

Despite progress towards peace, Afghanistan facing 'daunting challenges' ahead of presidential vote

The UN Special Representative in Afghanistan, Tadamichi Yamamoto, hailed on-going efforts made towards peace and the engagement of women and youth across the country, but warned the Security Council on Monday that “daunting challenges” remain.

“This year is likely to bring both numerous challenges and unprecedented opportunities,” said Mr. Yamamoto, briefing Council members on the latest [report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan](#) and its implications for international peace and security. “Addressing the challenges, and taking advantage of the opportunities, will require the concerted efforts of the international community, with Afghanistan in the lead”, he added.

Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and the head of UN Assistance Mission in the country (UNAMA), briefs the Security Council. Photo: UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

“Tangible progress” on the peace process

Various talks aimed at ending years of conflict have taken place in past weeks, notably between the United States Government and senior Taliban officials, as well as some Afghan representatives and the militant group.

“Despite such engagements, the Taliban have not yet accepted to engage in direct talks with the Government,” lamented Special Representative Yamamoto, who also heads the UN Assistance Mission in the country, [UNAMA](#). “I stress the imperative need for the Taliban to directly talk with the Government,” as “inclusiveness, coherence, and representativeness in negotiations are critical for success.”

Commending the efforts made by the Government to establish a “negotiating structure, including a negotiating team,” and a consultative assembly of traditional leaders, Mr. Yamamoto insisted on the importance of ensuring all efforts towards peace are “Afghan-led and Afghan-owned.”

He stressed that the “peace process must be inclusive of the meaningful participation of groups representing all segments of Afghanistan’s diverse society including women, youths, ulemas (Islamic legal scholars), and community and political leaders,” adding that the rights of the victims also need to be taken into consideration.

'Daunting challenges' ahead of presidential elections

Afghanistan is set to hold a presidential election later this year, a critical step in further consolidating the country's representative political system.

"The holding of the presidential election on schedule, however, will be very challenging," noted Mr. Yamamoto, citing "widespread reports of irregularities during last October's parliamentary elections", and "increasing scepticism" towards the country's two election commissions mandated with delivering "credible and timely" elections.

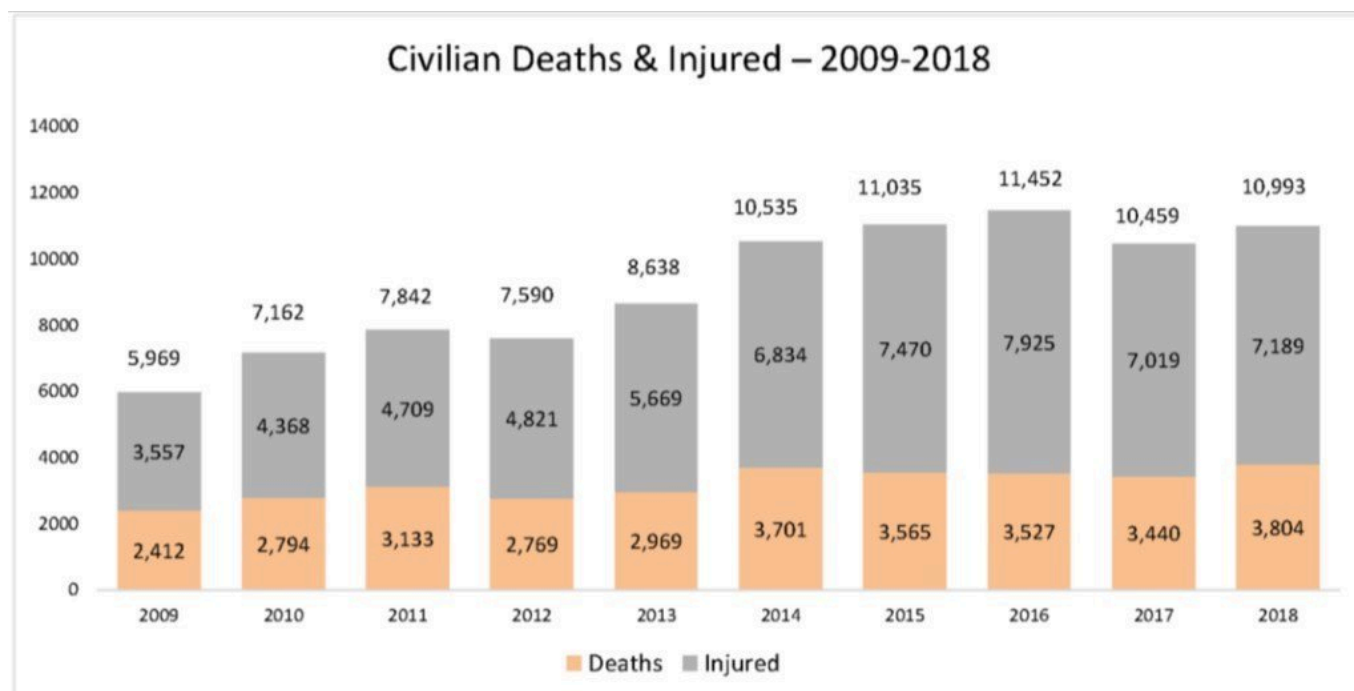
The Special Representative explained that new members are being selected for these two commissions and called on all candidates and political actors "to commit to respecting the independence of the two commissions to enable them to work without any interference".

