Asia

16. The situation in Afghanistan

During the period under review, the Security Council held two meetings under this item. Both were convened to adopt a resolution, namely, resolutions 2513 (2020) and 2543 (2020), the second of which was adopted to extend the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). More information on the meetings, including on participants, speakers and outcomes, is provided in table 1 below. In addition, Council members held a total of four videoconferences in connection the situation in Afghanistan. More information on videoconferences is provided in table 2 below.

During the year 2020, at several videoconferences, Council members were briefed quarterly by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of UNAMA and the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Officer in Charge of UNAMA, further to the reports of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General and her Deputy discussed in their briefings the outcome of the presidential election of September 2019, the developments in the peace process further to resolution 2513 (2020), and the security and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Council members were also briefed by the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, the Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), and the Afghan Youth Representative to the United Nations. In addition, in a videoconference held on 3 September 2020, Council members heard a briefing by the Chief Executive of MOBY Group. In addition to the briefers,

444 For more information on the format of meetings, see part II sect. II. A.
445 For information on the procedures and working methods developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, see part II.
the representatives of Afghanistan and Iran delivered a statement at one of the videoconferences.\textsuperscript{450}

On 10 March 2020, the Council held a meeting at which it unanimously adopted resolution \textit{2513 (2020)} welcoming the Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan (Joint Declaration) and the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the United States of America and the Taliban.\textsuperscript{451} In the resolution, the Council urged the Government of Afghanistan to advance the peace process, including by participating in intra-Afghan negotiations through a diverse and inclusive negotiating team composed of Afghan political and civil society leaders, including women.\textsuperscript{452} The Council called on the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban to pursue in good faith additional confidence building measures to create conditions conducive to a swift beginning and the success of intra-Afghan negotiations and a durable peace.\textsuperscript{453} Furthermore, the Council requested the Secretary-General to include in his quarterly reports on Afghanistan, as requested in paragraph 9 of resolution \textit{2489 (2019)}, developments related to the efforts set out in the resolution.\textsuperscript{454}

After the vote, the representative of the United States expressed regret that the presidential electoral process and the high levels of violence by the Taliban had delayed the start of the intra-Afghan negotiations. She stated that the United States would carefully monitor and assess whether the Taliban lived up to its commitments and urged the Taliban to also reduce violence against Afghan forces. She also stressed that her country would continue to support the goal of a lasting peace in Afghanistan and hoped that other Council members would join in doing so as well.\textsuperscript{455} Other Council members acknowledged the importance of including language in the resolution in relation to the meaningful and effective participation of women in the peace process.\textsuperscript{456} As an expression of their responsibility as co-penholders together with Indonesia, the

\textsuperscript{450} See \textit{S/2020/1274}. See also \textit{SC/14391}.

\textsuperscript{451} Resolution \textit{2513 (2020)}, para. 1. See also \textit{S/2020/184} and \textit{S/2020/185}.

\textsuperscript{452} Resolution \textit{2513 (2020)}, para. 4.

\textsuperscript{453} Ibid., para. 5.

\textsuperscript{454} Ibid., para. 9.

\textsuperscript{455} See \textit{S/PV.8742}.

\textsuperscript{456} Ibid., Germany and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.
representative of Germany affirmed that the two countries were united in their determination to ensure that the Security Council continued to closely follow and support the peace process in Afghanistan. He also added that he would have welcomed in the resolution clear references to the Afghan Constitution as well as to human rights and the importance of respecting such rights in general, which he said remained the indispensable basis for the future development of the country. The representative of the Russian Federation affirmed that the resolution opened up a window of opportunity for the achievement of national reconciliation in Afghanistan and added that one of the prerequisites for the long-term stabilization of the country was the review of the sanctions decisions taken by the Council vis-à-vis the Taliban movement and their synchronization with the relevant national measures.

On 31 March 2020, at a videoconference, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General reported that while the Independent Election Commission had declared President Ashraf Ghani as the winner of the presidential election, his runner-up, Mr. Abdullah Abdullah, had rejected the outcome and unilaterally claimed victory, prompting serious concern over the future of the country.\(^{457}\) Despite this political impasse, the Deputy Special Representative reported that the Afghan establishment had been able to agree on a diverse negotiating team for potential intra-Afghan talks. Notwithstanding the logistical challenges imposed by COVID-19, representatives of Afghanistan and the Taliban had held three video-teleconferences to discuss prisoner releases, an important confidence-building measure to start the peace process. The Deputy Special Representative further briefed the Council on the signing of the agreement between the United States and the Taliban on 29 February 2020, which provided for the conditions-based full withdrawal of international military forces from Afghanistan, and the commitment for the Taliban to reduce violence against international military forces. Regarding the security situation, the Deputy Special Representative noted an increased level of violence and expressed concern about the ongoing threat to civilians posed by the Islamic State-Khorasan Province. On the humanitarian situation, she highlighted the Secretary-General’s call for an immediate global ceasefire so that the necessary resources could be provided to combating COVID-19, which was of particular concern given Afghanistan’s

\(^{457}\) See S/2020/274.
fragile health system, its highly vulnerable population and the economic and social impact of the loss of livelihoods.

