government to adhere to.

As Prime Minister Johnson made clear on 8 July, we continue to support the Government of the Republic of Afghanistan and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan. But the United Kingdom will not provide aid to a Government that does not respect and uphold human rights, including the rights of women and minority groups. The Taliban should understand that. We also recall resolution 2513 (2020) agreed by the Council, which stated that any easing of sanctions will depend on the Taliban making sustained efforts to embrace peace.

Against that background, the opportunity to lift peace talks out of the stalemate in Doha, next week, is critical. We encourage all parties, including the Taliban and the Government of Afghanistan, other parties, neighbours and the international community, to engage and support, in good faith, an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned search for peace. Afghanistan's neighbours and the regional organizations to which they belong have an important supporting role to play in the process, as does the Council.

Mr. Dai Bing (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative Lyons for her briefing. I listened attentively to Ms. Akbar, Chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. I also welcome Ambassador Isaczai, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, and thank him for his statement.

Afghanistan is at a historic juncture of war and peace. With the hasty withdrawal of United States and NATO forces, Afghanistan has seen an escalation of violence, a rising number of civilian casualties and an even more severe security situation. Two decades of war in Afghanistan have caused the death of tens of thousands of civilians and the displacement of tens of millions. However, peace has remained elusive. Facts have once again demonstrated that there is no military

solution to the situation in Afghanistan. Any external interference in Afghanistan is doomed to fail.

In the light of the current situation, China believes that there are three pressing tasks.

First, we must prevent extensive fighting and an all-out civil war. The greatest aspirations of the Afghan people are the cessation of hostilities and peace. The countries of the region and the international community also share those aspirations. China condemns the violent attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure and calls on all parties in Afghanistan to exercise restraint, stop military confrontation and reach a comprehensive ceasefire as soon as possible. Foreign troops should consult fully with the Afghan Government on post-withdrawal arrangements so as to ensure a smooth and responsible transition in Afghanistan. They should be more transparent with the countries of the region and avoid leaving a host of problems behind them. The United States has recently expressed its intention to assist Afghanistan in maintaining stability. We hope that it can earnestly fulfil that commitment and intensify its efforts.

Secondly, we must work together to help advance the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan. A political solution is only way forward for Afghanistan. No Government should be established in Afghanistan by force. China welcomes the recent resumption of dialogue between the Afghan Government and the Taliban in Doha and the agreement to continue high-level talks and accelerate the negotiation process. We hope that the parties can show flexibility, seek common ground while managing differences and develop a road map and a timetable for reconciliation as soon as possible.

We look forward to the rebirth of Afghanistan and the establishment of a broad and inclusive political structure, in pursuit of a moderate and steady Muslim policy, with a commitment to friendly relations with all neighbouring countries. China is willing to host the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations, in due course, to support and facilitate the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan.

Thirdly, we must prevent terrorist forces from gaining strength. Terrorism remains a grave challenge for Afghanistan and the countries of the region. Terrorist organizations listed by the Council, such as the Islamic State, Al-Qaida, the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement and the Pakistan Taliban, continue

to launch frequent terrorist attacks in Afghanistan. The international community must not allow Afghanistan to again become a place where terrorists assemble and should continue to support the Afghan National Defence and Security forces in strengthening their counter-terrorism capacity. The Taliban should set the goal of peace and make a clean break with terrorist organizations. All countries should fulfil their obligations under international law and Security Council resolutions, strengthen cooperation and jointly combat terrorism.

The international community should respect the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned principle, strengthen coordination efforts and contribute positive energy to the Afghan peace and reconciliation process. China will continue to coordinate closely with all relevant parties through such mechanisms as the extended troika — the Russian Federation, China the United States and Pakistan — and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Afghanistan Contact Group to foster synergies.

The international community should continue to support Afghanistan's development and reconstruction and assist the country in pursuing regional cooperation, building interconnectivity and enhancing its independent development capacities. Developed countries should honour their commitments and continue to provide development and humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, especially in terms of urgently needed pandemic assistance. China has actively supported the Afghan Government in fighting the pandemic, with 700,000 doses of coronavirus disease vaccines, ventilators and anaesthesia machines and other medical supplies arriving in Kabul not long ago. We will provide an additional 1 million vaccine doses in the near future.

