



AUSTRALIA



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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

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United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

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

(As delivered)

I join others in expressing my deepest condolences to the Russian Federation and our Russian colleagues for the sad passing today of your Ambassador to Turkey.

We thank the Secretary General for his report on Afghanistan, and all the briefers.

As 2016 draws to a close, we reflect on a year for Afghanistan of formidable efforts, concrete commitments and sobering challenges.

Under the leadership of President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah, the National Unity Government continued progress toward improved governance under difficult circumstances. The Government has proven resilient in spite of the challenges that persist. We urge perseverance in addressing underlying tensions to build on the gains of 2016 and ensure the National Unity Government remains the sturdy foundation the international community looks to.

We commend efforts toward an Afghan-led peace process and acknowledge the peace agreement with Hezb-i-Islami as a historic achievement. Ongoing attention to the success of this deal is crucial as Afghanistan works towards a broader peace process as the sustainable path to security and stability.

We are encouraged by progress in the anti-corruption agenda and the electoral program, and urge attention to the work that is still to be done on planning for elections in 2017. We also welcome the continued high-level focus on improving gender equality in Afghanistan and would echo the words of Canada as to the importance of these efforts.

The commitments made at the NATO Warsaw Summit and the EU hosted Brussels Conference on Afghanistan demonstrate strong sustained international support for Afghanistan through to 2020 –

despite competing demands for resources and attention in response to crises elsewhere.

Regional economic cooperation in support of Afghanistan that has seen Kabul build closer relationships and partnerships with its neighbors is a welcome development as Afghanistan works to improve its economic performance. We note also the important opportunity provided by the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process to progress regional dialogue and create opportunities for economic growth.

And because external support is necessary but not sufficient, we are glad the Afghan-led, Afghan-owned National Peace and Development Framework is driving the broader agenda.

Significant challenges remain. And also for Australia, the deteriorating security situation is of particular concern. The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces are continuing to fight bravely.

Australia is committed to maintaining its strong contribution to Afghanistan, alongside our international partners. We have extended our deployment of Australian Defence Force personnel to the NATO-led Resolute Support mission into 2017 and have also

committed \$750 million to security sector sustainment and development over the next 4 years.

As winter sets in, we are conscious of the great human costs of the ongoing conflict, with women and girls particularly vulnerable. The large number of civilian casualties in 2016 and the growing needs of returning refugees and internally displaced persons highlight the dire humanitarian situation that cannot be ignored.

And as we look toward 2017 security, governance and the reform agenda will remain key priorities for building Afghanistan. We remain committed to supporting this agenda in close partnership with the Government of Afghanistan, NATO and the international community – we share a collective stake in Afghanistan's future.

Thank you Mr President