

Speech: Supporting efforts for peace and security in Afghanistan

Thank you Mr President, I commend you for your leadership, foresight and diplomacy in convening this important and timely debate. And thank you to the Secretary General for your insightful briefing.

As many of you have said regional partnerships are crucial to achieving long term peace and security. This of course is particularly important when we consider the future prosperity of Afghanistan. Afghanistan is making genuine, sustainable progress in overcoming its many challenges. I saw this for myself when I visited Kabul only 3 months ago.

The international community has a crucial role to play in encouraging and promoting this progress, as do the regional partnerships and the initiatives that have been discussed here today. We warmly welcome the efforts underway to improve the links between Afghanistan and its regional partners in South and Central Asia. This, I believe, is critical to achieve greater economic development in Afghanistan, which of course is an essential factor for long-term stability.

Now such co-operation will bind common economic interests, reduce frictions and provide further avenues for resolving disputes. The CASA 1000 hydroelectric project is a great example of the benefits of this type of regional co-operation. Afghanistan and its neighbours have worked together and alongside the international community to overcome significant challenges, bringing this important endeavour to the point of implementation. We are confident that more, much more, regional co-operation will now follow. There is a clear appetite for it within some of the most important regional groups, such as the Regional Economic Co-operation Conference on Afghanistan, or RECCA, and the Heart of Asia. Today's meeting is, I believe, an important opportunity to demonstrate this Security Council's whole-hearted support for that type of co-operation.

However, Mr President, there is still a long way to go before Afghanistan's government and people achieve their goal of building a more stable and prosperous country. The United Kingdom will continue to play our part within the international community in supporting this goal. We have committed up to £750 million for the 4 years up to 2020 to help support the Afghan government's work to improve security, to reduce poverty, and to increase broad access to health and education. We are also working closely within NATO to support Afghanistan. Our non-combat troops have played a crucial role in supporting the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. Through the National Army Officer Academy we have helped to train over 3000 cadets – these are Afghanistan's military leaders of the future.

But ultimately, as others have observed and will do of the course of this debate, the solution to long-term peace and stability lies not within the military, but in a peace process that is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. That is

why the forthcoming meeting of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation is so very important. We encourage all of Afghanistan's regional partners to fully support these efforts towards peace. It takes vision, courage and leadership to begin a conversation with your adversary after years of violence and bloodshed.

However, the time is now surely ripe for that conversation. The people of Afghanistan deserve peace. So we urge President Ghani and the government to use the meeting to reach out to the insurgents and to try to launch a credible peace process. All of us here today should, collectively and individually, express our full support for this peace process, which is vital for Afghanistan's long-term stability.

Credible, inclusive and timely elections are also essential. We commend the work of various UN bodies in helping the government to prepare for parliamentary and presidential elections this year and next.

Mr President, to conclude, Afghanistan continues to face a number of significant challenges in 2018, but this is also a year of real opportunity. With timely elections and the launch of a credible political and peace process this has the real potential to be the year that Afghanistan finally and irreversibly turns a corner. However as the US Deputy Secretary of State so rightly pointed out, the commitment to this must be conditions based and not driven by time lines. We need at times to be patient. This I think is in everyone's interests. Most of all, it will be in the interests of the Afghan people, who have waited so very long for peace. So let us all pledge today to do everything we can, within this Security Council and beyond, to support efforts to bring about that peace and stability.

Thank you.