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Королевства Великобритании и Северной Ирландии при
Организации Объединенных Наций от 7 августа 2020 года
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1. Co-host remarks

AFGHANISTAN

Remarks by H.E. Mrs Adela Raz, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan

Opening Remarks

Excellencies and Distinguished Guests,

I also would like to join my co-chairs in extending a warm welcome to all participants who are joining us at this virtual Arria-Formula meeting of the Security Council, on Women and the Afghan Peace Process. The timeline of this meeting cannot be stressed enough, as we prepare for the beginning of the intra-Afghan negotiations. I would like to thank the President of the Security Council for this month, Germany, for allowing us to convene this meeting, to the United Kingdom, our co-chair of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan and to Indonesia, for supporting and co-coordinating today's discussion.

My sincere gratitude to H.E the First Lady, as the Keynote speaker for her valuable contribution, and to our distinguished panelists for being with us here today. The First Lady's efforts to further women's empowerment, as an important pillar within government, have been an integral part of Afghanistan's progress to advance gender equality over the past few years. Her work in bringing the peace process to the ground has been critical and her leadership in starting the difficult but utmost important dialogues to include the voices of women from all corners of the country, particularly through the National Women's Consensus for Peace, underline the Government's unwavering commitment to a peace that belongs to us all.

Today, discussing the role of Afghan women in securing a lasting peace in our country is an issue of vital importance, not only for women, but for all Afghans. There has been genuine, and tangible progress made over the past nineteen years for women who have risen to become visible and influential members in all segments of the society. These gains are built on the foundation set by the Islamic Republic according to the Afghan Constitution which is based on equality and respect.

It is clear that when the intra-Afghan negotiations begin, we will be facing a Taliban that does not see the value in women as we do. But I echo the voices of my fellow Afghan sisters when I say that their voices will be heard and that we will not compromise away our hard won gains, and the protection of their rights.

Speaking about peace in Afghanistan also means underscoring the achievement of multilateralism and the work of the international community of rising to the occasion in the name of human rights, peace and equality. Reaching a sustainable and dignified peace will lead our joint journey towards a self-reliant and prosperous nation. This is the desire and the commitment of every Afghan under the leadership of H.E. President Ghani. We know there is still a difficult road before us, but we are optimistic with the leadership of our government, with the resilience of our people, and with the support of our regional and international partners, we will see the peace and prosperity Afghan people so desperately deserve.

Now it is my great honor to give the floor to the driving force in our work to empower, promote and safeguard Afghan women, H.E the First Lady of Afghanistan. Her work in supporting women, and their meaningfully inclusion into the society and government extends to all corners of our country and she has given a stronger voice to women in Afghanistan.

Your Excellency, the floor is yours.

Concluding Remarks

Thank you, Jonathan,

I don't know what to say but I would like to express my very sincere gratitude first of all to co-organizers, Germany, as the President of the Security Council for letting us to have the Arria Formula, for the UK for being the Co-chair of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan and for a wonderful partner here at the Security Council here at the UN, and Indonesia, my dear brother Ambassador Dijani, and the co-penholder of the Afghanistan file in the Security Council. I would also like to express my gratitude to the members of the Security Council for your participation and for your constant support to us in every step of Afghanistan that we built in the last 19 years, Afghanistan has been one of the most important conversation at the Security Council and you have always stood with us, and heard us, and I am very grateful for being with us today and hearing the wonderful voices you heard from Afghanistan. And now you know where I get my inspiration from and my motivation. I also have to express my gratitude to Uzbekistan a wonderful neighbor and a regional partner, as well as Norway for a being a friend stand with us on a rainy day and difficult days. My gratitude to Deborah, for being a friend of Afghanistan beyond a SRSG with your new role, it is inspiring to see women leadership at the UN and Afghanistan at this very important time, and thanks to the UN partnership with us during these difficult days and the critical time in front of us. And of course to Alia, I know you are back at home and taking time to express the support of your government which is very critical because what we have in front of us the beginning of intra-Afghan negotiations, and the stronger echo we need to have from the Muslim community and you reflect on that.

And of course, Ms. Baroness Fiona Hodgson, you are a great friend, we said this at the beginning, and your presence here today, once more signifies that this friendship is long-term, you were with us at the launch of the Group of Friends of Afghanistan and your constant voice for women of Afghanistan, and being a friend to us is extremely beneficial and we are very grateful. Thank you for being here and for the wonderful and strong of words. And of course to the members of the Group of Friends, the launch of the Group of Friends of Women was an important initiative that the UK and Afghanistan and the members we put together as we said earlier that Afghanistan is at the critical juncture, and as I always say this is truly the time it is a testimony if we are able to make it through the bumpy road that we have in front of us, especially in terms of the protection of the women's rights, when I say women's rights, that is the protection of women's constitutional rights during the peace process and after the peace process where the agreement will be made. And, of course, thanks to our viewers, we had more that 100 viewers today because our event was broadcasted live.

