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Official Records

President: Mr. Lajčák (Slovakia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 39

The situation in Afghanistan

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/72/312 and A/72/392)

Draft resolution (A/72/L.8)

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany to introduce draft resolution A/72/L.8.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): It is my great pleasure to introduce the draft resolution entitled “The situation in Afghanistan” (A/72/L.8). This draft resolution has a long history in the General Assembly, it having first been adopted in 1980. Every year since then, in the draft resolution the General Assembly has reflected the developments in the country, the situation, the crisis, the international community’s support for Afghanistan, and the fate of the Afghan people.

Germany has facilitated, and been the penholder for, the draft resolution since 2002, the year in which the International Conference on Afghanistan was held at the Hotel Petersberg in Bonn, setting a milestone in the history of the country. Last year we completely overhauled the draft resolution, incorporating recent developments and reflecting the international community’s support for the country. This year we updated the draft resolution, which involved rather difficult negotiations. At this stage, I would also like to pay tribute to all members of the General Assembly that

actively tried to reach consensus. It has been hard work, and I thank all of those involved.

Divergences among delegations persisted until the end of consultations. That is why the German penholder decided to make a proposal designed to achieve compromise among the diverging points of view. In the discussions following the presentation, we actually managed to reach an agreement, which was endorsed by a silent procedure.

As a result of the foregoing discussions, in my capacity as facilitator, I would like to ask you, Mr. President, that the word “dialogue” be added after the word “Moscow” in paragraph 22 of the draft resolution. In addition, I would like to make a technical revision to the text: in paragraph 56, the word “must” should be replaced with the word “shall”. This change corrects a technical error that occurred during the editing process; it brings the text back into line with what was agreed on by Member States.

Having overcome the divergences on what I would call minor issues, I would like to recall the substance and meaning of the draft resolution. It is meant, first and foremost, as an expression of unified support for Afghanistan and its people by the entire membership of the United Nations. I would like to express gratitude for the fact that discussions have ended and that we have been able to demonstrate today this unified support.

Turning to the substance of the draft resolution, our pre-eminent concern with respect to Afghanistan, which is also one of the most important points of the draft resolution, is security. In the past year, illegal

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armed groups have carried out a number of high-profile attacks, which have taken a heavy toll on innocent civilians in the country. I would like to take the opportunity of the presence of the Chief Executive of Afghanistan, Mr. Abdullah, to convey to him our deep condolences for the Afghan lives that have been lost to terrorism and violence. I would especially mention the despicable acts of violence, including attacks against Shia mosques and other attacks, which have sought to divide Afghanistan and its people on social, ethnic and religious grounds.

The international community, which has also been hit by terrorist attacks, is trying to help Afghanistan and its people. We strongly condemn all of those attacks and wish to mention in particular the devastating suicide attack that took place in front of the German Embassy on 31 May. I would pay particular tribute to the Afghan security forces for the sacrifices they have made. Together with our partners, Germany will continue to support Afghanistan. NATO will also continue to support the country with the Resolute Support Mission and will try to re-establish peace and stability there. In that context, we welcome the commitment and conditions-based approach that forms the substance of the new Afghanistan strategies of the European Union and of the United States.

Three things are needed to improve the situation in Afghanistan: first, support for the security sector; secondly, support for civilian development; and, thirdly, diplomatic efforts aimed at addressing the political situation.

An inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process involving the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban is the only way to achieve a sustainable resolution of the conflict. We therefore welcome the strategic plan for peace and reconciliation that was presented by the Afghanistan High Peace Council, as well as the initiation of the Kabul process on 6 June, with the aim of ensuring unified and close coordination of efforts under the leadership and ownership of the Afghan Government. On behalf of the international community, the draft resolution calls on all parties to recognize their responsibility for peace, and it calls in particular on the Taliban to enter into direct talks.

The draft resolution welcomes the announcement of the ambitious plan to hold parliamentary elections next year. We call on the Government to accelerate the preparatory work in creating the conditions needed for

a transparent, credible and inclusive electoral process, thereby strengthening the trust of the population in democratic institutions.

We commend the Government of Afghanistan for the progress made in its reform agenda, as presented at the senior officials meeting in Kabul on 4 and 5 October. We are all aware of the persistent challenges, including the fight against corruption, which is key, and the need for continued and determined progress on political and economic reform. We encourage the Government to do its utmost to implement those reforms.

In conclusion, Germany aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union later today. As Germany remains committed to Afghanistan and to the Afghan people, we will continue our active engagement in the country.

Mr. Abdullah (Afghanistan): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's debate on the situation in Afghanistan. It is my pleasure to be here with my delegation as the General Assembly adopts its annual draft resolution on Afghanistan (A/72/L.8). This occasion reflects the international community's strong consensus on the imperative of ensuring stability and prosperity in my country, and we look forward to the emergence of a peaceful regional environment.

This year the delegation of Germany again demonstrated its excellent leadership of the intergovernmental negotiations on the draft resolution that will be adopted later today. We thank the Permanent Mission of Germany for its efforts in that regard, and, more broadly, I express my appreciation to all delegations for contributing to the negotiations process.

Seventy-one years ago yesterday, Afghanistan became the fifty-second Member of the great family that is the United Nations. However, since the late 1970s, my country has undergone severe trauma after suffering tremendous losses caused by imposed conflicts and in the war against terrorism and violent extremism, which continue to hurt us. Despite the hardship, Afghanistan has today regained its status as a responsible member of the international community. The unanimous adoption of this year's draft resolution will signal the overwhelming support of the world, which is standing behind us as we continue our quest for lasting peace and prosperity in Afghanistan.

My presence here today attests to the importance that the Government and the people of Afghanistan

attach to the draft resolution and, more specifically, to its more focused implementation. We therefore expect and request that Member States view the draft resolution in that way too. Despite the challenges confronting us, Afghanistan stands resilient and confident in its stance at home and abroad. We are a nation firmly committed to the ideals of the Charter of the United Nations and the vision of a global landscape anchored in peace, sovereignty, mutual respect and cooperation for our common benefit. We equally value our bond of partnership with the United Nations, which has always stood in strong support and solidarity with our nation, especially in the most difficult times. Today the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and all the relevant United Nations agencies on the ground continue to play an important role in helping us with various aspects of recovery, rebuilding, humanitarian assistance and the seeking of a peaceful resolution to our political and security issues.

We welcome the Secretary-General's United Nations reform initiative in the hope that it will expedite our realization of a "One United Nations" approach in Afghanistan. Today we are reciprocating the international community's generosity through our active engagement and positive contributions. Afghanistan's recent election to the Human Rights Council for the first time and its membership in the Economic and Social Council, its vice-presidency of the General Assembly, its active involvement in other forums and the successful adoption of two Afghan-initiated draft resolutions — on countering the threat posed by improvised explosive devices and on the proclamation of 19 August as the International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism — stand as a testament to our national will, diplomatic efforts and eagerness to be an effective contributor to the global good.

Let me now provide an update on the situation in Afghanistan.

With regard to security, over the past several months our national security forces have effectively thwarted efforts by the Taliban working alongside its affiliated Haqqani Network, elements of Al-Qaida, Da'esh and other recognized terror groups aimed at making notable gains or capturing a major urban centre. We are not dealing with one but several terror outfits that either mirror one another under different labels or indirectly support overlapping agendas. We are grateful to all international partners for the contributions they have

made to equipping and training our security forces, which have courageously and at a high cost led the fight against those terrorist and violent extremist groups threatening us, the region and many others beyond our borders.

The draft resolution also reaffirms the importance of the international community's continued support for the Afghan National Security Forces. To that end, we have adopted new measures to complement and better coordinate with the newly announced strategies devised by the United States, NATO and the European Union, *inter alia*, which came as a response to our enduring request for sustained international support for security and stability in Afghanistan — be it military or civilian in nature.

We firmly believe that a conditions-based approach and clear focus on resolving the problem of regional terrorist sanctuaries and support systems will bring us closer to peace and stability. They also form the cornerstone of our new national security strategy to defeat terrorism, work with nations that share our threat perception and protect our people against politicized violence. We have long asserted our desire to have friendly relations with all nations. We have taken every opportunity to make it clear through words and deeds that we will never allow our relations with any single country or group of countries to overshadow or adversely affect our relations with others in the region or beyond. Afghanistan should be seen as a strategic asset and a platform of cordiality for all. We consider negative State rivalries and the use of violent proxy forces as counter-productive. There is no such thing as a good violent extremist or terrorist. We need to agree to fight all forms and shades of terror. We can, and should, no longer harbour or support one group while fighting another and claim to be combating terrorism in all its dimensions.

This year's draft resolution also recognizes the centrality of Afghanistan's role in leading peace efforts within the framework of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation to supplement initiatives for action-oriented cooperation. Those efforts will also be guided by Afghanistan's High Peace Council's new strategic plan, which is centre upon a whole-of-society approach to promoting peace. At the regional level, fostering stable and constructive relations with all our neighbours, especially Pakistan, remains a key component of our peace strategy. President Ashraf Ghani and I hope that, this time around, action against

all forms of terrorism will speak louder than words. It should be noted that changing the status quo will be possible only when terror subsides, infringements on our territory come to a halt and safe havens are shut down. Failure to do so will have negative consequences and result in further tensions, or worse.

Through the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework, we have adopted concrete and systemic measures to implement a reform agenda, offer better governance and strive towards achieving greater self-reliance. Our economy, hurt by the 2014 ending of the combat mission by international forces as a result of our reliance upon large-scale military expenditures, has turned a corner and is showing signs of recovery, especially with regard to private-sector investment and development.

Since the formation of the Government of National Unity, domestic revenue has seen important gains, which in turn have helped us shoulder more responsibility for our security and development needs. Moreover, we are making steady progress in the development of our national infrastructure, including roads, industry, energy, telecommunications and transport networks. Once completed, these projects will improve connectivity and generate economic growth in Afghanistan and our region.

Once an ambitious vision, the regional economic cooperation agenda is becoming reality. Afghanistan is being transformed into a hub for regional and international trade, transit and transport. Energy transfer is a major component of this transformation now and will be so in future. I am pleased to highlight the successful outcome of the seventh Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, held in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, last week, where Afghanistan, regional countries and other international stakeholders recommitted to the full implementation of at least 18 major regional projects, including the CASA-1000 and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India energy and natural-gas initiatives, as well as the Chabahar International Transport and Transit Corridor project.

The recent historic signing of the Lapis Lazuli Transit, Trade and Transport Route agreement among Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey marks another important development in the advancement of economic and cultural links in the region. Additionally, the air corridor with India has

increased trade volume between our countries, while major railway projects with China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan are also moving forward. All in all, these mega-projects hold the promise of propelling us and the wider region into a new era of economic prosperity.

We in the Government of National Unity recognize that strengthening good governance and the rule of law is imperative for our stability and prosperity. We are making every effort to fulfil the commitments we made at the London, Warsaw and Brussels Conferences in 2014 and 2016.

The National Strategy for Combating Corruption — a living document adopted in September — lays out clear strategies and solutions for systemic reforms across Government institutions and agencies. An example of a system that has seen reform is the public civil administration. The Supreme Court, the Attorney General's Office and the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre have so far tried more than 1,000 cases of corruption, bribery and abuse of authority, including by senior-ranking officials. We have made clear to our people and our international partners that the principle of accountability will not be compromised at any cost. In the area of fiscal sustainability, we have improved our financial systems to the point where they have been declared to be in conformity with international standards. Our efforts in the areas of the rule of law and governance will continue as a matter of priority.