With less than five months until election day, he warned that the remaining "technical and political challenges are daunting," including the implementation of the new Election Law, along with the holding of three other elections (provincial council elections, district-council elections, and parliamentary elections for the province of Ghazni).

"The United Nations will continue to work with Afghan stakeholders to help them ensure that the electoral process is conducted in a credible, transparent and inclusive manner. It is important, however, that Afghan institutions and stakeholders fully realize that the ultimate responsibility and ownership for elections rests with the people of Afghanistan," said Mr. Yamamoto.

The impact of conflict on civilians

In February, the [UNAMA released devastating figures](#) showing the direct impact of the conflict on the civilians. Fighting and brutal violence claimed 3,804 civilian lives in 2018, the highest number recorded since the UN started keeping records ten years ago. In addition, 7,189 people were injured in 2018, 5 per cent more than in 2017.



UNAMA report

Number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan, 2009-2018.

“But even these figures do not capture the full human cost of the war,” Mr. Yamamoto told the Council, noting that over half the population in the country lives under the poverty line and that 13.5 million people “survive on less than one meal a day,” a situation compounded by last year’s severe drought.

Although last year, the world mobilized for the international humanitarian response in Afghanistan – 78 per cent of the funding requirements were met – this year’s humanitarian response is only [4 per cent funded](#) to date.

Finally, Special Representative Yamamoto mentioned the illicit trafficking of opiates as “another major socio-economic challenge” threatening stability in the country. It is estimated that 10 per cent of the adult population is addicted to narcotics.

“In order to tackle this complex issue, the whole demand and supply chain needs to be addressed,” he stressed, adding that “the United Nations family remains committed to supporting the country’s humanitarian and development goals”.

[Let us keep ‘their spirit of service](#)

alive': Guterres leads tributes to UN workers who died in Ethiopia crash

United Nations flags flew at half-mast around the world on Monday to honour the more than 150 people killed in Sunday's Ethiopian Airlines crash, including at least 21 UN workers.

Speaking to delegates attending the opening of the Commission on the Status of Women at UN Headquarters in New York on Monday morning, the [UN Secretary-General António Guterres](#), said it was "a sad day for many around the world, and for the UN in particular."

"A global tragedy has hit close to home, and the United Nations is united in grief," he said, extending his "deepest condolences" to the relatives and loved ones of all those who died.

A global tragedy has hit close to home, and the United Nations is united in grief *UN chief Guterres*

"Our colleagues were women and men, junior professionals and seasoned officials, hailing from all corners of the globe and with a wide range of expertise," he said, adding that "they all had one thing in common. A spirit to serve the people of the world and make it a better place overall."

"Let us honour the memory of our colleagues, by keeping their spirit of service alive," he concluded, before a minute of silence was observed.



UN Photo/Manuel Elias

The United Nations flag flies at half-mast at UN Headquarters in New York in

memory of the people who died in an Ethiopian Airlines crash accident in Ethiopia on 10 March 2019.

‘Sadness and shock’

The [President of the General Assembly](#), Maria Fernanda Espinosa, reacting on Twitter on Monday, passed on “heartfelt thoughts” to all friends and families of the victims. “This is a popular route for many fighting for the good of Africa,” she added. My heartfelt thoughts are with the friends and families of those affected by the devastating crash of Ethiopian Airlines. This is a popular route for many fighting for the good of Africa

In Nairobi, where Ethiopian Airlines flight 302 was bound, [UN Office in Nairobi](#) (UNON) Acting-Director General, Maimunah Mohd Sharif, spoke of her “great sadness and shock”.

“The United Nations and its Member States have suffered a huge loss. We are working closely with authorities to gather further information,” she said in a statement. “We join the international community in mourning the loss of so many lives, including those countries who have also lost citizens in this devastating crash.”

The top UNON official wrote that staff had held a moment of silence in the Kenyan capital on Monday morning to remember “our colleagues and friends” who had died.

A similar tribute was held at the UN in Geneva ([UNOG](#)), where Director-General Michael Møller spoke of his “profound shock” at the news.

