

## **ARRIA meeting on Afghanistan: notes for 'briefing' by SRS**

Excellencies, distinguished co-sponsors and members of the Council:

Greetings to all of you from Geneva, where we are doing final preparations for the Afghanistan 2020 pledging conference.

Indeed, this has been the most momentous year for the Afghan peace process after decades of conflict. Today, I will focus on the pertinent question put to us by the co-sponsors: What can the Security Council do to support the peace process?

First, a few words on where the process stands. The 29 February Agreement between the Taliban and the United States, and the concomitant Declaration between Afghanistan and the United States, paved the way for the start of peace talks.

This indeed has not been easy. After a long impasse over prisoner releases, the talks opened in Doha on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September. An initial host country support group comprising Germany, Indonesia, Norway and Uzbekistan was formed to assist the Qatari hosts and the Afghan parties. Of course UNAMA's Peace and Reconciliation team forms a critical part of this group.

Hopes were high, but progress slowed, as the two parties remained deadlocked for weeks on language framing the negotiations. But it is positive that both sides remained at the peace table throughout the painstaking negotiations.

Finally we heard this week that the two parties are close to agreement on the Code of Conduct, which would then unlock discussions for the draft agenda.

This would be a highly positive development. Both parties are to be congratulated for considering small shifts in their positions to enable the talks to move to the substantive stage. As this new chapter opens, the international community must see how we can reinforce these efforts so that peace stands the best chance of an eventual success.

Firstly, this means reinforcing the environment for peace within Afghanistan itself. And on this front, nothing is more pressing than the need to reduce violence.

Civilian casualties remain devastatingly high. Every violent incident results in another victim, another family, another community where lives have been shattered. Women, men, boys and girls continue to be killed, to face long-term injuries, to face displacement, to lose their homes and livelihoods, and perhaps worst of all loss of hope.

This violence has dented public confidence in the peace process. Recent brutal attacks in Kabul – on the education centre and on Kabul University – , as well as increased violence in many provinces, have shocked the Afghan population, accustomed though they are to the horrors of war.

I commend the Afghan Republic for its continued commitment to the talks despite the corrosive effect of the

battlefield violence. But clearly, there is a need for a declared reduction in violence, or ideally an eventual ceasefire.

Despite these challenges, Afghanistan can draw strength from its diversity. But this diversity must be respected and fully engaged throughout the talks to ensure a lasting peace. I therefore recognize the Afghan Republic team and the State Ministry of Peace for their active outreach to media, civil society and religious groups. It is positive that the Taliban have also engaged in outreach. Both negotiation parties must intensify this dialogue with Afghans from different sectors of society, including in remote areas to build the foundations for reconciliation and lasting peace.

Through your resolutions, such as 1325 and related resolutions on women, peace and security; and resolution 2250 and related on youth, peace and security, the Security Council has provided strong normative guidance which we, UNAMA, use in our work with the Afghan parties to support inclusion at every level, from international conferences to grassroots initiatives at the village level.

As the talks progress, sensitive but important issues will come to the fore: human rights – women's rights, minority rights, freedom of expression, and the rights of victims of war; the role of Islam; the future of democracy; education; rule of law; transnational terror and narcotics. These issues are ultimately for Afghans themselves to decide, but the international community must make its views known, and

warn of the possible consequences, should the country slide back.

This is particularly true of Afghanistan's human rights commitments. The UN Security Council could reaffirm the importance of continued adherence to Afghanistan's existing international obligations, including the seven core international human rights treaties to which Afghanistan is party, irrespective of the Government of the day.

Engagement by the Council can also bolster the role of Afghanistan's neighbours in the peace process. A peaceful Afghanistan would enable the whole region to prosper and benefit the lives of all. Improved economic connectivity, transit trade, power supply, and economic cooperation would lift the income for all countries.

Along with all the Resident Coordinators in the neighbouring countries, I have started an initiative across the United Nations family to strengthen the regional links in our programming. So far, I have been very gratified and energized by the positive response from my colleagues and particularly from the governments in the region. I hope to continue my visits to the neighbouring countries in the near future to see how we can advance this work further. The regional voice for peace in Afghanistan must be amplified and supported by all of us.

On the larger international front, prospects for peace need to be underpinned by sustained international assistance. Next week's pledging conference in Geneva will be a

demonstration of this. I pay tribute to Afghanistan and Finland as our conference co-chairs. This year it will be different, not only because of Covid-19, but because the path which peace will take is still unclear. International support will ensure that the Afghan state can build strong institutions, continue providing basic services to its people, and alleviate the worst of their suffering as peace takes hold. In return, the Afghan government is expected to assure donors that their money will be spent wisely and with accountability.

Your ongoing engagement as the UN Security Council will be a critical signal of support for Afghans in their quest for peace. Resolution 2513, adopted on 10 March, provides a solid and principled basis for durable peace in Afghanistan. I want you to know that this resolution is often quoted back to me by the Afghan public, leadership and regional partners as a solid, principled foundation for all member states to respect and support.

To that end, we remain committed to helping Afghanistan work towards a peaceful end-state that is inclusive of all Afghans, and preserving the rights of the whole population in keeping with global standards. Daily, I am reminded that the United Nations has a vital role as an umbrella under which we can all work for peace, without self-interest. This impartiality can be further leveraged to engage the Afghan parties, and all stakeholders.

I said at the beginning that this was a momentous year. Clearly, the year ahead will see great changes in this country

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that has been at the forefront of global attention for many years. I look forward to working with the Council through the many challenges that lie ahead.