During her first briefing to Council members on 25 June 2020, the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General welcomed the political agreement between President Ghani and Mr. Abdullah. She expressed cautious optimism on the start of the talks between Afghanistan and the Taliban, noting that both sides had agreed that talks could start within a week of the completion of prisoner releases.\(^{458}\) The Special Representative welcomed brief respites from the spiralling levels of violence following the United States-Taliban agreement and a three-day ceasefire for Eid Al-Fitr by the Taliban and the Government, and stressed the importance of a reduction of violence to create an environment conducive for peace talks.

Regarding the humanitarian situation, the Special Representative noted that the humanitarian response plan had been updated to incorporate the COVID-19 requirements for 2020, reflecting a total of $1.1 billion to provide immediate humanitarian assistance. Following the Special Representative’s briefing, the Executive Director of UNODC reported on the findings of the UNODC World Drug Report 2020, which showed that Afghanistan remained the world’s biggest producer of opium despite the COVID-19 pandemic and that drug use in the country was exacerbated by the availability of trafficked weapons supporting the drug trade and terrorism.

The Executive Director described synthetic drugs as a new danger to the country and the region, and highlighted that COVID-19 could further drive illicit opium-poppy cultivation. During the same videoconference, the Chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission briefed the Council on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the human rights situation in Afghanistan and on the role of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission in the Afghan peace process. The Chairperson described the Commission’s work on the peace process which was focused on contributing to an inclusive process, a durable outcome and mechanisms for the preservation and expansion of human rights.

On 3 September 2020, Council members held a videoconference at which the Special Representative of the Secretary-General reported that pre-talks had started between representatives of Afghanistan and representatives of the Taliban. She called that a historic

\(^{458}\) See S/2020/597.
moment and expressed hope that the following days would bring the formal launch of the intra-Afghan negotiations.\footnote{See \textit{S/2020/891}.} Noting the continuing high level of violence in the country, she hoped that a humanitarian ceasefire would be one of the first items on the agenda of those negotiations. She added that one of the flagship issues for the United Nations in achieving a sustainable peace would be the role of human rights, and stressed the importance of women’s representation at the peace table. Noting the importance of strong and trusted public institutions, the Special Representative welcomed the Government’s announcement of the formation of its cabinet and of appointments to the High Council for National Reconciliation. On the humanitarian front, the Special Representative reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had hit Afghanistan hard with millions of Afghans having suffered lost income and livelihoods. Council members also heard a briefing by Saad Mohseni, the Chief Executive of MOBY Group. Mr. Mohseni spoke about the media and news sector, the freedom of the press and the safety of journalists in Afghanistan. He presented his views on how the Council and the international community could support the peace process.

In addition to resolution \textit{2513 (2020)}, on 15 September 2020, the Council adopted resolution \textit{2543 (2020)}, by which it extended the mandate of UNAMA for 12 months until 17 September 2021.\footnote{Resolution \textit{2543 (2020)}, para. 5.} By the resolution, the Council welcomed UNAMA’s ongoing efforts in the implementation of the mandated tasks, priorities and related resources of UNAMA especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.\footnote{Ibid., para. 3.} Specifically, the Council decided that UNAMA and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General would continue to lead and coordinate the international civilian efforts with a particular focus on a series of priorities including good offices in support of the peace process, elections support, governance, regional cooperation, human rights and accountability and the protection of civilians, especially women, children, displaced persons and minorities.\footnote{Ibid., para. 6. For more information on the mandate of UNAMA, see part X, sect. II.} Welcoming the start of intra-Afghan negotiations in Doha on 12 September 2020, the Council also strongly encouraged the negotiating parties to continue pursuing confidence-building measures, including additional reductions in violence, and

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encouraged them to engage in good faith. The Council also called for the implementation of the recommendations of the Secretary-General’s call for a global ceasefire as supported in resolution 2532 (2020) and emphasized the importance of the implementation of resolution 2513 (2020).

Further to the vote, Council members welcomed the unanimous adoption of the resolution given the initiation of intra-Afghan negotiations in Doha on 12 September 2020. The representatives of Germany and Indonesia as co-penholders emphasized that the resolution sent a strong signal of international unity. Council members offered their views on the necessary elements to achieve peace and stability, such as human rights, including women’s participation, a reduction of violence and improved security and socioeconomic development. In that regard, the representative of China added that through his country’s promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative, China remained committed to helping Afghanistan forge closer trade and economic ties with countries of the region, especially its neighbours. The representative of the United States commended the penholders for their cooperative spirit but clarified that the United States would have serious concerns if, contrary to their understanding, UNAMA were to interpret resolution 2543 (2020) to mandate UNAMA to support illegitimate investigation of International Criminal Court (ICC) against United States personnel. In that regard, he reiterated that the United States was not a party to the Rome Statute and had consistently rejected ICC’s assertions of jurisdiction over United States personnel, affirming that his country would not tolerate any attempts to subject Americans to the ICC’s jurisdiction.