According to figures released by the airline, citizens from more than 35 nationalities were involved in the accident, which involved a Boeing 737 airliner bound for the Kenyan capital, Nairobi. Kenya reportedly suffered the heaviest loss, with 32 nationals on board the plane, followed by 18 Canadians and nine Ethiopians.

On Monday as Ethiopia observed a day of national mourning, investigators announced that they had recovered the aircraft’s black box. The fatal crash marks the second time that a new Boeing 737 Max-8 plane has gone down in five months, the first being off the coast of Indonesia, last October. China’s airline regulator announced on Monday that it was grounding its entire fleet of more than 90 Max 8s, according to news reports.

After taking off at 8:44am local time on Sunday, the jet lost contact with air traffic control at Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa, crashing six minutes into its flight, news reports say.

Extending his sympathies to the victims’ families and friends, Mr Møller said that a number of staff counsellors were on their way to Nairobi from different UN organizations in Geneva.

The World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) lost seven staff members, and on Sunday, Executive Director [said](#) “each of them were willing to travel and work far

from their homes and loved ones, to help make the world a better place to live.”

‘A new chapter’ dawns for democracy in Guinea-Bissau: top UN official

The UN’s Deputy Special Representative in the West African state of Guinea-Bissau, has congratulated politicians, voters and officials across the country for the peaceful conduct of Sunday’s national assembly elections.

Speaking to *UN News* in the capital Bissau, David McLachlan-Karr called it “a very positive result for the people” adding that that “people have come out to vote in large numbers, voted peacefully. There have been no reports of major security incidents around the country.”

The United Nations, as expressed in a recent Secretary-General’s report published in February and a Security Council resolution approved last week, has high hopes that this vote will help to end the political crisis that has rocked the country since 2015.

That year, then President José Mário Vaz, dissolved the government of Prime Minister Domingos Simões Pereira, whose party had won a majority in the 2014 elections. Since then, there have been seven different heads of government.

On Sunday, the Deputy Special Representative described the day as “a new chapter in the country’s democratic history. It will pave the way for the formation of a new government, and for the creation, we hope, of the right conditions for reform and for democratization, peacebuilding, and stabilization in the future.”

Preliminary results are expected on Monday night, and the official tally should be announced on Wednesday. The party that gains a majority of the seats will be invited to form a government, according to political convention.

UN watching closely

Last month, the Security Council approved a resolution which will see the closure of the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau, [UNIOGBIS](#), by the end of 2020. Mr. McLachlan-Karr said that, for the next two years, he hopes “the United Nations Mission will continue to lead good offices to ensure there is a stabilization and peace building agenda” and that it “will continue to work with the new government, continue to work with civil society and other agencies to ensure that a series of necessary reforms takes place.”

At a press conference held as polls closed on Sunday, a spokesperson for the National Election Commission, CNE, said the voting had happened in a “calm, very serene” way with “acceptable” turnout, even though final results will not be known for some days.

Early in the morning, inside some of the capital’s hotels, more than 130 international observers started being dispatched to every one of the eight regions of the country of 1.9 million people. There were 21 parties running, the biggest number in the country’s history.

Currently, only five parties have seats in the Assembly. Throughout the day, the election was monitored in various parts of the capital by various organizations, including civil society groups.

At its headquarters, UNIOGBIS set up a situation room with several members of its staff, who followed the latest news and information received from the regional delegations. The same was true of the Electoral Process Monitoring Cell, which was set up with UN support, where constant updates from 420 monitors were analyzed.

One of the key national concerns prior to the vote centred around electoral lists. In recent weeks, there had been some controversy over voters missing from official registers, despite having voter identification.

Last week, CNE, with the approval of every party, decided they wouldn’t be allowed to vote. On Sunday, the Commission said only around 2% of voters were effected.

Election day reaction

In Santa Luzia, one of the biggest neighborhoods in this city of close to 400,000 people, *UN News* saw voters started lining up along its unpaved roads before the booths opened at 7am local time. At 5pm as soon as the voting ended, the counting began.

In one of the most popular voting places, by the National Heroes Plaza, one of the electoral officers gave results in real time, by holding up a ballot, announce the result, and showing it to everyone gathered around.

At the end of this process, which took close to two hours, the results for that location were posted on a nearby wall.

As the sun was setting, people would stop to look, make some comments, and keep walking up toward the Presidential Palace, just a few hundred feet way. When it comes to the new occupant of that building, the people of Guinea-Bissau should choose its new resident, by October or November this year.

UN chief 'deeply saddened' by Ethiopia plane crash which killed more than 150 – UN staff among the dead

An Ethiopian Airlines flight crashed shortly after take off from the capital Addis Ababa on Sunday, killing more than 150 people on board. The UN Secretary-General António Guterres said [in a statement](#) that he was “deeply saddened at the tragic loss of lives” , as reports emerged that UN staff were also among the dead.