And I should mention one person that she gives us the motivation and she is a secret weapon, that the Afghan women know we have at the government at the structure of the institution that is build towards women's empowerment, with the genuine commitment that H.E. the President has and he has said it publicly, that he is truly he is inspired by H.E the First Lady, and she is truly an inspiration for many of us. And you heard her today and you know exactly when I say I get my inspiration from women in Afghanistan and that is what I mean. Thank you, Excellency for your time, and for your unwavering support to us and to the women in the rural area and in the cities and really making sure that the women in the government have been heard and they are given the space to exercise their rights.

And just one concluding point that I will end today's event, is that we are as everybody says at the critical time and it is a strong voice for Taliban, number one, they hear us, women of Afghanistan and our international partners we are committed

and very genuine for peace and as H.E. the First Lady said, it is the women of Afghanistan that pays the highest price, so we truly want the end of conflict, but what exactly that end will mean to us and what it would be post peace, it is society that protects our constitutional rights and they must acknowledge that today Afghanistan is a new Afghanistan and as Deborah said, it is an Afghanistan that is committed to international community with the international commitments we have here at the UN based on equality, human rights, rights of women, rights of minority and the rights of girls, that is truly protected by the constitution we have under the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Thank you all and this meeting is adjourned.

GERMANY

Remarks by H.E. Mr Christoph Heusgen, Permanent Representative of Germany

Germany is very proud to co-sponsor today's Arria meeting on the role of women in the Afghan peace process. For Germany, the Women, Peace and Security agenda is at the top of our priorities throughout the two years as a member of the Security Council. Just ten days ago, we had a signature event of Germany's Presidency of the Security Council focusing on sexual violence in conflict.

We deeply believe it is crucial that women play a more important role in politics, in preventing and managing conflicts. When you look at the COVID-19 crisis that all of our countries are confronting these days, the countries that have managed well, like my own country, Iceland, Finland or New Zealand, are all run by women.

Also in Afghanistan, we have made tremendous progress. The First Lady is very active in Afghanistan. We are very grateful to you and your government for sending [Ambassador] Adela Raz to New York. But of course, women must play a more important role overall in Afghanistan. They have to have a seat at the negotiating table with the Taliban. The fact that we have an all-women panel today from the U.N., from government, and international partners in society actually speaks for itself and sends a very strong signal.

Women's rights have been promoted over the years thanks to the reforms that have been implemented by the Afghan government. We have a very vibrant women's rights movement, but we have to admit it's largely limited to urban settings. There is still a long way ahead to achieve full, equal and meaningful participation of women in daily life in the whole country. They continue facing significant challenges when it comes to education, economic opportunities, and health care just to say a few areas.

When you talk to Afghan women, there is an unprecedented fear of going back to a time when especially women and minorities were denied their freedom. So our solid ambition is that any outcome of peace talks and intra-Afghan negotiations should build upon the achievements of the last 19 years, most notably on reforms of freedom, non-discrimination, human rights, and education. In this respect, what is enshrined in the [Afghan] constitution must not be changed.

We believe that we can only achieve general sustainable peace and a negotiated inclusive political settlement owned and led by the people of Afghanistan, including its women. Women must be equally and meaningfully represented within the negotiation team. We will hear more about that from Dr. Sarabi. We have highly appreciated the steps taken so far to move the process forward. We have had some substantial progress regarding the exchange of prisoners, but now we urge all parties to take the final step to start intra-Afghan negotiations.

Such a very long, arduous process needs united international support. Germany will continue to support Afghanistan in this endeavor. We are very happy to work with partners, including our co-penholder, Indonesia, the US, Norway, Uzbekistan and Qatar. Already [last July] in Doha, Germany helped to get Afghan women around the table in informal talks.

The United Nations will need to continue playing a central role in this process. This is why I am also very happy that SRSF Lyons will also brief us a bit later today.

INDONESIA

Remarks by H.E. Mr Dian Triansyah Djani, Permanent Representative of Indonesia

WELCOMING REMARKS

Your Excellency First Lady of Afghanistan, Madame Rula Ghani, Ambassadors Jonathan, Christoph, and Adela, Distinguished Panelists, Colleagues in Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan.

We are honored to have the participation of first lady of Afghanistan along with five other prominent and strong women, as panelists.