China appreciates the important role played by Special Representative Lyons and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in supporting peace, reconciliation and economic reconstruction in Afghanistan. UNAMA is working in a very challenging environment under the current circumstances. China strongly condemns the attack on the United Nations compound in Herat on 30 July and calls on all parties to abide by international law and protect the safety and security of United Nations personnel.

The Security Council should give early consideration to the form of the United Nations presence in Afghanistan in the next phase and to how it can safely perform its duties, and make proper arrangements in that regard.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of India.

I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Deborah Lyons, for her detailed briefing. I also thank the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his statement and Ms. Shaharзад Akbar for her briefing.

As a neighbour of Afghanistan, the current situation prevailing in the country is of great concern to us. The violence shows no signs of abating. Reports from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan make it clear that civilian casualties and targeted killings have reached record levels. There have been targeted attacks on religious and ethnic minorities, girl students, the Afghan security forces, ulemas, women occupying positions of responsibility, journalists, civil rights activists and young people.

As we saw recently, not even the United Nations compound has been spared. The residence of the Minister for Defence of Afghanistan has been attacked. An Indian journalist was murdered while he was reporting. The fighting continues in Helmand, Herat and elsewhere. More than 100 Afghan civilians were mercilessly killed in Spin Boldak.

The rapid deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan constitutes a serious threat to regional peace and stability. It is therefore time for the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to take stock of the situation and decide on actions that would help to bring about a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire and ensure an immediate cessation of violence. Anything short of that will constitute a serious threat to regional peace and security.

I would like to recall here what our Minister for External Affairs said to the Council in June (see S/2021/601), namely, that a durable peace in Afghanistan requires a genuine double peace, that is, peace within Afghanistan and peace around Afghanistan. It requires harmonizing the interests of all, both within and around the country. India has been supportive of all efforts being made to accelerate the dialogue between

the Afghan Government and the Taliban, including the intra-Afghan negotiations.

If the peace process is to be successful, then it is necessary to ensure that the Taliban engages in negotiations in good faith, eschews the path of violence, severs ties with Al-Qaida and other terrorist organizations and fully commits itself to reaching a political solution. Violence and military threat cannot be used to strengthen the negotiating position. A tangible demonstration of that commitment is required.

India wishes to see an independent, peaceful, sovereign, democratic, stable and prosperous Afghanistan. I would like to reiterate our support for an inclusive Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled peace process. Any political arrangement or settlement in Afghanistan must ensure that the gains of the past two decades are protected and not reversed. Those gains are non-negotiable. It should therefore preserve the constitutional democratic framework and ensure the protection of the rights of women, children and minorities.

Any regime devoid of legitimacy in Afghanistan will find it difficult to garner the much-needed humanitarian and development assistance from the international donor community. As the international community, we cannot afford to set the clock back. The future of Afghanistan cannot be its past.

We support a leading role for the United Nations and call on the Secretary-General to take an initiative towards finding a lasting and durable outcome. We welcome any move towards a genuine political settlement that leads to those objectives. The only way forward is via negotiations that will provide an

acceptable compromise, reflecting the Doha process, the Moscow format and the Istanbul process.

For enduring peace in Afghanistan, terrorist safe havens and sanctuaries in the region must be dismantled immediately and terrorist supply chains disrupted. It needs to be ensured that Afghanistan's neighbours and the region are not threatened by terrorism, separatism or extremism. There needs to be zero tolerance for terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. It is equally important to ensure that the territory of Afghanistan is not used by terrorist groups to threaten or attack any other country. Those providing material and financial support to terrorist entities must be held accountable.

We, as the international community, must ensure that our commitments to Afghanistan, including to its various institutions, are maintained. On India's part, we will continue to stand with Afghanistan in ensuring that peace and stability are restored through a legitimate and transparent democratic process, which is essential for the long-term stability of Afghanistan and the region. We will continue to provide all support to Afghanistan in realizing its aspirations for a peaceful, democratic and prosperous future free from terror, where the rights and interests of all sectors of Afghan society are promoted and protected.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I will now adjourn the meeting so that the Council can continue its discussion in closed consultations.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.