Prevailing insecurity has also led to an increase in drug production in some parts of the country. The dangerous nexus between terrorism and narcotic drugs therefore demands a more focused and collective effort from within the region and beyond.

The full participation of women in sociopolitical processes and the economy remains a core priority, in line with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). Today, Afghan women proudly represent our country in all spheres. I would especially like to thank the more than 8,500 women who are serving in our security forces. Their contribution and sacrifice are helping us deal with cases of criminality, violence and abuse.

Finally, I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to the most important aspect of political stability: learning from the past and ensuring free, fair and transparent elections. We are in preparation mode, working alongside the Independent Election Commission, to bring necessary reforms to the

electoral process so that public participation and trust in it are restored. This is a critical pledge. We are committed to holding parliamentary elections in 2018, followed by presidential elections in 2019. We thank the United Nations and all other partners for their help in this regard.

To conclude, I can say with utmost confidence that the contributions, investments and joint sacrifices made in the past 17 years have made a tremendous difference. From a domestic standpoint, the notable gains made across various sectors have had a profound impact in improving the lives of ordinary Afghans throughout our country. Our civil society is vibrant, our free media is functioning, providing checks and balances to the system, and our growing youth population is less inclined than before to leave the country, as young people see opportunities and prospects at home. Just two days ago, our Under-19 national cricket team won the Asia Cup in Malaysia.

All in all, we are committed to continuing this journey based on the wishes of the Afghan people and enjoying the support of the international community. Once again, with security being a vital priority for us and with so many across our region and beyond being affected by insecurity at this important juncture, let us reinvigorate the spirit of international partnership and effective engagement in which the global fight against terrorism began 17 years ago. Doing so provides the best guarantee for the security and prosperity of all our nations.

The President: I give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Dvořák (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to thank the Chief Executive of Afghanistan, Mr. Abdullah Abdullah, for his statement. I also thank all the delegations that have participated in the consultations on the draft resolution (A/72/L.8), particularly the German team for so ably facilitating the negotiations thereon. We are once again looking forward to adoption of the draft resolution by consensus.

More than a year ago, at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, the international community confirmed its substantial political and financial support for Afghanistan. To recall, the international community pledged \$15 billion until 2020, out of which the European Union and its member States would contribute \$5 billion. This pledge was made against a comprehensive and detailed Afghan reform programme presented during the Conference. Now, one year later, we can see progress in a number of areas, but major challenges remain. In addition, the challenging security situation in the country has made our work more difficult.

On behalf of the European Union and its member States, I would like to underline that we have delivered on our commitments. On 16 October, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the EU member States approved a new European Union strategy on Afghanistan, reconfirming the long-term commitment of the EU and its member States to promoting peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan and to support its sustainable development. The new EU strategy focuses on four priority areas critical to achieving progress in Afghanistan: promoting peace, stability and regional security; reinforcing democracy, the rule of law and human rights and promoting good governance and women's empowerment; supporting economic and human development; and addressing challenges related to migration.

In recent years, Afghanistan has been confronted with a number of challenges that threaten the progress made in its economic and social development and its democratic institutions. The European Union recognizes that the country's delicate security situation and the fragile economic state of affairs, combined with a clear determination on the part of the Afghan authorities to implement much-needed reforms, necessitates renewed attention from the international community.

The new strategy is the latest illustration of the European Union's strong engagement in and firm commitment to Afghanistan. Notably, it follows the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, the signing in February of a new EU-Afghanistan Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development, and the appointment in June of an EU Special Envoy to Afghanistan. The EU-Afghanistan Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development represents the first legal framework governing cooperation between the EU and Afghanistan. The provisional

application of the Cooperation Agreement will allow us to strengthen our existing dialogue and explore new areas of cooperation. A joint committee will ensure the Agreement's proper functioning by overseeing its implementation. Two special working groups will also be created in order to deepen the sectoral dialogue on human rights, good governance, migration and economic and social development.

Peace in Afghanistan will benefit not only all Afghans, but also the entire region and the international community as a whole. This was also a key message of the Brussels Conference last year and is the focus of the new EU strategy. Security and sustainable development are interconnected challenges in a State-building process that needs to be underpinned by genuine political support from the region. The EU urges all regional stakeholders to cooperate constructively in order to promote a genuine and results-oriented negotiation process without preconditions aimed at creating a lasting settlement between the parties to the conflict. Such a settlement will provide the foundation for peace, security and prosperity in Afghanistan and the wider region.

The European Union remains fully committed to supporting an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. Such a process must include all Afghan men and women, protect their legitimate interests and preserve Afghanistan's unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity and the equal rights of all Afghans under the Constitution of Afghanistan. Furthermore, the EU supports the Kabul Process on Peace and Security Cooperation and other international efforts to establish a genuine Afghan peace and reconciliation process. The Kabul Process is expected to encourage further discussions among Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries so as to increase regional cooperation for peace and stability.

We particularly encourage the Afghan Government to engage in a political process with the Taliban and other Afghan opposition groups in order to reach a lasting political settlement. We also welcome all initiatives to create an environment conducive to the success of this process and call on all parties to engage in constructive solutions.

The EU is alarmed by the high level of violence and large number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan, including women and children. Improving security remains fundamental for stability and development in

Afghanistan. The EU is committed to working with the country to combat terrorism, the financing of terrorism and terrorist threats in all their forms, and to step up dialogue and cooperation to prevent and counter violent extremism, radicalization and recruitment and address their root causes. The EU welcomes the Afghan Government's four-year security-sector reform plan and commends the efforts made in support of a sufficient and increasingly sustainable Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, as endorsed by Afghanistan and countries contributing to the Resolute Support Mission at the NATO Warsaw Summit in July 2016.

The EU welcomed the announcement of the Afghan parliamentary and district council elections for 2018. Our expectation is that they will be held in an inclusive, transparent and credible manner. But for that to be possible, key decisions on electoral reforms need to be taken as a matter of urgency. The EU followed closely all developments on elections, in coordination with the international community. We will remain committed to supporting the Afghan electoral process and the right of Afghan citizens to exercise their civic and democratic rights.

Human rights is an area of high importance in the EU-Afghanistan dialogue. On 14 August, the EU, together with member States and the Afghan Government, organized the third EU-Afghanistan high-level meeting on human rights, taking stock of the progress made so far and looking forward to the future and to addressing the many challenges that still exist on the ground.

In its actions, the EU puts a particular emphasis on women's empowerment, education for girls and fighting violence against women, and we encourage the Afghan Government to make further efforts in these areas. The EU supports the implementation of Afghanistan's national action plan on women, peace and security, created pursuant to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), with projects and actions in several provinces. The fourth Kabul Symposium on Afghan women, entitled "Afghan Women: Messengers of Peace", held in May, offered an additional opportunity to reiterate the importance of women's participation in peace processes. We believe that the Kabul Symposium can become a mechanism to formulate Afghan women's expectations and monitor the Government's progress in delivery.

The EU supports Afghanistan in its fight against corruption in the country's justice sector, parliament and civil society, and welcomes the adoption of its anti-corruption strategy in October. The focus must now be on the implementation of this strategy.

Migration continues to be high on the EU's agenda and is an important subject of discussion with our Afghan partners. The new EU strategy on Afghanistan includes migration among its priorities, confirming the importance of widening the scope of the EU-Afghanistan migration dialogue. We discuss bilateral cooperation, but also the regional and multilateral context. We have continued our cooperation in the framework of the EU-Afghanistan Joint Way Forward on migration issues, a political platform for managing migration in a sustainable way, based on solidarity, dialogue and respect for human rights.

Similarly, with regard to Afghan refugees, our attention has been focused on development at the regional level. In parallel with regular political dialogue with relevant partners, the EU took concrete actions through a comprehensive approach to address the key challenges of migration and forced displacement in Afghanistan and in the region. To this end, two multi-country regional programmes were adopted in 2016 and 2017, with budgets of €91.6 million and €195.6 million, respectively. The United Nations-level global compacts for 2018 will offer an additional opportunity for the EU and Afghanistan to coordinate and respond to the challenges migration poses today in our societies and in the international arena.

Finally, insecurity and instability are also fuelled by the illicit cultivation, production and trafficking of narcotics. We have just seen the alarming recently published United Nations figures showing an 87 per cent increase in opium production, to a record level of 9,000 tons. This remains an important concern for the European Union, with severe consequences for Afghanistan, including high consumption rates within the population, the fuelling of the illicit economy, the corruption of institutions and the financing of international terrorism. We therefore encourage the Government of Afghanistan to continue to forcefully implement its National Drug Action Plan with the full support of the international community and in close cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and other relevant regional frameworks, such as the Paris Pact Initiative.

In conclusion, in addition to the foregoing, we must also point out that the EU emphatically acknowledges the crucial role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and all the United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people, encouraging peace and reconciliation, monitoring and promoting human rights, and coordinating the international community's assistance. It is important that the international community remain strongly committed to accompanying Afghanistan towards lasting peace and stability. We will continue to support the transformation process to promote the emergence of a fully self-reliant, peaceful, democratic and prosperous society for the benefit of all Afghans.

Ms. Wilson (Australia): As an ardent supporter of the international consensus on Afghanistan, Australia is proud to co-sponsor draft resolution A/72/L.8. At a moment where this consensus has become brittle, we acknowledge the work of all countries in developing a draft resolution that reflects constructive engagement in support of security, stability and development in Afghanistan, in partnership with the National Unity Government.

In 2017, the international community reaffirmed its support for Afghanistan, including through the United States-South Asia strategy, a renewed NATO commitment, the European Union strategy and Shanghai Cooperation Organization engagement. Australia affirms these efforts and believes an integrated regional approach to Afghanistan's challenges — including properly resourced diplomatic, development and defence efforts — can help improve Afghanistan's prospects, reduce its dependence on international assistance and chart a path toward credible peace.

We commend the efforts of Afghanistan and its regional partners to increase trade and investment through greater regional economic cooperation. We congratulate the National Unity Government for overcoming significant challenges in 2017 and note others ongoing, including responding to more than 1 million Afghan returnees and the difficult security environment. Australia welcomes the progress against corruption, specifically by the work of the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre. We encourage the Afghan Government to persist in making Afghan institutions more transparent and accountable. Conducting timely elections will be critical to accountability. We encourage the Afghan Government to continue to work to hold free and fair elections.

Events in 2017 tragically reminded us of the human cost of insecurity and the scale of the challenge before us. We welcome the commitment of the Afghan Government to security-sector reform, including the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces road map and the achievement of its milestones. Australia remains committed to Afghanistan's long-term security and development. In 2017, alongside our international partners, Australia announced a modest increase in its military commitment to train, advise and assist the courageous and resilient Afghan security forces working to secure the country and its future. During an April visit by President Ghani to Australia, we reaffirmed our commitment to development cooperation by signing an updated and renewed bilateral development partnership agreement. This partnership recognized the important task of empowering women and girls and meeting the needs of vulnerable populations.

However, ensuring Afghanistan's future is not just about security. Violence and instability are not inevitable. Australia continues to support an Afghan-owned negotiated political solution as the most sustainable path to peace. We encourage Afghanistan and its partners to look for opportunities for an inclusive, pragmatic dialogue to end violence and create a coherent vision for the country's future, including through the Kabul process.

Draft resolution A/72/L.8 is a vital way for the international community to express support for Afghanistan and its people. I wish to record Australia's admiration and appreciation for the work of the Chair of the negotiations in developing the draft resolution and commend it to the Assembly.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation supports the adoption by consensus of draft resolution A/72/L.8, on the situation in Afghanistan, which was intended to reflect in a targeted and comprehensive manner the collective approaches of the international community to reach an effective and long-term Afghan settlement. This was achieved largely by taking into account the friendly relations and positive experience of cooperating with Kabul at the United Nations. However, we would like to note that, in reaching agreement on the text, a number of Russian concerns were not taken into account.