The Boeing airliner bound for the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, took off at 8:44 am local time, losing contact with air traffic control at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Addis Ababa, just six minutes later, according to news reports. The plane was reportedly carrying passengers from more than 35 different countries.

Mr. Guterres conveyed his “heartfelt sympathies and solidarity to the victims’ families and loved ones, including those of United Nations staff members, as well as sincere condolences to the Government and people of Ethiopia”.

According to the UN Department of Safety and Security in Kenya, 19 UN staff perished in the crash. The World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) lost six staff, the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights ([UNHCR](#)) lost two, as did the International Telecommunications Union ([ITU](#)). The Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)), International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) in South Sudan, [World Bank](#) and UN Assistance Mission in Somalia ([UNSOM](#)) each lost one staff member. Six staff from the UN Office in Nairobi (UNON) were also tragically killed.

The cause of the disaster is not yet known, although weather conditions were reportedly good and the plane went down in a field near Bishoftu, around 35 miles southeast of the capital.

The UN is in contact with the Ethiopian authorities and “working closely with them to establish the details of United Nations personnel who lost their lives in this tragedy” the Secretary-General stated.

The disaster happened on the eve of the [UN Environment Assembly](#) when Heads of State, environment ministers and thousands of others will convene for five days in the Kenyan capital.

UN officials express condolences, sadness

Many senior UN officials took to Social Media to express their condolences and sadness. On Twitter, José Graziano da Silva, Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO,) sent his “[heartfelt condolences](#) and

sympathies to the bereaved families", saying that one FAO staff member was among the victims.

Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP) David Beasley tweeted that "the [WFP family mourns](#) today", revealing that WFP staff were also among those on board the flight. "We will do all that is humanly possible to help the families at this painful time. Please keep them in your thoughts and prayers", he said.

Houlin Zhao, SecretaryGeneral of ITU tweeted his "sincere condolences to the families and friends of those who lost their lives in the plane crash" Noting that two ITU staff were on the flight, he said: "Our colleagues in Addis are providing support to their families during this difficult time."

"All of us at [UNICEF](#) mourn the tragic loss of our UN colleagues and all those who died in the Ethiopian Airlines crash today. May they [rest in peace](#). Our thoughts are with their families and loved ones", Henrietta H. Fore, Executive Director of the UN Children's Fund, tweeted.

On behalf of the UN Human Settlements Programme ([UN-Habitat](#)), whose Headquarters are in Nairobi, Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif tweeted here "deepest condolences and prayers to the Great Nation of Ethiopia and to the families of the passengers and crew members who lost their lives in this tragedy. May they [rest in eternal peace](#)".

DR Congo: Second vicious attack on Ebola clinic, UN health chief vows to continue serving 'most vulnerable'

Amidst a deadly Ebola outbreak, on Saturday morning armed groups brutally attacked an Ebola treatment centre in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) eastern city of Butembo, prompting the United Nations health agency's chief's call "to [protect](#) the treatment centres".

Just hours after the assault, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), toured the centre, which was also attacked last week, thanking personnel for their steadfast dedication.

"It breaks my heart to think of the health workers injured and police officer who died in today's attack, as we continue to mourn those who died in previous attacks, while defending the right to health", he said. "But we have no choice except to continue serving the people here, who are among the most vulnerable in the world".

The visit came as he concluded a three-day mission to the country, along with other [WHO](#) leadership and senior United States officials who met with the President, government officials, partner organizations and local responders involved in the outbreak response. He also spoke to a group of partners, officials and staff in Butembo.

He stressed that “these are not attacks BY the community, they are attacks ON the community” conducted by “elements who are exploiting the desperation of the situation for their own purposes”.

“The people of Katwa and Butembo, as in the other communities affected by Ebola, want and deserve a place to receive care and a chance of survival”, he spelled out. “They do not deserve to suffer in their homes while infecting their loved ones, they do not deserve to suffer in inadequately resourced health centers while infecting health workers”.

After careful negotiations, health workers have been allowed in the area permeated with dozens of armed groups, according to news reports. But attacks on treatment centers greatly hinder the ability to contain the virus, as fear pushes people to flee.

“WHO has requested and received further support from UN and local police forces to protect the treatment centres” the WHO chief continued.

To conquer Ebola, he explained “we must strike a delicate balance between providing accessible care, maintaining the neutrality of the response, and protecting patients and staff from attacks by armed groups”.

Pointing out that “these are the dilemmas we face in conflict zones around the world”, he concluded by reiterating WHO’s commitment “to ending the outbreak, and “to improving the health of the people of DRC”.