

KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Statement by

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of Belgium to the United Nations

UNAMA Briefing to the Security Council

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Madam President, Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,

I would like to thank Special Envoy **Tadamichi Yamamoto** for his briefing and for his tireless efforts in the service of a prosperous and stable Afghanistan. We welcome Ms **Aisha Khurram**; we attach a great deal of importance to the voice of young leaders like you.

Madam President,

We welcome the holding of the **presidential elections** in September. We support UNAMA's important role in the electoral process and are encouraged by reports that the electoral authorities relied on lessons learned from past experiences. Electoral institutions must communicate proactively with all stakeholders and preserve the integrity of the electoral process. In the coming days, when the results are announced by the Independent Electoral Commission, we encourage all parties to act responsibly, exercise restraint and channel any complaints through the existing legal mechanisms.

With regard to the pursuit of **peace**, we remain convinced of the need for peace talks and welcome the recent exchange of prisoners as a confidence-building measure. We fully support the central role of the Afghan government in the peace process and call on the Taliban to engage in talks with the government.

For a peace agreement to last, it must at all costs safeguard the gains made in terms of the **rights of women**. Women must play a meaningful role in the peace process. In this regard, we welcome last month's launch of the second National Action Plan on Resolution 1325, as well as Afghanistan's inclusion in the joint EU-UN Spotlight initiative to combat sexual violence against women and girls. We are also encouraged by the recent launch in New York of a Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan, whose objectives we fully support.

The **level of violence** is totally unacceptable. Afghanistan is **the deadliest conflict in the world for children**, with more than 2,400 deaths in the first nine months of this year. Belgium is committed to facilitating the negotiation of a consensual Council product on the situation of children and armed conflict in Afghanistan. We welcome the efforts of UNMAS and its partners to reduce the number of child victims of mines, explosive

remnants of war and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by strengthening child-centred risk education.

Belgium notes with concern that IEDs continue to be the second leading cause of security incidents in Afghanistan and that their use is increasing. We invite the Afghan armed forces, Afghan security services, NATO Resolute Support and the civilian organisations involved in mine action in Afghanistan to share information on IEDs and their precursors in order to prevent their manufacture and use by the Taliban and other armed groups as much as possible.

Madam President,

We strongly condemn the attacks on **United Nations personnel as well as human rights defenders and journalists** and call on the Afghan authorities to spare no effort in identifying the perpetrators and bringing them to justice. We recall the obligation for all parties to uphold international humanitarian law and to take immediate measures to prevent civilian casualties. The government must redouble its efforts to implement its policy of mitigating civilian casualties. Bringing justice to victims and guaranteeing accountability for the most serious crimes are prerequisites for reconciliation. These principles can usefully be pursued as part of a broader and situation-specific transitional justice process for sustainable peace.

I would like to conclude by expressing my **gratitude to UNAMA and the United Nations agencies** for the work they are doing in Afghanistan to consolidate peace and prosperity. I am encouraged by the role of young people in this regard. In 2020, Belgium will also continue its commitment to Afghanistan through its support for EU and UN programmes, as well as through its participation in NATO's Resolute Support mission and its financial contribution to the Afghanistan National Army Trust Fund.

Thank you, Madam President.

Speaking points for consultations:

- The **protection of civilians and the situation of children in armed conflict** are key issues in UNAMA's mandate. Belgium is currently facilitating the negotiation of the conclusions of the CAAC Working Group. What more important role can the Council play in combating the high rate of civilian casualties, in particular children?
- The continued engagement in the **peace talks** is positive. The next phase (intra-Afghan dialogue) will also be crucial. What are your expectations of the peace efforts?
- Despite very unfavourable circumstances (threats of Taliban violence, very few campaigns), the **presidential elections** were a positive step towards democratic consolidation. When do you think the results will be announced and how should the international community/Council react?
- Respect for **women's rights**, including women's participation in any peace agreement, is fundamental. What are the main challenges regarding women's rights that we must be aware of?
- What additional measures can be taken to combat the threat posed by IEDs? Can UNAMA play a role in facilitating the exchange of information on IEDs and their precursors?