During her last briefing of the year, in a videoconference held on 17 December 2020, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General welcomed progress in the talks between Afghanistan and the Taliban. She reported having met with women negotiators on her recent trips to Doha and again underlined the importance of including women, young people, minorities, victims of conflict and religious leaders in the peace process. Taking note of the recent formation of the High Council for National Reconciliation allowing Afghanistan to

463 Resolution 2543 (2020), paras. 3 and 4.
464 See S/PV.8759.
465 Ibid., Indonesia, France, Estonia, and Dominican Republic.
466 Ibid., France and Estonia.
467 Ibid., Estonia and China.
establish a broad base for consolidating its negotiating positions, she invited the Taliban to also broaden its consultations with Afghan constituencies.468 The Special Representative reiterated the importance of stability and cooperation in the region and highlighted regional efforts on counter-narcotics and transnational organized crime including discussions within the UNODC regional Steering Committee. Reporting on the security situation, the Special Representative shared a sense of violence and insecurity being higher than ever in Afghanistan. She called upon the Government of Afghanistan to take effective measures to protect the media and journalists, and upon the Taliban to refrain from attacking civilian targets. In closing, the Special Representative reported on the devastating humanitarian effects of COVID-19, including hunger and malnutrition and the erosion of livelihoods with women and children particularly affected. She shared that the larger United Nations family had scaled up to ensure that work was getting done to respond to the pandemic in coordination with the Government and civil society. She noted that the year 2020 had brought a profound shift in the country with the United States-Taliban agreement, the United States-Afghan Government joint declaration, three months of intra-Afghan negotiations, the renewal of pledges from international donors and a revitalized regional cooperation effort. Following the Special Representative’s briefing, Council members heard briefings from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) and the Afghan Youth Representative to the United Nations. While expressing optimism about the ongoing negotiations in Doha, the Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) highlighted two key challenges reflected in the latest report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team,469 namely, the continuous close relations between the Taliban and Al-Qaida, and the Taliban’s ongoing profiting from narcotics.

In her briefing, the Afghan Youth Representative told the Council about the young students, journalists, human rights activists and security forces who had lost their lives to terrorism and called for an end to the “daily slaughter of young Afghans”.

She also called for the inclusion of young Afghans in an Afghan-owned peace process taking place in Afghanistan without the interference of foreigners.

In 2020, Council members’ discussions focused on the outcome of the presidential election, the peace process, and the security and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. Council members specifically reiterated their support for an inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process and welcomed the launch of the intra-Afghan negotiations and the first agreements on the rules and procedures for the negotiations thereunder. Council members also urged that the progress made in guaranteeing fundamental rights especially for women under the Afghan Constitution be protected. Council members also expressed concern over the compounding impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing and escalating violence in Afghanistan and called for all parties to heed to the Secretary-General’s call for a humanitarian ceasefire in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. They called for the international community to increase their support for Afghanistan including through UNAMA to ensure continued delivery of humanitarian aid to the population facing the impact of the pandemic.

Developments in Afghanistan were also considered elsewhere under the item entitled “Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts”.

Table 1
Meetings: The situation in Afghanistan

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470 See S/2020/274, China Germany, Indonesia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, South Africa, Viet Nam; S/2020/597, Estonia, Germany, Indonesia, Russian Federation, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia, United States and Viet Nam.
471 See S.PV.8759, Germany, Indonesia, Estonia, China, Belgium, S/2020/1274, China, Dominican Republic, Indonesia, Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia, United Kingdom, Viet Nam.
472 See S/2020/1274, China, Estonia, France, Germany, Indonesia, Russian Federation, South Africa, Tunisia, United Kingdom, United States and Viet Nam.
474 See S/2020/274, Belgium, France, Germany, Indonesia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, United Kingdom and Viet Nam; S/2020/597, France, Germany, South Africa, Tunisia and Viet Nam; S/2020/1274, China, Estonia, France, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Tunisia.
475 See S/2020/274, France, Germany, Indonesia, Niger, United Kingdom, United States, Viet Nam; S/2020/597, Dominican Republic, Germany, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia and (Viet Nam; S/2020/1274, China, Dominican Republic, Estonia, Germany, Saint Vincent & the Grenadines, United States and Viet Nam.
476 See part I, sect. 29.
Table 2
Videoconferences: The situation in Afghanistan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Videoconference date</th>
<th>Videoconference record</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Decision and vote (for-against-abstaining)</th>
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<tr>
<td>31 March 2020</td>
<td>S/2020/274</td>
<td>Letter dated 31 March 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 June 2020</td>
<td>S/2020/597</td>
<td>Letter dated 29 June 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council</td>
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<td>Letter dated 8 September 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council</td>
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<td>17 December 2020</td>
<td>S/2020/1274</td>
<td>Letter dated 22 December 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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a Belgium, China, Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Indonesia, Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, United Kingdom, United States, and Viet Nam.
b Belgium, China, Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Indonesia, Tunisia and United States.