We thank and welcome you to this important Arria Formula meeting.

With the plan of holding the Intra-Afghan Negotiations soon, this meeting is not only an opportune moment to provide momentum, but also valuable as the discussion in this meeting will resonate the crucial role of Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process with the participation of women.

In this regard, allow me to emphasize several pertinent points:

First, the crucial role of women in the peace process and national building.

The start of peace process, we believe, will bring a new beginning and hope for the people of Afghanistan including women and youth. A beginning to start rebuilding their nation towards a prosperous, democratic, stable and secure Afghanistan.

As they embark on this new journey, it is the expectation of many that the drivers of the process would involve women. As in many societies, and as history has taught us, women have led the way and continue to shape in bringing peace and prosperity.

They are also an integral part of the engine of growth and an agent of peace in national reconciliation, thus it is important to tap their full potential.

Second, the need of creating a conducive environment to ensure the role of women.

It should be noted that women have the same rights and they should be given rooms to share their experience in promoting peace in Afghanistan. The right to be involved in charting the course for a better Afghanistan, the right to be able to contribute to a better future for their children and future generations.

Women should be involved in the negotiation at the intra-Afghan peace negotiations, to ensure a sustainable outcome. Their role should not be compromised or derogated to be merely an object of negotiations but should be the subject and decision makers of future peace.

The Security Council has agreed upon a landmark resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. And we welcome efforts on implementation of the said resolution, as the Government of Afghanistan is currently in the Second Phase of the Afghan National Plan to implement resolution 1325. Girls continue to be in schooling, a

significant numbers of parliamentary seat are held by women, as well as women in executive levels, including in civil servants and various sectors. In our midst, we have our own sister Ambassador Adela as Permanent representative to the United Nations.

Third, the importance of nurturing all available potentials.

The gains that have been achieved this last decade should continue to be nurtured and enhanced further. And this is where the international community, including the Security Council, could play a part, and that is to ensure that the momentum is preserved, that there are support and concrete assistance. Political support as well as economic assistance. And most importantly to ensure that there will not be reversal of progress, that would imperil the basic human rights of women and children in Afghanistan.

Without any fear, Afghan women should continue to pursue their education, their dreams and their choices. They must be fully supported and respected in their participation and contributions. They should be part of decision making with an active role in reconciliation and post conflict reconstruction. Sustainable peace will be elusive without the participation of Afghan women.

Finally, allow me to reiterate Indonesia's strong commitment to enhancing the role of women for a lasting peace in Afghanistan.

Indonesia has emphasized this in the Council and other forums many times. Their input and meaningful participation is indispensable for the whole peace process and nation building.

For Indonesia, its commitment to support the full and meaningful participation of women in the peace process, including in the upcoming Intra-Afghan Negotiation (IAN) is unwavering. Foreign Minister, Retno Marsudi, is personally reinforcing this support.

Thus, Indonesia will continuously collaborate with the government of Afghanistan for capacity building of Afghan women. On my note here, we have 60 needs driven capacity building programs, including for Afghan women.

In early March this year, Foreign Minister Marsudi visited Kabul and launched the Afghanistan-Indonesia Women's Solidarity Network (AIWSN). This network is intended to bridge the gap on wellbeing, empowerment and protection of women, as agents of peace. We hope that a concrete Plan of Action will be developed to that end, and this network, with full participation of Afghan interlocutors, can turn the vision into reality.

The women in Afghanistan are not alone in their pursuit of a secure, stable and prosperous country. We are with them all the way.

Indonesia also stands ready to further support the Intra-Afghan Negotiation, including with facilitation of the process.

I thank you.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A lot have been said with one underlying message that the achievements of past years with regard to human rights, particularly women's rights should be preserved.

Challenges are there but everything must be done to safeguard and elevate women's rights. Further, their perspectives and contribution are essential to the peace process and nation building for their viability. Everyone must support women's active role.

In closing, there is no doubt that it is those courageous and enterprising Afghan women who as we speak are making a concrete difference, whether in farms, cottage industry, schools and universities or politics, government and business organizations. They hold an extraordinary potential in putting Afghanistan firmly on its path to peace, stability and prosperity.

Thank you.

UNITED KINGDOM

Remarks by H.E. Mr Jonathan Allen, Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the United Kingdom

I am delighted to be opening this Security Council Arria format meeting this morning, which focuses on supporting women's participation in the Afghan peace process and I am co-hosting this morning's Arria with the Permanent Representatives of Afghanistan, of Germany and of Indonesia.

Now the UK and Afghanistan launched the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan last autumn. And our aim then was to highlight the achievements and advances made by Afghan women in recent decades. But also to emphasise our support for Afghan women and their rights as the prospect of a negotiated peace approaches.