Mr. Tevi (Vanuatu), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We are troubled by the current state of affairs in Afghanistan. The spillover of the terrorist threat to

Central Asia and Russia runs counter to our national interests. By adopting this draft resolution, we trust that when the next draft resolution is drafted, we will receive thorough and detailed reports on the concrete results of the 16-year struggle against terrorism and narcotics trafficking and on the reasons for the unprecedented expansion of opium-poppy cultivation, which plays into the hands of international terrorist organizations.

The deliberate information campaign based on the unfounded accusation that the Russian Federation supports the Taliban, including by financing it and providing it with weapons, is unacceptable. We see this as an attempt to assign blame and use us as a scapegoat. So far, the discussions of the draft resolution have shown that Russia alone has called consistently and systematically for the Taliban movement to be fully reclassified as a terrorist group, which would preclude any possible relaxation of its members' criminal prosecution. We will continue to insist on that approach as long as we see no alternative, and we will never accept loopholes that enable terrorists to avoid accountability while hiding behind the tired concept of countering violent extremism.

We are concerned about the state of the Afghan National Security Forces. We deplore the decision to replace its Russian aircraft and small arms and the reform lowering the upper age limit for officers, which will result in the premature retirement of several thousand highly qualified soldiers.

Unfortunately, we see no progress in national reconciliation. In that regard, we believe that the Moscow format for consultations launched at the beginning of this year is the best possible platform for engaging in substantive negotiations to facilitate that process. We believe that its underlying principle of frank and equitable partnership with the participation of every country in the region will help to achieve its objectives.

The spring-summer campaign has not yielded the expected results for the Taliban movement, but in spite of that it still controls about half of the country's territory and continues to stage serious acts of terror and engage in subversive activity. The Afghan branch of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is also strengthening its position and according to our estimates now numbers 10,000 people. Its ranks are mainly being replenished by foreign terrorist fighters moving into Afghanistan after gaining combat experience in Syria

and Iraq. We would also like to point to the signs of outside support for ISIL evidenced by sightings of unmarked helicopters.

Yet another seriously worrying issue is the unprecedented surge in drug production. That trend is starkly confirmed by the numbers in the most recent report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which show that this year the acreage under drug cultivation grew by 60 per cent, while opium production nearly doubled. That represents 7 per cent of the country's gross domestic product. Narcodollars make up a significant portion — between 35 and 40 per cent — of terrorist revenue. We therefore urge that the international community ramp up its efforts to combat Afghan drug trafficking. We see good possibilities here through strengthening cooperation in this area between Afghanistan and the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

In conclusion, we would like to stress that the Russian Federation robustly and steadfastly supports the Afghan people's aspiration for lasting peace in the country. The traditionally friendly relations between our two countries reflect the national interests of both of us. However, bringing stability to Afghanistan and addressing the challenges it is facing will be possible only through a comprehensive approach on the part of the international community. We stand ready to continue to work to improve the coordination of all States' efforts in the interests of peace in Afghanistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): The General Assembly first adopted a resolution on Afghanistan in 1980 (resolution 35/37). It is therefore not out of place today to briefly recall the circumstances that produced that resolution and the way in which they have changed. Since 1980, Afghanistan has transitioned through almost four decades of foreign military interventions and civil wars that have inflicted endless suffering on the Afghan people, including millions of innocent men, women and children. What has remained constant throughout that period is the international community's support for the people of Afghanistan. The annual General Assembly resolution on the subject is an expression and embodiment of that global support. We commend the efforts of Germany in once again steering the negotiations on draft resolution A/72/L.8 on the situation in Afghanistan, of which Pakistan is once again a sponsor.

Apart from the people of Afghanistan, it is the people of Pakistan who have suffered the most from the decades of war and violence in that country. The conflict next door has fundamentally altered and affected Pakistan's polity, economy and society. Our response to the suffering of our Afghan brothers and sisters has been marked by empathy and generosity. My country has offered unprecedented hospitality and support to the Afghan people in the past several decades of their travail and tragedy. For more than three decades, we have continued to host close to 3 million Afghan refugees, the largest protracted presence of refugees anywhere in the world.

Unfortunately, the long war in Afghanistan continues. Over the past year, the security situation has deteriorated further, with violent insurgent attacks proliferating across the country. Civilian casualties have continued to rise owing to these attacks and escalating air strikes. Pakistan strongly condemns the repeated large-scale, orchestrated terrorist attacks in Kabul and elsewhere in Afghanistan. There can be no justification for indiscriminate attacks on innocent children, women and men. The intensifying violence and instability in Afghanistan, and the growing presence of Da'esh and a large number of other terrorist and militant groups in its ungoverned spaces, is cause for grave concern for the Afghan people, Afghanistan's neighbours and the international community. Such terrorist groups pose a clear and present danger to the long-term stability of Afghanistan and the entire region.

The nexus between terrorism and drug trafficking helps to sustain terrorist and extremist groups in Afghanistan. The latest report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime indicates that drug production in Afghanistan has rapidly increased.

The prolonged conflict in Afghanistan has not only inflicted epic suffering on its people, it has also prevented Afghanistan and the entire region from realizing its immense economic potential. A peaceful and stable Afghanistan is essential to regional stability and economic progress.

Pakistan has been obliged to address the fallout from Afghanistan's serial crises, including terrorism. We have deployed 200,000 troops on our western border and conducted the largest anti-terrorism campaign in the world. Those military campaigns have succeeded in clearing our tribal areas of almost all militant and terrorist groups. But in doing so, we have paid a

heavy price. More than 27,000 Pakistanis, including 6,500 military and law-enforcement personnel, have been martyred as a result of terrorist attacks, while Pakistan's economic losses are estimated at more than \$120 billion. Yet we remain committed to fully implementing our campaign against terrorism and violent extremism. Defeating terrorist violence is vital to realizing our overriding priority of rapid economic and social development.

Cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan is a vital component of the effort to achieve peace and security within Afghanistan and the entire region. We have a long shared border that is not easy to control. It is in that spirit of cooperation that we have shared comprehensive proposals with our neighbour for monitoring and controlling the border and for effective border management. They include the establishment of a ground coordination centre and the deployment of liaison officers on the international border. We believe that such measures can play a vital role in stopping the cross-border movement of terrorists and militants, and we hope that the Afghan Government will respond positively to our proposal to strengthen and reinforce border controls.

Over the years, Pakistan has also taken comprehensive and concrete steps to support Afghanistan's economy and development. We facilitate the transit of Afghan goods without any quantitative restrictions. We have recently taken a series of additional measures to facilitate transit trade, including the establishment of round-the-clock dedicated trade posts, the improvement of customs and immigration infrastructure at border crossing points and the creation of dedicated lanes for the smooth processing of goods, especially perishable items, to Afghanistan.

My country envisages a future of even closer economic cooperation with Afghanistan. Pakistan has actively promoted the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline and the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project, which will address the energy needs of the region and generate significant economic activity in Afghanistan. We are also working with the Government of Afghanistan to explore other connectivity and infrastructure development projects. More than 50,000 Afghans have studied in Pakistani educational institutions and are now working in Afghanistan's public and private sectors, fulfilling their own dreams and the needs of their country. We have announced 3,000 scholarships

for Afghan students in Pakistani universities and professional colleges. The first batch of those students is already studying at various educational institutions in Pakistan. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Afghanistan on winning the Asian Cricket Council Under-19 Asia Cup.

Pakistan and Afghanistan share deep historical bonds of faith, culture and geography. The combined potential of the two countries is considerable. Expanded trade, energy cooperation and implementation of the various transregional economic projects already identified can greatly enhance and foster peace and prosperity in the entire region.

The international community is unanimous in its view that sustainable peace in Afghanistan can be achievable only through a negotiated settlement. The draft resolution that we will adopt today reaffirms that international consensus. Pakistan has consistently proposed a political settlement as the most viable way to end decades of conflict and suffering in Afghanistan. Sixteen years of war waged by the world's most powerful forces have not secured a military solution. Peace will not be restored by continuing to resort to military force. Neither the coalition supporting Kabul or the Afghan Taliban is in a position to impose a military solution on the other. The promotion of a political settlement and the pursuit of a military solution in Afghanistan are mutually incompatible. Resorting to a military option without an accompanying political strategy will not produce a result different from what we have seen over the past 16 years but will rather lead to more violence and suffering for the Afghan people, as well as increasing political instability in the region.

It is our sincere hope that priority will be given to achieving peace through negotiations and reconciliation. While the international community can help in promoting those processes, the principal responsibility for that rests with the Afghans themselves. In that regard, we welcome the Afghan peace and reconciliation plan and hope that it will serve as a first step towards a political settlement. We also call on the Afghan Taliban to abandon violence, come to the negotiating table and engage in serious dialogue for peace.

Pakistan remains ready to help to promote such a dialogue. Our participation in every regional and international initiative for peace and reconciliation is a testament to our commitment. We have continued to engage in all processes designed to promote a political

solution — the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan; the 6+1 group of China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, the United States and Afghanistan; the International Contact Group on Afghanistan and Pakistan; the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process; the Moscow format and the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation. Progress will be assured, however, only when the Afghan parties themselves conclude that there can be no military solution to the Afghan war and that peace can be achieved only through unconditional dialogue. We hope that wisdom and realism will encourage them to engage in such peace negotiations. Such a process is our best hope for lasting peace in Afghanistan.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the path to peace in Afghanistan is arduous but achievable. However, it is up to the Afghan parties themselves to acknowledge that there is no alternative path to peace other than an unconditional dialogue and to then make the tough but necessary compromises that will enable them to arrive at a negotiated peace. We believe that the people of Afghanistan deserve no less.

Mr. Mahmaminov (Tajikistan): Tajikistan is pleased to join the sponsors of draft resolution A/72/L.8, which we hope will be adopted by consensus, as in previous years. In that regard, we express our sincere appreciation to the delegation of Germany for facilitating the draft resolution. It is encouraging that all Member States share the same view of the importance of peace and stability in Afghanistan and its key role in promoting regional cooperation and integration. There can be no doubt that ensuring peace, stability and socioeconomic rehabilitation for Afghanistan will be crucial to the development and prosperity of the entire region. Tajikistan supports the efforts of Afghanistan and its people aimed at strengthening its national dialogue and reconciliation and post-conflict economic rehabilitation, and calls for expanding assistance to Afghanistan targeting the restoration of its economy, the strengthening of its social sector and the creation of new jobs. Peace, stability and urgent socioeconomic rehabilitation are crucial to Afghanistan's development and prosperity.

Involving Afghanistan in the process of multifaceted regional cooperation will be key to the success of the international community's efforts. We believe that an important undertaking in that

regard will be creating an environment conducive to expanding the potential of transit networks between Central Asian countries and Afghanistan, as well as the establishment of the infrastructure needed to enable goods and services to circulate freely in the region. We are ready to take part in restoring Afghanistan's social and economic infrastructure by connecting our two countries' transport arteries to create an energy bridge, the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA-1000), which will provide the Afghan people with essential commodities and training specialists. The construction of the CASA-1000 electricity transmission line, which we will implement jointly with Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and our development partners, will provide an energy connection between Central and South Asia and contribute to the future development of both regions.

Another important area for our endeavours is in creating an environment conducive to expanding the potential of transit networks between Central Asian countries, including Afghanistan. In that context, Tajikistan believes that establishing the infrastructure necessary for the free movement of goods, services and investment in the region will be crucial. We therefore consider it a priority to achieve the signing of the relevant documents on the utilization and construction of regional framework projects, including the trade and transit agreement between Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan and the construction of a Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Turkmenistan railway.

