



AUSTRALIA



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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

10 March 2017

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

**Statement by H.E. Caitlin Wilson
Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative
of Australia to the United Nations**

Thank you Mr President

Like others before me, Australia too condemns the heinous and cowardly terrorist attack that took place in Kabul on 8 March and extend our condolences to the families of the victims and the Government of Afghanistan.

Australia thanks the Secretary-General for his most recent report. Despite declines in a number of indicators in the report, Australia believes that 2017 could be a year of substantive progress in Afghanistan, if the successes of Warsaw and Brussels are able to be capitalised on. The performance indicators have been agreed, and Afghanistan has the sophisticated plans and funding in place to achieve these.

Mr President

Challenges remain, including ongoing concerns with corruption, and access to government services fuelled by insecurity and political instability. To this end, we welcome the Afghan Government's commitment to countering corruption, and to reaching out to opinion leaders within and beyond the government. We encourage the Afghan Government to recall its social contract with the Afghan people, and continue progress toward holding elections in the coming year.

A stable Afghanistan remains central to the stability of the region. Violent extremism has never respected national boundaries, and we encourage all countries in the region to continue building on the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process through engaging in dialogue and cooperation to advance peace and stability.

Australia remains committed to helping the Afghan Security Services rise to the challenge presented by the insurgency, and at Warsaw we extended our deployment of around 270 personnel to the NATO Resolute Support Mission. We remain in the top five donors contributing to the sustainment of Afghan forces.

We were deeply distressed to see that civilian casualties rose by three per cent last year, to the highest recorded since 2009.

Australia calls on all parties of the conflict to enact measures which protect the vulnerable, especially women and children.

Long-term stability will require a successful Afghan owned and led peace process. We are encouraged by progress made towards implementing the agreement with Hizb-i-Islami in 2016. We urge the Afghan government to continue engaging with empowered negotiators, including women, to bring an end to the insurgency.

Insecurity is fuelling a humanitarian crisis, with a record level of conflict-induced displacements and unprecedented numbers of people returning from Pakistan and Iran in 2016. Australia's humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan (of almost \$19 million in 2016) helped provide support including critical shelter, food and health care to over 6.9 million Afghan people.

Mr President

Australia remains committed to working with Afghanistan to address its development challenges. Australia has also provided community based education classes to more than 19,000 children since 2001. More than 70 per cent of these were girls. These classes are just a small part of our development program in Afghanistan and at the Brussels Conference Australia pledged to maintain current levels of aid funding through to 2020.

To conclude, Australia sees a real opportunity for progress in Afghanistan in 2017, and calls on the Afghan Government to build on successes of 2016. We urge continued international cooperation to improve national and regional stability. We congratulate UNAMA for its important contribution, and on his retirement, would like to acknowledge the efforts UN Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General and Humanitarian Coordinator Mark Bowden has made to support Afghanistan.