

KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Speech by

Ambassador Marc Pecsteen, Permanent Representative
of Belgium to the United Nations

UNAMA Debate at the Security Council

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Mr President, Your Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,

Belgium aligns itself with the intervention of the European Union.

Like others, I would like to thank Representative Yamamoto for his speech and for his tireless work to bring about lasting peace in Afghanistan. I would also like to thank Ms Sima Samar for her briefing and her commitment to promoting women's rights in Afghanistan.

Mr President, I would like to focus my speech on three points: (1) the peace process; (2) the elections; and (3) the importance of promoting and protecting human rights in Afghanistan.

First of all, the **peace process**. Belgium welcomes the intensification of national and international efforts to put an end to the long and devastating conflict in Afghanistan. We believe that a sustainable peace agreement can only be reached through global and inclusive intra-Afghan dialogue. To this end, we reiterate our call to the Taliban to engage in direct peace talks.

In particular, Belgium calls on all the parties to promote the **equal and meaningful participation of women** at every stage of the peace process. Sustainable peace begins with the appointment of a representative and inclusive negotiating team. In addition, we must stress that any future peace agreement must preserve the political, economic and social achievements of the past 18 years, in particular the rights of women, children and minorities.

We are fully aware that peacebuilding is a **long-term process**. For an agreement to be sustainable, the international community must be united in its support. We call on all international partners to closely coordinate their efforts to launch an intra-Afghan dialogue and achieve an Afghan-led and Afghan-controlled peace process.

Mr President,

My second point concerns the **presidential elections** announced for September 2019. Belgium stresses the need to learn lessons from last year's vote. In view of the very tight schedule, we call on all parties to work to restore trust in the electoral process.

Elections are a **responsibility shared** by all political actors. I would like to stress the importance of creating an enabling environment, avoiding political interference in the decisions of the election management bodies and engaging constructively to ensure that the presidential elections are free, transparent and credible.

I now come to my third point, the **human rights situation** in Afghanistan. We have paid close attention to the recommendations of Ms Samar. Belgium is extremely concerned by the impact of the armed conflict on the civilian population, and in particular by the **high number of civilian victims**. Belgium urges all parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and to take immediate measures to avoid loss of life.

With particular reference to violations of **children's rights**, the Council's attention is drawn to the submission of the country report to the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict later this year.

The continuing violence against **journalists and human rights defenders** is also unacceptable. All parties to the conflict must respect international protection standards.

We are also concerned about the reports of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the **treatment of detainees** linked to the conflict. Almost one third report credible accounts of torture or ill-treatment in detention. We welcome the government's actions in response to this and call for strengthened accountability measures.

With regard to **demining work**, Belgium welcomes the Government's efforts to align national standards for the 'demining of improvised abandoned objects' with international best practice.

Mr President,

Allow me to conclude by reiterating our full support for the Afghan people and our strong commitment to an Afghan-led and Afghan-controlled peace process.

Thank you, Mr President.