In that regard, by implementing national and regional projects on energy, transport and the establishment of free economic zones on the border with Afghanistan, Tajikistan is helping to engage Afghanistan in regional economic integration. Those projects are aimed at creating jobs, eradicating poverty and ensuring a favourable environment for development. Developing Afghanistan's human resources and training specialists in various civilian professions are also important priorities for the cooperation programme between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Hundreds of Afghan students are currently studying at Tajikistan's universities. The Government of Tajikistan has also established a quota of 1,000 educational grants for citizens of Afghanistan for the period ending in 2025. We will continue our efforts to further strengthen cooperation with the Government of Afghanistan and international partners on the social, economic and security fronts in order to support

peace, stability and socioeconomic development in our neighbouring countries.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): I would like to thank Mr. Abdullah Abdullah, the Chief Executive of Afghanistan, for his statement and to welcome his presence at today's debate.

We are pleased that the consultations on draft resolution A/72/L.8 on the situation of Afghanistan, which is before us today, have been completed successfully. We thank all the delegations that made genuine efforts to that end. The Assembly's adoption of this resolution every year not only underscores the progress that Afghanistan is making but is also a solid symbol of the international community's enduring and unanimous support to the Government and the people of Afghanistan in addressing the country's continuing challenges. We once again look forward to the draft resolution's adoption by consensus, and we are pleased to be among its sponsors. I would now like to take this opportunity to share some of our views on the situation in Afghanistan.

I would first like to emphasize the importance of consolidating the country's achievements of the past 16 years. Afghanistan still needs the international community's support in that regard, and it is vital that we live up to the commitments we have made. We must also bear in mind that Afghan-led and -owned peace and reconciliation efforts are key to the country's lasting peace and security. Moreover, given the fragile security situation, the National Unity Government should focus on ensuring even greater inclusiveness and on combating terrorism. Needless to say, a more inclusive approach will solidify the effects of reforms and political stability, improve the security situation and align with the international community's efforts to achieve a stable, secure and prosperous Afghanistan.

Turkey will continue to support the Afghan Government in realizing its security and development agenda as long as our help is needed. We will continue our bilateral assistance in the areas of security and development, and will contribute to NATO's efforts as the Resolute Support Mission framework nation responsible for the Kabul area. I would also like to note that Turkey's official development aid to Afghanistan between 2002 and 2016 totalled more than \$1 billion and encompassed 850 projects. Our vision for Afghanistan is of a peaceful and stable country enjoying good, cooperative relations with its neighbours while being

at the centre of major regional projects. In that respect, we welcome the signing in Ashgabat on 15 November of the Lapis Lazuli transit, trade and transport route agreement. Turkey will also continue to assist Afghanistan through multilateral platforms such as the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.

The Afghan people deserve a better future. Our collective and continued commitment will help to renew the hopes of the Afghan people as they pursue that path. It is our joint responsibility to support and assist them to that end.

Mr. Lal (India): I thank the President of the General Assembly for organizing today's annual debate on the situation in Afghanistan. We thank Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah for his presence and for the important statement he delivered here today. His words have clearly illustrated the indomitable spirit of the Afghan people in even the worst adversities.

Dastardly acts of violence and terror targeting those who are most vulnerable continue to test the remarkable resilience of the Afghan people. No one — not the sick in hospitals, small children in schools, worshippers in mosques or even mourners at funerals — has been spared by the dark and desperate forces of terror and violence. We have all condemned those attacks and expressed sympathy with the people of Afghanistan. Terrorists and their supporters, however, continue to feel emboldened. Clearly, not enough has been done. Unfortunately, while the cowardliness and frequency of the terror attacks in Afghanistan have reached new heights, and while terrorists continue to take over territory and resources belonging to the Afghan people, we have witnessed little change here at the United Nations. The Security Council continues to debate whether it should designate new leaders or freeze the assets of the slain leader of the Taliban. Even as today's debate is taking place, Da'esh is posing new threats in Afghanistan.

Addressing global terrorism requires a comprehensive, uncompromising and coherent response from the international community. Afghanistan's security and stability are tied to those of the entire region. It is imperative to address the support that terrorist organizations operating outside the fabric of international law — the Taliban, the Haqqani network, Da'esh, Al-Qaida and its designated affiliates, such as Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and the Jaysh Muhammad — draw from outside Afghanistan. The special terrorist areas,

safe havens and sanctuaries beyond Afghanistan's border must be eliminated. Support for an Afghan-led, -owned and -controlled peace and national reconciliation process within the framework of Afghanistan's Constitution must be wholeheartedly pursued. Any meaningful progress requires an end to the violence, the renunciation of any links to international terrorism and respect for the rights of ordinary Afghans, especially women and children.

We congratulate Afghanistan on its election to the Human Rights Council for the first time. Afghanistan's active engagement at the United Nations on various important issues continues to grow. While the international community's commitment to Afghanistan is renewed every year through various multilateral efforts and those of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, respect for Afghanistan's sovereignty and for its direction and ownership of the peace processes should be paramount.

We are seriously concerned about the latest *Afghanistan Opium Survey* figures from the Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime highlighting the rise in opium production, the increased acreage under poppy cultivation in Afghanistan and the industry's role in fuelling terrorism. We should be asking where those drugs are going and who is benefiting from the trade. According to the survey, only a fraction of the revenue generated by the cultivation and trafficking of Afghan opiates reaches Afghan drug-trafficking groups. So who controls and benefits from that nexus? Those questions must be addressed with verifiable measures and actions. The Security Council, when addressing the issue of the funds that terrorists in Afghanistan are generating through their illicit activities, could effectively use the sanctions regime of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) as leverage to promote peace. However, that has not happened. We have not gone after the leaders of the terrorist organizations. We have not investigated or identified the illicit drug-trafficking businesses in Afghanistan. Unless there is effective action, the United Nations is in danger of becoming marginalized.

India continues to support the Government and people of Afghanistan in their efforts to achieve a stable, secure, united, prosperous, democratic and pluralistic nation. We greatly appreciate the continuing sacrifices that the Afghan security forces are making

not just for their own people, but for those in the region and the rest of the world.

We see development as the cornerstone of our long-standing friendship with Afghanistan. The recent high-level visits to India over the past couple of months, including by President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, have given momentum to the next generation of the new development partnership between us, launched in September. That extends to a whole range of areas, including education, health, agriculture, infrastructure, renewable energy, drinking-water supplies and human-resource development.

The importance of connectivity and transit in bringing peace and prosperity to Afghanistan is clear to us all. Regrettably, normal overland transport and transit access between India and Afghanistan has been blocked for many years, a blockade that harms the people of Afghanistan, for it is their welfare that is affected the most. In June, we established an air-freight corridor designed to give Afghan farmers direct access to Indian markets. Three dozen cargo flights from Kabul and Kandahar have already arrived in New Delhi. Ten days ago, on 11 November, the first consignment of wheat-grain assistance from India reached Afghanistan through the Iranian port of Chabahar. We believe this marks the beginning of a new era of enhanced, reliable and robust connectivity for landlocked Afghanistan that will enable it to trade with the larger economies in South Asia and beyond. The September India-Afghanistan trade and investment show in New Delhi generated more than \$250 million worth of business and demonstrated where the natural flow of trade and commerce lies for Afghanistan.

We will welcome the Assembly's adoption of draft resolution A/72/L.8, on the situation in Afghanistan, and hope that it will lead to a sharper focus on what really ails Afghanistan. It is time to abandon our routine discussions of the situation in Afghanistan and deal with the core issues. We should start by paying greater attention to the voices of Afghans.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I welcome the participation of Mr. Abdullah Abdullah, Chief Executive of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, in our meeting. Let me start by reaffirming the resolve of the people and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to continue their support to the fraternal people and the Government of Afghanistan as they navigate this difficult period in their quest for a

stable, safe and prosperous Afghanistan. I hope that the Assembly's adoption today of draft resolution A/72/L.8 will contribute to that goal.

Our region continues to suffer from an alarming surge in extremist violence, and a dramatic increase in drug production is threatening our societies. Unfortunately, Afghanistan is one of the countries most affected by such problems. The upward trend in the levels of violence and the number of terrorist attacks has continued year after year since the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001. More than a decade later, neither Afghanistan, the region or the world is any safer. The deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan has deep roots and cannot be addressed solely through military strategies. The Afghan Government of National Unity is now at the forefront of fighting terrorism and needs the international community's sustained support more than ever in its fight against terrorism and extremism, as well as in facing its complex security, economic and development challenges. Iran reiterates its support for any Afghan-led peace process.

Strengthening our regional cooperation with Afghanistan is a priority and a major step in the consolidation of peace and development in the region. We welcome and urge for further efforts to strengthen the process of regional economic cooperation, including measures aimed at facilitating regional connectivity, trade and transit, as highlighted in today's draft resolution. In that regard, the recent start of the Chabahar project and the arrival of the first shipment from India to Afghanistan through that port represent important progress.

The challenges facing Afghanistan and our region are interconnected. We are very concerned about the findings of the *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017* of the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, which indicates that opium production grew by 87 per cent in the course of the year, numbers that are especially alarming in view of the fact that narcotics are a major source of income for terrorist groups. Underdevelopment, low incomes and lack of economic opportunities provide fertile ground and abundant recruitment opportunities for terrorist groups and drug networks. The international community must support the relevant international and regional projects and activities, including those conducted by Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan within the framework of their triangular counter-narcotics initiative. For more than three decades, Iran has hosted

millions of Afghan refugees sharing our public services and education. This year alone, our schools are educating nearly 400,000 undocumented Afghan students.

Iran continues to participate in the work of the Tripartite Commission in order to plan for the voluntary, safe, dignified and gradual repatriation of Afghan refugees. However, the number of returnees continues to be the lowest recorded since the establishment in 2002 of the voluntary return programme, with many returnees choosing not to return to their areas of origin, including large numbers who have settled in urban centres. We welcome any effort to help overcome the main challenges to reintegration that returnees face and to formulate a comprehensive voluntary repatriation and reintegration strategy. Success in voluntary repatriation depends first and foremost on meeting the reasonable needs of repatriated refugees in Afghanistan and underscores the importance of mobilizing more international support to that end. A stronger and more coordinated approach among the Government, donors and the United Nations, and an overall strategy for addressing the combined needs of the displaced and returnees will be crucial to ensuring that the repatriation of Afghan refugees is more effective.

We support the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and other United Nations agencies in their efforts to provide development and reconstruction assistance through the genuine commitment of the United Nations to a sustained partnership with Afghanistan, as outlined in the final report (S/2015/713, annex) of the Tripartite Review Commission on the United Nations in Afghanistan. We must utilize the mandate of UNAMA and its good offices to strengthen national institutions and capacities in priority areas, as the Government requests.

Mr. Blanchard (Canada): I would like to thank Germany for leading the preparation of this year's draft resolution (A/72/L.8), on the situation in Afghanistan. On behalf of Canada, I would also like to express our appreciation for the presence and statement in the Assembly today of Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah.

Canada remains steadfast in its desire for peace and security in Afghanistan. The fighting there has intensified, and we are dismayed by the unacceptable toll it is taking on the Afghan people. We hope that all domestic, regional and international stakeholders will continue to focus on bringing an end to that violence.

For our part, we remain committed to ensuring that Afghanistan does not once again become a haven for international terrorism. We are dedicated to helping Afghans create a sustainable future and a country that is well governed, respects human rights and is in control of its own destiny.

