

KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Intervention of

Jeroen Cooreman, Deputy Permanent Representative of
Belgium to the United Nations

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Mr. President, Excellencies, dear colleagues,

Like others, I would like to thank all delegations that participated in the consultations of the draft resolution and in particular the **Afghan and German colleagues** for so ably facilitating the negotiations. We are proud to cosponsor this resolution and look forward to its adoption.

Belgium associates itself fully with the declaration of the **European Union**.

Afghanistan has made considerable political, economic and developmental **progress** over the past decade. Today's resolution highlights many of those advances, for which the government of Afghanistan and the Afghan people deserve much credit. But the gains made are fragile and major challenges remain.

Mr President, I would like to stress three points:

1. First, Afghanistan has had a momentous year and an even more momentous year lies ahead of us. Belgium congratulates the Afghan authorities on the **parliamentary elections** held on the 20th of October which marked another important step towards the consolidation of democracy in the country.

At the same time, it is important to **draw lessons** from these elections. The Afghan government and institutions owe it to the brave and courageous Afghanistan citizens to have orderly, inclusive and credible presidential elections in 2019. The election commissions must retain their independence and carry out their crucial mandate autonomously, building on the experience they have acquired. Together with the serious security threat, logistical and technical difficulties must also be addressed.

The heinous attacks against schools and medical facilities during the run up to the elections further remind us of the importance to fully respect **International Humanitarian Law**. In this regard

Belgium remains deeply concerned about the high level of civilian casualties and calls on all parties to protect the civilian population, especially women and children.

2. The momentous year ahead also applies to my second point, the **peace process**. The resolution justly stresses the importance of an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. The international community must be united in supporting these national efforts. There are different processes aiming to build peace in Afghanistan, but for the international community it remains essential to make sure all efforts are reinforcing each other in a streamlined process. Only the Kabul Process can act as a central framework in this respect.

Belgium calls on the **Taliban leadership** to respond to President Ghani's unprecedented peace offer and engage in direct peace talks. The impatience of the Afghan people for peace is ever more clear. The international community must head its call and support the process by acting in unison. It also implies continued support from donors.

3. Thirdly, I want to add Belgium's voice to the choir of **global support** for Afghanistan. I believe today is about coming together and uniting behind our support for progress, sustainable peace and development. That is the fundamental value of the resolution we are adopting today and it was also visible at the Geneva Conference last week. In Geneva we had an open and constructive dialogue with the Afghan government and the international community confirmed its continuing support to the necessary reform and modernization of Afghanistan, including the strengthening of the rule of law.

Belgium is a steadfast ally of Afghanistan through our membership of the **European Union and NATO**. Both entities have longstanding cooperation agreements with Afghanistan which Belgium fully subscribes to. Earlier this week the Belgian Government decided to substantially increase its contribution to the NATO/Resolute Support Mission and to help train the Afghanistan National Army.

We are also supporting the humanitarian response to the **drought** through our contributions to the UN **Central Emergency Response Fund**. The next two years Belgium is substantially increasing its support to CERF in line with our commitment to humanitarian principles.

I am also proud to share a new Belgian contribution of 2 million euros to the Afghanistan **Country Office of UN Women** in support of their programme to help with the implementation of the National Action Plan of Afghanistan on Women, Peace and Security, [UNSC Resolution 1325]. Belgium attaches great importance to women's rights and women's empowerment and we welcome the strong emphasis the resolution places on these themes. We encourage the Government of Afghanistan to redouble efforts towards greater participation of women in public institutions.

Mr. President,

I also want to express my appreciation for the important work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. Belgium will continue to work with the UN and regional and international partners to support the efforts of the Afghan authorities and of its population to achieve peace and prosperity.

Let me close with paying respect to the victims of the violence in Afghanistan and to the resilience of the Afghan people and the Afghan security forces. 2018 holds the terrible record of being the most deadly year for civilians to date. Since 2001 10.000 lives have been lost, including many children.

But peace is possible in Afghanistan and Belgium will maintain its support for an Afghan led and Afghan owned peace settlement. But also for the journey after such a settlement. That is why we are here today.

I thank you, Mr. President.