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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

21 December 2015

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

**Statement by H.E. Gillian Bird
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
of Australia to the United Nations**

(As delivered)

Madam President

This Council debate comes at the end of a difficult year for Afghanistan. The National Unity Government, under the leadership of President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah, has confronted a determined insurgency, significant economic challenges, and the imperative tasks of reform and countering corruption. Progress has been made, but there is much still to do.

Security remains a major challenge, as the brief fall of Kunduz reminded us. The insurgency has continued its horrendous attacks against civilians, undermining the basic rights of the Afghan people to a safe and certain future. The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces remain bravely resolute in their mission to confront the insurgency, and we honour their sacrifices. International forces also face a constant threat of violence, and we commend their efforts.

Australia remains committed to assisting the Afghan Government to deliver a secure and stable future for its people. To this end, we are one of the largest donors to Afghan security forces sustainment, providing \$0.5 billion from 2009 to 2017. Since 2001, over 25,000 Australian personnel have served in Afghanistan, with 250 continuing to serve in NATO's Resolute Support Mission at the current time.

Madam President

Afghanistan continues to face human rights challenges. Violence against women and children is of particular concern for Australia. Through our aid

program to Afghanistan - Australia's fourth largest at \$80 million per year - we provide shelter and support to over 2,300 women and children, and training for over 2,800 police and justice sector officials to uphold women's rights.

Electoral reform is another matter that requires urgent action. We welcome President Ghani's approval of most of the recommendations of the Special Electoral Reform Commission. Implementation must be a priority.

Parliamentary elections should be held in a timely manner to meet the expectations of the Afghan people.

Economic reform is key to a brighter future for Afghanistan. The Government's Self-Reliance Through Mutual Accountability Framework will be an important mechanism to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of donor funding. We welcome President Ghani's vision for Afghanistan's economic future and encourage his government to persevere in its efforts to combat corruption.

Madam President

Australia recognises the role UNAMA has played and applauds the efforts and dedication of all UN personnel in Afghanistan. The work of the Tripartite Commission on future priorities for UNAMA provides a useful assessment of the role, structure and activities of all UN entities operating in Afghanistan. We look forward to renewing the UNAMA mandate in March 2016 so that UNAMA can continue to play its important role in Afghanistan effectively.

Thank you Madam President.