(spoke in French)

Canada fully supports the Afghan-led peace and reconciliation process and commends the Government of Afghanistan for its efforts to foster peace, including by convening the first conference of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation in June. The Kabul Process meeting, held shortly after the devastating attack of 31 May in Kabul, is only one example of the country's unwavering commitment to peace, despite formidable challenges. Canada also welcomes the important role played by so many States and civil-society actors in promoting peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan, and in particular the tireless efforts of those working to help those who are most vulnerable, especially the internally displaced, refugees, minority communities and women and girls.

(spoke in English)

As Mr. Abdullah reminded us this morning, it is urgent and important that we, the States Members of the United Nations, support our Secretary-General in his efforts to reform the United Nations with a view to ensuring our ability to make the United Nations "deliver as one" in Afghanistan as soon as possible. For us in the Organization, the discussions of United Nations reform may sometimes sound bureaucratic and theoretical. But for the people of Afghanistan, that reform process could not be more real.

(spoke in French)

Canada has pledged \$465 million in security-sector support and development assistance to Afghanistan for the period from 2017 to 2020. At its core is a special focus on the rights of women and girls in line with Canada's feminist foreign policy, as well as with our second national action plan on women, peace and security commitments.

(spoke in English)

Sustainable peace and security cannot be achieved without the active and substantive participation of all members of society, including women and girls. We are pleased to see the commitment in today's

draft resolution to achieving women's full and equal participation in all spheres of Afghan life. Women play a vital role in the peace process, and we echo the draft resolution in emphasizing the importance of respect for the rule of law and human rights in Afghanistan.

Nor can sustainable peace and security be achieved without economic development. I was happy to hear Chief Executive Abdullah say that the economy has turned a corner and is showing signs of recovery, especially in private-sector investment and development. Canada is pleased to hear that the regional economic cooperation agenda is becoming a reality and stands ready to provide it with further assistance. As my colleague from Tajikistan said, regional economic cooperation is one of the keys to stability in the region.

As we move forward on the draft resolution, I would like to note that this year marks the twentieth anniversary of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. The use of anti-personnel landmines and the numbers of their victims are dropping around the world. I hope that such achievements will continue to motivate us all in our efforts to attain peace, emphasizing the importance of sustained international assistance as we work towards the goal of declaring Afghanistan mine-free by 2023.

Canada supports draft resolution A/72/L.8. We stand with the Afghan people, especially the country's women and girls, as they strive for a more secure, prosperous and peaceful future.

Mr. Ibragimov (Uzbekistan): I would like to thank the President for convening today's important meeting on the situation in Afghanistan and to make a general statement on draft resolution A/72/L.8 in the context of its implications for the Central Asian region.

Today the prospects for stable and sustainable development in Central Asia are inextricably linked to the achievement of peace in our neighbour Afghanistan, since stabilizing the situation there is an important prerequisite for ensuring peace and security globally as well as regionally. In that regard, Uzbekistan supports the draft resolution on the situation in Afghanistan, which defines the progress that has been achieved and the continuing challenges facing the country, and provides ways to address those challenges. We particularly agree with the notion that there is no military solution that can ensure Afghanistan's stability, which requires all the country's regional and international partners

to continue their efforts to support the peace and reconciliation process. As the draft resolution states, an inclusive Afghan-led and -owned peace process backed by the international community is essential to achieving long-term peace and stability there. That also reflects Uzbekistan's position on the issue. As President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan said in his address to the Assembly at its seventy-second session,

“We are convinced that the only way to peace in Afghanistan is a direct dialogue between the central Government and the main domestic political forces, held without preconditions. The negotiations should be Afghan-led, held on the territory of Afghanistan and under the auspices of the United Nations.” (*A/72/PV.5, p.15*)

Uzbekistan strongly believes that the international community's active involvement in helping Afghanistan to rebuild its economy and infrastructure continues to be an important condition for ensuring the overall stabilization of the situation there. Those efforts should focus on integrating Afghanistan into regional economic processes, especially projects implemented by its neighbours in energy and transport communication and other areas.

Ten days ago, Uzbekistan hosted an international conference, held under the auspices of the United Nations, on ensuring security and sustainable development in Central Asia. Foreign Ministers from every Central Asian State, including Afghanistan, as well as high-ranking officials from other countries, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and various international organizations, were present at the forum and contributed to its success. In the forum's final communiqué, the attendees supported initiatives aimed at backing the peace process in Afghanistan, promoting the reconstruction of its socioeconomic infrastructure and working more actively to integrate it into global economic networks.

Over the past year, Uzbekistan has also intensified its bilateral dialogue with Afghanistan. This year alone, the Presidents of the two countries met several times on the sidelines of various international conferences and forums. An official visit by Afghanistan's President to Uzbekistan is also being planned. In January, a delegation from Uzbekistan, led by our Foreign Minister, paid an official visit to Kabul, during which the parties signed five agreements on collaborating on

Afghanistan's economic reconstruction, developing its transport and energy infrastructure and training its human resources. It was also announced that an Uzbekistan trade commission would open in Kabul with the goal of expanding trade between the two countries. In addition, this year the President of Uzbekistan appointed a special envoy to Afghanistan in a clear indication of Uzbekistan's desire to upgrade its bilateral ties to a qualitatively new level and advance its multifaceted cooperation with Afghanistan on every front.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that we in Uzbekistan strongly believe that Afghanistan must remain at the heart of the global agenda. Its integration into regional and global economic networks will be a key factor in establishing peace and stability in the country.

Mr. Camp (United States of America): I would like to start by thanking the German delegation for its work in leading the negotiations on this year's draft resolution (A/72/L.8). I am also grateful to Afghanistan and all the other nations that engaged constructively on the text, as well to Mr. Abdullah Abdullah, Chief Executive of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, for his presence here today.

The United States is pleased to be a sponsor of the draft resolution and thereby renew its collective pledge of continued support to the Government and the people of Afghanistan as they work to build a stable, prosperous and secure nation. It has been 16 years since the United States and the international community first took action in Afghanistan. Throughout that period, we and our international partners have expended considerable blood and treasure, and the Afghan people have endured great hardship and sacrifice. We were reminded of that in the starkest terms this year on 31 May, when terrorists killed more than 150 people and injured almost 500 in a cowardly attack in the centre of Kabul. Among the dead, almost all of them civilians, were women, children, members of the media and diplomatic personnel.

In the first half of this year, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan documented more than 5,200 civilian casualties, of which more than 1,600 were fatalities. Even more tragically, 30 per cent of those were children. As the draft resolution notes, anti-Government forces such as the Taliban, along with terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida and the Islamic State

in Iraq and the Sham in Khorasan, were responsible for a significant majority of those civilian casualties. It was in that context that in August President Trump approved a new regional strategy for the United States in South Asia, based on the recognition that Afghanistan's security and stability is tied to that of the entire region, and that we must enlist that region in efforts to bring peace to Afghanistan. We will continue to support the Afghan Government and security forces in their fight against the Taliban and terrorist groups. We commend the Afghan Government on the progress it has made in combating those threats, and we are prepared to assist its forces in ending the war and preventing the re-establishment of any terrorist safe haven.

Our NATO allies and partners are working to finalize troop increases and additional support efforts that will strengthen NATO's Resolute Support Mission. At the NATO Defence Ministers' meeting on 9 November, more than two dozen nations stated that they intend to increase their troop numbers on the ground. We are deeply appreciative of their continued commitment to stabilizing Afghanistan and the broader South Asia region. All of the efforts of the United States and our NATO allies in Afghanistan are focused on the goal of achieving a political settlement via an Afghan-led and -owned inclusive peace process. Today's draft resolution underscores how important it is to ensure that such a peace process is backed by all the relevant regional actors, and we urge both Afghans and regional partners to bring a renewed sense of urgency in order to reinvigorate the peace talks.

Our message to the Taliban and other anti-Government forces is clear. They cannot win on the battlefield, and the only path to peace is through negotiations. They must cut their ties with terrorist groups, abandon violence and accept the Afghan Constitution. Along with our efforts to advance Afghanistan's peace process, we stand ready to work with President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah, the Afghan Government and the Afghan people to advance security, political stability, electoral reform and accountable governance in the coming year. Working together, the Afghan Government, the region and Afghanistan's international partners can make progress towards the promise of a stable, secure and prosperous Afghanistan. Indeed, we owe it to the soldiers and civilians who have suffered or perished during the course of the war to make good that promise.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China would like to welcome Mr. Abdullah Abdullah, the Chief Executive of Afghanistan, to our debate today.

Afghanistan's peace and stability are central to the interests of the Afghan people and have a bearing on regional security, stability, development and prosperity. A united, stable and growing Afghanistan will serve the common interests of the international community and the countries in the region. China commends the National Unity Government for its commitment to economic and social development and the promotion of national reconciliation, as well as the positive results it has achieved. In the meantime, however, Afghanistan is still facing serious political, economic and security challenges. China hopes the international community will continue its support and assistance to Afghanistan to help it realize peace, stability and development. In that regard, we would like to propose the following key initiatives.

First, peace and stability must be maintained by improving the security environment. The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces bear the primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace, security and stability in Afghanistan. The international community should continue to support their capacity-building initiatives so as to effectively respond to threats such as terrorism, transnational crime and drug trafficking. Draft resolution A/72/L.8 acknowledges the important contribution made by regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to the maintenance of security and stability in Afghanistan and hopes that the international community can strengthen counter-terrorism, coordination and cooperation so as to provide a secure environment for Afghanistan's national development and reconstruction.

Secondly, determined efforts must be made to advance the reconciliation process through political dialogue. Advancing an inclusive reconciliation process, led and owned by the Afghan people, is the only way to lasting peace and development in Afghanistan. The parties should put the long-term interests of the country and the people first and participate actively in the political reconciliation process based on the strategic plan for peace and reconciliation. China supports the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan peace and reconciliation process, through which Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and the United States should continue their activities, in accordance with resolution 72/10, to push for launching peace talks between the Afghan

Government and the Taliban as soon as possible. We welcome the international community's continued support to peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

Thirdly, reconstruction must be realized through independent development. China hopes that the political parties in Afghanistan can improve their unity, narrow their differences through dialogue and work jointly for national development in accordance with the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework. The international community should continue to provide the Afghan Government and people with attention and support — while respecting Afghanistan's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and the Afghan people's right to an independent choice of political systems and development paths — and, by taking Afghanistan's development strategies and specific needs into consideration, target its assistance so as to help the Afghan Government improve its governance and development capabilities.

Fourthly, in order to support economic and social development through regional cooperation, the international community should honour its aid commitments to Afghanistan and support its efforts to achieve economic sustainability. Afghanistan is blessed with the advantage of significant geological and other natural resources, and has broad potential for participating in regional economic cooperation. The draft resolution once again underscores the importance of initiatives such as One Belt One Road in promoting Afghanistan's economic development and regional cooperation. We hope that in a spirit of consultation, collaboration and benefit-sharing, countries can strengthen their regional economic cooperation and interconnectivity, and help Afghanistan integrate into regional development with a view to forging a shared destiny for humankind.

As Afghanistan's good neighbour and good partner, China has all along supported Afghanistan's reconstruction and development efforts. Countries in the region, including Afghanistan, took an active part in the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, held in Beijing in May. The Governments of China and Afghanistan have signed cooperation agreements in economic, trade and customs affairs and other spheres, and are actively implementing the memorandum of understanding between China and Afghanistan and jointly promoting the Belt and Road construction.

