



AUSTRALIA



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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

21 June 2017

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

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

(Check against delivery)

Australia joins others in strongly condemning the horrific bombing in Kabul on 31 May – a shocking attack to take place during the holy month of Ramadan. In a letter of condolence to President Ghani and in his remarks to the Australian Parliament, Prime Minister Turnbull restated Australia's commitment to supporting Afghanistan in its fight against terrorism – and its long-term security and development.

Mr President,

Attacks like these only strengthen our resolve to stand with the Afghan people to achieve peace and prosperity. We stand with the National Unity Government as it pursues unity and stability for Afghanistan's future. We urge the people of Afghanistan to maintain solidarity despite their frustration and suffering, and commend the work of UNAMA in encouraging political dialogue through the use of its good offices in Kabul.

The events of the last quarter underline the ongoing need for the international community as a whole to stand with Afghanistan as it works to end the cycle of violence. To this end, Australia recently announced an increase to our military commitment in Afghanistan to about 300 personnel, to support the development of the long-term capabilities of Afghanistan's security forces. This important work is part of our broader commitment to Afghanistan's governance and reform agenda.

Because securing a future for Afghanistan is not just about security.

We commend Afghanistan's commitment to implementing reform and note the important progress achieved – including improved projections for economic growth this year. The revised penal code and anti-corruption initiatives are commendable achievements on governance and the rule of law. Positive steps on human rights, particularly withdrawing the reservation to the Optional Protocol of the Convention Against Torture, are also welcome. To build on this progress, we urge sustained momentum on electoral reform as a critical building block for democratic progress and we are encouraged to hear today that an announcement on a date for delayed parliamentary elections may be imminent.

We also congratulate Afghanistan on inaugurating the Kabul Process initiative. Afghanistan's ownership of the regional discussion about sustainable peace demonstrates a commitment to seek fresh, smart and practical ideas on how stability can be achieved. We encourage Afghanistan's neighbors and partners to join with the National Unity Government in this effort. We welcome recent constructive engagement between Prime Minister Sharif and President Ghani. The international community stands with Afghanistan and is ready to support Kabul as it leads on finding solutions to Afghanistan's challenges.

Mr President

In conclusion, Afghanistan remains at the forefront of global counterterrorism efforts. Recent events in London, Manchester, Tehran, Egypt and Afghanistan itself underline the potential consequences of failure. Afghanistan remains an urgent priority for regional and international security and it remains essential that we act together in support.