Those efforts will further strengthen trade and infrastructure interconnectivity between Afghanistan and the region and will help to consolidate economic and social development in Afghanistan and the region. China stands ready, along with the rest of the international community, to make unremitting efforts for the early realization of peace, stability and development in Afghanistan.

China supports the unanimous adoption of draft resolution A/72/L.8, on Afghanistan, by the General Assembly at the current session and commends Germany for its tremendous efforts as the facilitator of the draft resolution.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): At the outset, I would like to say that the United Arab Emirates looks forward to the adoption of draft resolution A/72/L.8, on the situation in Afghanistan, by the General Assembly, and thanks Germany for its great work in facilitating the draft resolution. Mobilizing support for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is the way to create a safe and sustainable path that ensures inclusive and long-term development for all Afghans. I therefore welcome the statement made this morning by Mr. Abdullah Abdullah, Chief Executive of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, which offered an important blueprint for Afghanistan's future.

The United Arab Emirates has been devoted to improving the lives of the Afghan people for more than four decades. We believe that that is not only the right thing to do, but that it is imperative for maintaining the security and stability of our region. We recognize the need to achieve long-term peace and stability through a comprehensive Afghan-led political peace process. In that regard, we commend the efforts of the Secretary-General and those of his Special Representative in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for their role in improving coherence and international coordination in support of an Afghan-led political process.

The Afghan Government and people are on the front lines of the global war against terrorism and extremism. The United Arab Emirates is gravely concerned by the tragic events that have occurred in Afghanistan in recent years, including the escalating number of terrorist attacks targeting civilians and security forces. One such attack earlier this year really struck home for us. A heinous act of violence claimed the life of my colleague, Mr. Juma Al-Kaabi, the United

Arab Emirates Ambassador to Kabul, and killed five other Emirati diplomats and 11 Afghans, injuring many more.

We know that we are not alone in our concern about that situation. The United States and dozens of other countries are actively addressing the insecurity in Afghanistan and have been for years. We applaud the efforts of the United States, the European Union, the NATO partners and others to bring peace and stability to the country and to support and rebuild its institutions and infrastructure. We welcome the United States Administration's bold strategy, which brings renewed vigour to addressing the security situation and is charting a path of continued United States engagement aimed at improving the conditions on the ground in Afghanistan.

While much progress has been made, the road ahead is long. The international community must not repeat the mistakes of the past, when disengagement and neglect of Afghanistan permitted extremists to take over the country. We call on the international community to continue to address the security situation in Afghanistan, work to establish a peace process, intensify efforts to support the country's security forces and promote economic and human development.

The United Arab Emirates has been a long-term stakeholder in the international community's efforts to ensure the peace and prosperity of Afghanistan. In support of the legitimate Government of Afghanistan and our NATO partners, the United Arab Emirates has been part of the International Security Assistance Force mission in the country since 2003. Emirati troops — who have numbered as many as 1,500 — have provided security assistance and have been involved in community development activities. We welcome Mr. Abdullah's statement this morning that defeating terrorism is a cornerstone of their security strategy. We believe, along with him, that it is action against all forms of terrorism that will speak louder than words. We must agree to fight all shades of terrorism. There are no good or bad terrorists.

Since the 1970s, the United Arab Emirates has provided over \$680 million in development assistance for reconstruction and for humanitarian efforts. My country has implemented several development and reconstruction projects in Afghanistan, including a housing and community development project in Kabul, the rebuilding of the airport in Mazar-e-Sharif

in collaboration with Germany and other countries, and a partnership with the United Kingdom on work to improve Highway 611, a critical traffic artery in the country.

And because we also believe that educational institutions — especially in conflict-affected areas — are instrumental in building a future for young generations, the United Arab Emirates opened the Zayed University in Khost province, which teaches medicine, engineering, technology and law, among other subjects.

The United Arab Emirates also recognizes that religious leaders are integral to instilling values of peace, tolerance and diversity. To that end, the United Arab Emirates aims to train religious leaders and position them to better lead their communities. We have trained nearly 20,000 Afghan imams to promote values of tolerance and moderation in Islam, work to eliminate causes of discord and division, foster peace and promote inclusion.

In establishing peace and security in Afghanistan, we must not forget the fundamental and important role that women play. To that end, we recall Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and the subsequent resolutions on women and peace and security that make up the framework for the integration of women into the building of sustainable and inclusive societies. To better position women in Afghan society, the United Arab Emirates has specifically implemented projects for women and families in Afghanistan, including through their ownership of small businesses, so as to enable them to provide for their families.

In conclusion, I want to say that the United Arab Emirates remains deeply committed to the people of Afghanistan. The relationship between the United Arab Emirates and the Afghan people is a particularly close one. We are powerfully bonded by our shared history, traditions and culture. The United Arab Emirates will therefore continue to provide humanitarian support and development assistance, particularly in health, education and social services, through bilateral cooperation or joint cooperation with international partners.

Mr. Imnadze (Georgia): Georgia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union. However, I would like to make few remarks in my national capacity.

At the outset, allow me to thank the delegation of Germany for facilitating the negotiations on draft resolution A/72/L.8, entitled “The situation in Afghanistan”, this year again. As one of the sponsors of the draft resolution, we look forward to its adoption by consensus later today.

The United Nations plays a central role in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan. We remain committed to the development of Afghanistan and commend the efforts of its Government aimed at reconstruction, development and strengthening the foundations of democracy. We condemn in the strongest terms all unlawful acts of violence and intimidation perpetrated against civilians, which are aimed at undermining those efforts.

Georgia is privileged to be among those countries that are helping Afghanistan rebuild that war-torn country. Despite our small size and our own security challenges related to respect for our territorial integrity and sovereignty, Georgia has, for more than a decade, been consistently contributing to the international efforts aimed at ensuring the secure and peaceful development of Afghanistan.

Throughout those years, in a clear demonstration of my country’s commitment to enhancing peace and stability in the region, Georgian soldiers have been part of the NATO missions in Afghanistan, displaying outstanding courage, professionalism and dedication. We joined the anti-terrorist coalition immediately after the horrendous 9/11 attacks by providing our airspace and airports for the transit of coalition forces and personnel to Afghanistan. In 2004, Georgia upgraded its engagement by committing troops, and within several years it became the largest non-NATO troop contributor to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and the second largest per capita troop contributor after the United States. Following the drawdown of ISAF, Georgia maintained its commitment to international peace and security by joining the Resolute Support Mission. We maintain 870 servicemen and servicewomen, and stand ready to maintain the same volume and composition of those forces throughout 2018.

We also support the development of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and have already contributed \$1.5 million to the Afghan National Army Trust Fund. We will consider further financial contributions for the period 2018-2020.

In conclusion, I should like to welcome the Chief Executive of Afghanistan, Mr. Abdullah Abdullah. We welcome his statement and echo his remarks on the Lapis Lazuli Corridor, in which Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey joined hands in a historic agreement, once again reaffirming their centuries-old traditional, cultural and economic ties. The Corridor not only opens up new opportunities for the development of Afghanistan and the entire region but also acts as a stabilizing factor in terms of security.

Georgia will continue to stand by Afghanistan and its people in the years to come.

Ms. Plepytė (Lithuania): At the outset, I would like to thank the delegation of Germany for its outstanding work on the draft resolution on the situation in Afghanistan (A/72/L.8), which Lithuania co-sponsored.

Lithuania aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union. We welcome the participation of, and the statement made by, the Chief Executive of Afghanistan, Mr. Abdullah Abdullah, at this meeting.

Lithuania commends the National Unity Government of Afghanistan for implementing substantial reforms in various areas, with a view to facilitating the transition of the country into a peaceful and democratic society. The efforts in the fight against corruption and impunity are encouraging. However, further progress is needed in the areas of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and women’s empowerment. But first and foremost, none of the goals can be achieved without a stable security situation, which is vital for the development of the nation.

As the Secretary-General indicates in his most recent report (A/72/392), conflict continues throughout the country, with thousands of civilians killed or injured, and hundreds of thousands displaced. Ordinary Afghans bear the brunt as armed clashes, improvised explosive devices, suicide attacks and assassinations continue unabated. The growing number of casualties among women and children is an extremely worrying fact. Terrorist attacks continue to destabilize the country, with the Taliban, Al-Qaida, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province and others claiming responsibility for the most brutal ones.

The cycle of violence must end, and dialogue commence. Peace can be achieved only through direct negotiations, and we encourage the Government of

Afghanistan and the Taliban to proceed in that regard. Only the fostering of stable and effective institutions of Government that can overcome the threats from Islamist terrorist groups active in the country can lead to success. The leaders of Afghanistan must ultimately assume responsibility in order to achieve long-term peace and stability in the country. Only an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process can ensure sustainable solutions in the various fields of the development of the State.

While commending the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces for their courage and resilience in maintaining full responsibility for security throughout the country, we also stress that they must continue to be strengthened. One of the contributions of the international community to that end is represented by the Resolute Support Mission, which provides training, advice and assistance. Lithuania, for its part, continues to assist Afghanistan in building professionally trained and equipped defence and security forces. This year again, we contributed \$500,000 to the Afghanistan National Army Trust Fund and intend to do likewise over the coming years. We have also increased our military presence, within the framework of the Resolute Support Mission.

Electoral reform should remain high on the national agenda. As Afghanistan prepares for the forthcoming parliamentary and district-council elections next year, we hope that every effort will be made to hold them in a timely, inclusive, transparent and credible manner. It is imperative that no political divisions destabilize the situation, so that timely elections can herald tangible progress towards the democratization of the country.

In the context of the forthcoming elections, we expect that the reintroduction of the 25 per cent quota for women in the Parliament will provide much-needed impetus to efforts to secure women's rights in Afghanistan. Although we acknowledge the progress achieved on Afghan women's rights and empowerment, advances in promoting women's rights remain, nevertheless, uneven. A new Women, Peace and Security Index, unveiled recently at the United Nations, indicates that Afghan women's inclusion and access to justice and security in the home, community and society remain the lowest among all countries on the list.

In that regard, we congratulate Afghanistan's first television network run by and for women, Zan TV,

and female Afghan journalists, who are challenging, through several new media projects, various stereotypes imposed on them in their society. The network, which covers topics from women's rights to children's shows, is set to transform attitudes in the country and should be supported.

At the same time, we are concerned about the situation of journalists and media workers, who face increasing risks in their daily lives. This year marked an increase in attacks on journalists and media outlets. We encourage the Afghan authorities to strengthen their efforts to investigate attacks against journalists and related media workers and bring the perpetrators to account.

The growing problem of widespread drug production in the country has a very negative impact on development, health and security. Concerted efforts on the part of the Government of Afghanistan and the international community are required to generate alternative sources of income, create viable economic opportunities and jobs, and foster a business-friendly environment. Such an approach would enhance the prospects of the population and, at the same time, reduce migration out of Afghanistan.

In conclusion, Lithuania continues to support the efforts of the Afghan people to achieve lasting peace and prosperity. Lithuanian companies are working with Afghanistan to improve the quality of Afghan passports and solve cybersecurity issues. Moreover, our State institutions stand ready to assist with the reform processes and share our experience in a number of areas. A stable, peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan is a priority that we share, in the interests of all of us.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I should like to join other speakers in thanking Mr. Abdullah Abdullah for his statement. I should also like to thank our German colleagues for having so ably guided the negotiations on today's draft resolution (A/72/L.8). We hope that it will be adopted by consensus, as in previous years.

Belgium aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union. I should like to add the following remarks in my national capacity.

Over the past decade, Afghanistan has made significant progress politically, economically and in terms of development. The draft resolution highlights numerous areas of progress, but those gains are fragile,

and major challenges persist. I should like to focus on four aspects.

First, I would like to underscore that the draft resolution provides a unique opportunity for the international community to come together to consider the best way to assist Afghanistan in building sustainable peace and development. There are many ways to support the country, including cooperation on security, regional trade and humanitarian matters, strengthening institutions and fighting drug trafficking, criminality, terrorism and human rights violations, among many others. Providing such support in coordination with the efforts undertaken by Afghanistan brings us closer to lasting peace.

For its part, Belgium has decided to increase its military presence in Afghanistan, which will amount to nearly 100 soldiers. We will also continue our contribution to the humanitarian effort as part of demining and economic and social development, primarily through the United Nations agencies active in Afghanistan, coordinated by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

Secondly, the principle of ownership, which I have just mentioned, also applies to the peace process. The draft resolution rightly underscores the importance of a peace process led by the Afghans themselves. The Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation, launched on 6 June 2017 at the initiative of the Afghan Government, constitutes an essential element. Other initiatives can contribute to peacebuilding, but it is crucial and in the interest of all to ensure that those efforts are mutually reinforcing.

Thirdly, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the election of Afghanistan to the Human Rights Council. We look forward to working alongside Afghanistan in that body. I would also like to commend the Afghan Government's commitments in that regard, particularly with respect to the rights of women and children. In particular, I welcome the establishment of local child-protection units, and I encourage the authorities to continue to address the situation of children in detention centres.

Finally, a sustained demining effort remains essential. Afghanistan is among the countries in the world most heavily affected by landmines, which have a disproportionate impact on children. We welcome the achievements in the implementation of the Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan, as well as the

partial transfer of the management of that programme to the Directorate for Mine Action Coordination. We emphasize the need for continued efforts of that kind and for the adequate support of the international community so that Afghanistan can become mine-free by 2023.

In conclusion, I would like once again to underscore the ongoing commitment of Belgium to the development and lasting security of Afghanistan.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I would like to thank the President for convening this important debate. I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to Ambassador Christoph Heusgen of Germany and his colleagues for guiding the consultations on draft resolution A/72/L.8, on Afghanistan.

Today we welcome to the Hall His Excellency Mr. Abdullah Abdullah, Chief Executive of the Government of Afghanistan, who has reaffirmed his Government's strong commitment to pursuing Afghan-led development, stabilization and anti-corruption efforts. The response of the international community is clearly described in the draft resolution. We unanimously express our commitment to continuing to support Afghanistan and its people. However, our responsibility does not end there. The focus is now on the implementation of commitments both by the Afghan side and on the part of the international community. We welcome the fact that, in the past year, there have been achievements in the political sphere, reform and the strengthening of civic institutions. However, we also see a rollback in economic development and a deterioration in the security situation. Our ultimate test will be whether Afghanistan achieves self-reliance to the point where donors no longer need to announce multi-year pledges.

Japan has consistently called on the Government of Afghanistan to fulfil its 2014 commitment to equitable representation within the National Unity Government. We believe that inclusivity is key to political stability in Afghanistan. Without it, genuine progress on an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process that provides significant security improvements cannot be attained.

In that regard, the Kabul process meeting on 6 June served as a good opportunity for Afghanistan to show its strong will to advance the peace process. Japan hopes that the second round of the Kabul process, scheduled for January next year, will yield tangible

steps that contribute to the peace process. International and regional partners must be united in their support. Violent extremism, which undermines the social and economic stability in Afghanistan, is primarily rooted in weak governance, but the lack of unity among regional stakeholders exacerbates the environment for the Afghan Government in overcoming its challenges.

Japan reiterates its appreciation and strong support for the tireless work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The Secretary-General's strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, which Japan welcomes, will serve as important guidance for enhancing the Mission's crucial tasks. Draft resolution A/72/L.8, put before the Assembly this morning, calls for the implementation of the recommendations of the review. It is time for the Security Council to consider how we can incorporate those findings into the discussion on the renewal of the UNAMA mandate.

A Japanese medical doctor, Dr. Tetsu Nakamura, has contributed to the reconstruction of Afghanistan for decades through his irrigation development projects. In his view, if people have access to water resources, they will have far less reason to become terrorists or start a war, because water brings them satisfaction in life. Aware of the fact that the development of an effective irrigation system offers a strong potential for improving agricultural production, which is the primary driver of economic growth in Afghanistan, the Government of Japan, together with the Afghan Government and international organizations, support the efforts of Dr. Nakamura. The Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework underscores the importance of agriculture.

Japan is eager to witness concrete progress in development and is committed to assisting Afghanistan on its path towards self-reliance and a mutually beneficial relationship with its neighbours and with the international community at large.

Mr. Mahfouz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Egypt welcomes the consensus reached by members of the General Assembly on the adoption of the important draft resolution A/72/L.8 — a draft resolution that has been adopted every year. We have always reaffirmed the vital role played by the General Assembly and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), in particular in the light of the report of the Secretary-General (A/72/312) on

the strategic review, which was launched to assess the work, activities and effectiveness of that important United Nations Mission. The review demonstrates the need for the vital role played by the General Assembly in Afghanistan.

In the light of the alignment of interests and the need to ensure conditions conducive to stability in Central Asia and the Middle East, Egypt has consistently supported the Afghan Government in its fight against terrorism and its concerted efforts to extend its control and sovereignty throughout the country. We also welcome the early preparations to hold elections, set for mid-2018. In addition, we support the Afghan authorities in their political and social efforts to bring about security, development and prosperity for all Afghan people.

We underscore that the trafficking of illicit drugs, in particular opium, threatens the stability and security of Afghanistan and the entire Central Asian region. In that regard, we reaffirm the importance of close cooperation with the Afghan authorities at the regional and international levels on counter-narcotics, which cannot be separated from counter-terrorism efforts, since drugs are a primary source of financing for terrorist groups and armed militias.

In accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and reports of the Secretary-General, the international community has acknowledged the threat posed by the growing presence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, or Da'esh, in Afghanistan, which has strengthened and expanded its presence in the country. Terrorism is a scourge that must be overcome by all possible means. We must seek to suppress its evil through a comprehensive international strategic framework aimed at countering extremist ideologies in general.

In that regard, Egypt pledges to continue its specialized high-level training programmes for the Afghan military and police, administered by the Egyptian Agency of Partnership for Development. We will also continue our efforts to support the judicial, cultural, medical, nursing, agricultural, irrigation and banking sectors, since we believe in the comprehensive capacity-building of all Afghan national institutions. Egypt acknowledges the common international objective to which we aspire, namely, to build the capacities of the Afghan State so as to achieve peace, stability, security and sustainable development throughout the country.

Egypt therefore calls on all international Powers and stakeholders, as well as the international community, to continue to meet their obligations towards Afghanistan.

Mr. Carlucci (Italy): Allow me to begin by expressing our sincere appreciation to Germany for its capable facilitation of a difficult, yet ultimately successful, negotiation on today's draft resolution A/72/L.8. We are proud to co-sponsor the draft resolution to be adopted today. Allow me also to extend our thanks to Mr. Abdullah Abdullah for his presence today, which honours us.

Italy remains deeply concerned about the security situation in Afghanistan, where terrorists and violent extremists continue to pose a grave threat to the stability of the country, thereby severely hampering its potential for economic growth and development.

The latest reports on civilian casualties from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan paint a telling picture. We continue to observe a worrying increase in civilian casualties, especially among vulnerable groups, such as women and children. We note with particular concern the increase in attacks directed against religious groups and places of worship. Since January 2016, such casualties have risen to a higher level than the total number recorded in the period between 2009 and 2015.

Under those circumstances, it is imperative for us to renew the full support of the international community to the National Unity Government's efforts to achieve lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan. We continue to work together to defeat the terrorist threat in all its manifestations, as well as to facilitate the pursuit of an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process.

Italy reiterates its conviction that the best path to peace and stability lies in a peaceful and negotiated solution through an inclusive reconciliation process, while ensuring the participation of all segments of Afghan society, especially women. That process must work towards a solution that respects the Afghan Constitution and the fundamental rights enshrined therein for all Afghan men and women.

Italy supports all initiatives that can lay the foundation for that objective, first and foremost through the Kabul process. In that context, we underline the importance of the constructive cooperation of all international stakeholders, especially regional actors. The overall stability of South and Central Asia cannot

be separated from the resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan. It is our hope that all of the region's main actors will be able to converge around that common interest, while building towards genuine cooperation in order to achieve that goal.

In order to support the peace and reconciliation process, it is equally crucial for the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces to be able to effectively repel the continued attempts by insurgent groups to violently destabilize the country. Strengthening the capabilities of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces is an essential goal in that respect. We pay tribute to their courage and sacrifice on the battlefield. Italy will continue to play an active role in that regard in the context of the training, advising and assistance activities carried out by the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission.

Faced with such complex challenges, which go beyond security, it is crucial that the citizens of Afghanistan be empowered so that they can continue to place their trust in the country's democratic institutions. The legislative and district elections planned for 2018 will constitute a crucial moment in that regard, and their transparency, credibility and inclusiveness must be ensured. To that end, the completion of the remaining aspects of electoral reform is essential. In the light of recent developments, we hope that the Government and the relevant Afghan institutions can work together to make every effort to achieve that objective.

In order to build a positive trajectory of hope, development and self-reliance for Afghanistan and its citizens, we encourage the effective implementation of the internal reforms to which the Government committed at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan last year in the framework of its partnership with the international community.

The fight against corruption in all sectors is certainly one of the most important in that regard. Italy welcomes the measures already undertaken, including the Government's recent anti-corruption strategy, which must now be put into practice and deliver tangible results. Concrete progress in areas such as justice, the rule of law and the promotion and protection of human rights, especially women's and children's rights, will be equally important. The gains made in terms of women's rights in Afghanistan over the past 16 years are undeniable, but they are still fragile when it comes to violence against women, female empowerment

and girls' education, as demonstrated by the fact that female literacy rates remain very low. We welcome the Afghan Government's commitment to protecting and promoting women's rights, and we encourage it to intensify its efforts in that domain.

In conclusion, the road to peace, stability and prosperity is one that Afghanistan and the international community must continue to pursue together. While reaffirming once again its commitment to the country and people of Afghanistan, Italy will continue to be a strong believer in that partnership.

Mr. Panayotov (Bulgaria): Allow me to begin by expressing my gratitude to the President for convening this important annual debate. I would also like to welcome Mr. Abdullah Abdullah, Chief Executive of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and his participation today. I would also like to thank the Permanent Mission of Germany for all its efforts, which have resulted in consensus on the draft resolution on the situation in Afghanistan (A/72/L.8), which Bulgaria has co-sponsored.

My country aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States and reiterates the common messages taken from the conclusions on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan reached by the Council of the European Union in October, as well as the long-term commitments set out in the EU strategy for engagement and cooperation with Afghanistan. I would like to make additional remarks in my national capacity.

Bulgaria shares the determination of all our allies to help build defence and security institutions in that country and make Afghanistan safer and more secure. That also includes our support for the National Unity Government's efforts to establish a safe and democratic environment in the country and region, and for the international efforts, which contribute significantly to achieving that objective, in particular the new United States strategy on Afghanistan and South Asia.

Bulgaria remains committed to the long-term support of NATO, which is driven by the understanding that a secure and prosperous Afghanistan is vital for the stability of the region and beyond. Our participation in the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission continues, with an increased contingent of up to 160 Bulgarian soldiers. Bulgaria also contributes financially to the Afghanistan National Army Trust Fund.

The volatile security and humanitarian environment makes the unity of the Afghan Government and its perseverance in reforms critically important. The pursuit of the ongoing reforms aimed at achieving a more effective Government that further increase political inclusiveness and reinforce accountability must remain a priority. We fully support the Government's efforts, in particular in areas such as good governance, the rule of law, institution-building and the fight against corruption and narcotics, as well as gender and social issues, where further reforms are needed.

Bulgaria attaches particular importance to the ongoing peace and reconciliation efforts and expresses support for constructive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace talks. We hope that the Kabul Process for Peace and Security will significantly contribute to achieving success in that regard.

Regional support and cooperation are also essential for the security and development of Afghanistan. We commend regional initiatives, such as the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, and encourage regional actors to engage in a credible manner with the efforts to achieve peace in the country, as well as its economic integration.

The United Nations support for electoral reforms, peace and reconciliation, human rights and women's issues will continue to be crucial as well. We are confident that, on the basis of the strategic review to be discussed early next year by the Security Council, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan will remain well-positioned to deliver on its tasks.

Bulgaria has been a long-term partner of Afghanistan — a partner for peace and development. Our engagement was officially reconfirmed at the International Conference in Brussels in October 2016, and we maintain our contributions, including within the framework of Bulgaria's official development assistance policy, by organizing training courses for diplomats, police officers and other civil servants from Afghan institutions. Mindful of the need to address the challenges of migration and forced displacement in Afghanistan, in particular the vulnerability of children, this year Bulgaria has taken part in the humanitarian response by contributing to the programmes and projects on those topics run by UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration.

In conclusion, let me reiterate my country's full support for Afghanistan and the work carried out by the United Nations in the quest for peace in the country.

Mrs. Ataeva (Turkmenistan) (*spoke in Russian*): The delegation of Turkmenistan would like to thank the Secretary-General for preparing the reports on the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (A/72/312) and on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (A/72/392). The delegation of Turkmenistan supports the draft resolution on the situation in Afghanistan (A/72/L.8), which we have co-sponsored. We furthermore support the consensus in that regard.

We extend our gratitude to the delegation of Germany as the facilitator of the draft resolution, and we thank it for its consistent proactive approach in that process. On the whole, Turkmenistan fully supports the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and expresses its gratitude for the long-term commitment and support on the part of the United Nations to the Government and the people of Afghanistan.

Turkmenistan attaches particular importance to relations with that neighbouring State and to the contributions by the international community to the creation of conditions for that country's sustainable development, its full integration into regional and global processes and the establishment of lasting peace and harmony in the country. We consistently deliver assistance to Afghanistan within various areas of socioeconomic development, including energy, transport development, education and health care.

We believe that the key issue for Afghanistan is the development of its socioeconomic infrastructure. Turkmenistan is convinced that economic growth, the creation of new jobs, the implementation of broad social programmes, the improvement of material well-being and the level of education of its people positively affect the situation in the country and contribute to strengthening peace and stability there.

On 14 and 15 November, Turkmenistan hosted the seventh Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan. Its agenda featured a wide range of issues concerning the prospects for further developing constructive partnerships with a view to achieving the goals of common prosperity and progress. During the Conference, special attention was paid to the

implementation of transport and energy projects with the participation of Afghanistan. Such projects seek to promote Afghanistan's integration into regional and international economic exchanges, full trade relations, the attraction of large investments and the creation of new jobs. In that context, the following initiatives are noteworthy: the construction of the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India gas pipeline project, the development of the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Tajikistan regional railway corridor and the implementation of a number of other projects aimed at creating a modern, diversified transport and communications infrastructure in the region in the east-west and north-south directions.

As was mentioned previously by the Chief Executive of Afghanistan, Mr. Abdullah Abdullah, of particular importance in the work of the seventh Regional Conference was the signing of a five-sided agreement on the establishment of the international Lapis Lazuli Transit, Trade and Transport Route linking Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, which will offer new opportunities for increasing the volumes of cargo transported along that route. At the same time, that transport corridor will help to strengthen cooperation over a wide economic area, including the regions of Central and South Asia, the Caspian and Black Sea basins and the Mediterranean. The holding of the seventh Regional Conference, in Ashgabat, provided another effective way of strengthening and expanding constructive interaction in that connection by bringing regional economic cooperation to a qualitatively new level and working towards our multi-faceted potential and constructive goals.

We call upon Afghanistan and regional partners to sustain the momentum and continue their efforts to strengthen regional dialogue and cooperation. We also call for consistent targeted assistance to be provided to the people and the Government of Afghanistan in the interest of building peace and stability and ensuring State-building in the country.

Mr. Aliyev (Azerbaijan): At the outset, I would like to thank the Chief Executive of Afghanistan, Mr. Abdullah Abdullah, for his statement. We also thank the delegation of Germany for facilitating the negotiations on draft resolution A/72/L.8, which Azerbaijan is pleased to co-sponsor. We look forward to its unanimous adoption.

Azerbaijan commends the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan to implement political, economic and social reforms and address the country's complex security issues. The country's well-being, economic growth and regional cooperation are interlinked and are dependent upon the security situation in Afghanistan and in the region. It is of the utmost importance to demonstrate our resolve and strong will to continue jointly addressing the security challenges that the country is facing and enhance regional cooperation to that end.

Continued regional and international commitment and assistance to Afghanistan are crucial for maintaining the progress made so far and for efforts to fulfil the country's aspiration to achieve long-term peace, stability and prosperity. Enhanced engagement between Afghanistan and its neighbours is essential for the peaceful and stable future of the country and the region. We commend Afghanistan's efforts to integrate with the regional and global economies and develop trade with its neighbours and other partners through increased regional connectivity.

Over the years, Afghanistan has fostered regional cooperation and has successfully developed transregional infrastructure with multimodal capabilities along the east-west and north-south axes. The Baku International Sea Trade Port and the recently opened Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway will help develop transport and transit links, provide fast and reliable connections, increase trade and make new business opportunities available for Afghanistan and other countries in the region.

Azerbaijan participates in the relevant international and regional political initiatives aimed at promoting peace, stability and sustainable development in Afghanistan, including the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation, with a focus on ensuring a secure and stable Afghanistan. Since its inception, in 2011, the Istanbul Process has become an effective regional platform for enhanced cooperation, confidence-building and dialogue.

The forthcoming Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference, to be held on 1 December in Baku on the theme "Security and Economic Connectivity: Towards a Strengthened Heart of Asia Region", will provide an important opportunity for discussions among the major stakeholders on a wide range of issues, including peace, security, economic prosperity and social

welfare in the region. We will continue to support the stabilization, peaceful reconstruction and development of Afghanistan through bilateral cooperation and the relevant multilateral, international and regional formats.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate Azerbaijan's support for Afghanistan's sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity. We wish the Government of Afghanistan every success in its efforts to achieve a unified, peaceful and prosperous future for the country.

Mr. Sadykov (Kazakhstan): I would like to start by paying tribute to President Ashraf Ghani and the Chief Executive of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Mr. Abdullah Abdullah, for their valiant and selfless commitment, and I take this opportunity to wish the Government and the people of Afghanistan every success in their efforts to achieve peace and stability. My delegation would like to share the following observations.

Kazakhstan welcomes the intensified efforts of the Government of Afghanistan and its regional and international partners to resolve the internal political crisis and establish peace in the country. My delegation is of the firm view that there is no alternative to a peaceful solution to the problems in Afghanistan. We express the hope that the measures taken by the Government of Afghanistan and its international partners to reconcile parties and establish peace will serve as the basis for a good dialogue with positive results for the future.

It is heartening to note that the situation in Afghanistan received special attention at the historic Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization held in Astana on 8 and 9 June, to which India and Pakistan were admitted as full-fledged members. We are confident that, with the entry of those States into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the solution of regional concerns — including those of Afghanistan — will move more dynamically.

We believe that consultations on Afghanistan in various formats are important and necessary in order to overcome political differences and work together to promote peace negotiations. It is equally vital to focus on strengthening intra-regional relations with neighbouring countries.

The efforts of regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building

Measures in Asia, together with the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, are significant in laying the foundations for stability. Afghanistan is one of our priorities as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. In January 2018, during our presidency of the Council, we plan to hold an open debate on building a regional partnership involving Afghanistan and Central Asia.

We note the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan. The series of recent major terrorist attacks in the country require the entire international community to take decisive actions to eradicate those threats. Kazakhstan is concerned about the emergence of well-known radical terrorist groups in the north of Afghanistan and the escalating threats that they pose to the security of States in Central Asia, as well as to Afghanistan itself. The situation in Afghanistan plays a special role in ensuring the long-term stability of the entire region. Kazakhstan therefore fully shares and supports the vision of Secretary-General Guterres aimed at strengthening preventive diplomacy.

The increased drug production in Afghanistan is alarming. It is clear that only joint efforts at the international and regional levels can achieve positive results in the fight against drug trafficking. In that regard, it is necessary to support the coordinated measures taken by the Government of Afghanistan, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, INTERPOL and the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre to combat illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors.

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated considerably. Consequently, the civilian population, especially the elderly, women and children, are suffering the most. Attacks on schools and school staff are also an alarming trend, as they impede access to education and to a return to normal living conditions. We call for the adoption of comprehensive measures to assist Afghanistan in meeting its challenges in the humanitarian sphere.

Kazakhstan has always considered, and continues to believe, that security and development are interrelated and that it is necessary to promote them on parallel tracks. Bearing that in mind, Kazakhstan has provided, and will continue to provide, assistance to further Afghanistan's development. In recent years, Kazakhstan has provided assistance worth

approximately \$100 million to cover free education for 1,000 Afghan students through studies in specialized institutions in Kazakhstan.

The Government of Kazakhstan will also invest in the reconstruction of the Kunduz-Takhar highway, together with the construction of a school in the Dara-I-Suf district of Samangan province and a hospital in the Waras district of Bamyān province. A bridge is also being built, and the banks of the Aibak River are being reinforced in Samangan province. In view of the drought and natural disasters in Afghanistan in recent months, the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan has decided to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan in the form of food supplies, which we will send in the near future.

We consider it important to change the paradigm in Afghanistan and the way in which it has been perceived thus far. It should no longer be seen as a threat but an important partner with great potential. In that context, we should help to connect Afghanistan with other countries in the region, including those in Central Asia, mainly through economic integration. Such integration can be further enabled by creating new infrastructure, trade investment and transit transport projects.

In order to achieve those objectives, we deem it essential to create the United Nations regional centre in Almaty, in order to consolidate the work of the 18 regional and subregional offices of the United Nations system already situated in the city of Almaty. The centre would coordinate and implement all activities with a view to promoting sustainable development and economic capacity-building and preventing natural and man-made disasters, as well as overcoming their consequences. We believe that the centre in Almaty, with a general focus on socioeconomic development, humanitarian assistance, resilience-building and disaster risk reduction, could substantially complement the work of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia. Those two regional offices of the United Nations would, in a way, address almost the entire range of problems in the region and overcome them with a view to bringing greater stability to the region.

To conclude, let me confirm Kazakhstan's most sincere commitment to supporting the Afghan Government in its efforts to achieve peace, security and stability.

Organization of work

The Acting President: Before concluding, I should like to consult members regarding an extension of the work of the Second Committee. Members will recall that at its second plenary meeting, on 15 September, the General Assembly approved the recommendation of the General Committee that the Second Committee would complete its work by Wednesday, 22 November.

However, I have been informed by the Chair of the Second Committee that the Committee requests

an extension of its work to Thursday, 30 November, in view of the expectation that such an extension would facilitate reaching consensus on the pending draft resolutions before the Committee.

May I therefore take it that the General Assembly agrees to extend the work of the Second Committee until Thursday, 30 November 2017?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.