For our part, the UK believes that a long-term, sustainable peace that Afghans deserve will only be possible if peace negotiations involve Afghan women of all backgrounds, from Kabul to the provinces, at every stage and at every level of the process. And it is the only way to ensure that we protect and promote the rights and achievements that Afghan women have fought for.

Today we are still awaiting the start of Intra-Afghan Negotiations but we are perhaps closer than ever before. So it is a timely opportunity to bring together this fantastic panel of women leaders – Afghans themselves and friends of Afghanistan – and I look forward enormously to the discussion.

2. Keynote remarks by H.E. Mrs Rula Ghani, First Lady of Afghanistan

*In the Name of God the Merciful the Compassionate
Eminent Members of the Security Council
Distinguished Participants to this Arria Meeting
My Dear Afghan Sisters
I come to you in Peace Al Salam Aleikum*

I would like to thank all of you for the keen interest you have in the active participation of Afghan women in bringing peace back to Afghanistan. Allow me first to set the context from an Afghan point of view. Long before the launch of the Doha Talks in March 2019, Peace had been uppermost on Afghans' mind. Ever since the ousting of the Taliban in December 2001 (and we will always be grateful for the generosity of those members of the international community who did not hesitate to cross oceans and travel thousands of miles to help us bring their rule to an end), ever since that time Afghan men and women have been yearning for Peace. Who wouldn't? Can you imagine living in constant fear that you will be caught in the next terror attack, that the children you have sent to school in the morning might not make it back home by evening, or that the car you are driving might hit an IED and blow up from under you?

Afghan women did their share of calling out for Peace and for putting an end to the daily violence. At first it was repeated calls on the government to ensure the security of everyday life. Then they started focusing on how they could themselves contribute to "social peace" within their own social environment – in other words how to unlearn the violent reflexes of the preceding decades of war, and relearn how to live together in peace and harmony. All over Afghanistan, many women civil society activists organized trainings for and discussions on Peace, often with the support of the donor community. In May 2017, my own office hosted a 3-day symposium on the role of women as "Messengers of Peace" and offered a full-day workshop on mediation and conflict resolution to the 350 participants.

When President Ghani made his courageous peace offering in February 2018, announcing that his government was ready to sit down with the Taliban without any preconditions, every Afghan celebrated the news and Afghan women in particular started discussing what Peace should look like.

Encouraged by a renewed campaign, both local and international, calling for a place for women at the negotiating table, a group of determined activists of various denominations came together and decided to visit each of our 34 provinces to seek the opinions and voices of provincial women. The discussions they had shed light on what peace meant for women around Afghanistan, what were the obstacles to peace in their localities and what solutions could be sought. The result of these provincial consultations was the Afghan Women's National Consensus for Peace held on February 28, 2019 in the Loya Jirga tent in the presence of 3500 women from all 34 provinces, and the validation of a 15-article National Declaration that summed up the concerns of the 15000 women who had been consulted.

Two months later, at the Afghan National Loya Jirga for Peace of April 29, 2019, 30% of the selected participants were women of which 2 were deputy to the chair, 2 were secretary to the chair, and 1 was the official spokesperson of the Jirga. Likewise, of the 51 working groups to which the Jirga participants were assigned, 13 were led by a woman and 21 had a woman as the rapporteur.

I share this context with you to show that, though their efforts have not been consistently covered by the international media, Afghan women have indeed been, and still are, very much involved at several levels of the Afghan Peace process. They

are involved at the level of advocacy both national and international, at the level of training for mediation and conflict resolution, at the level of consulting and networking for a unified vision of peace, and at the level of taking part in national jirgas on peace. Today they are members of the official negotiating team. Eventually they will also have a significant part to play in the post-negotiation phase with the reintegration of returnees.

Afghan women have found their voice and are not afraid to raise it. They found fault with the initial Doha setup as it did not make any allowance for women's participation. They issued declarations, wrote op-eds in the international press, held debates on TV and even attempted, at least a group of 40 of them, to travel to Doha to speak directly to the Taliban residing there but, unfortunately, were not granted visas.

(By the way, I was pleasantly surprised to see that the permanent representative of Qatar to the UN will be taking part in the panel discussion. I take it as a welcome acknowledgement on the part of the Emirate of Qatar of the importance of Afghan women's role in the Peace process).

Finally, through Afghan women's contacts with sister organizations in the US, they successfully lobbied Congress and in a closed congressional hearing it was made clear to the relevant parties that Afghan women must be included in the Doha talks.

Afghan women should be congratulated for their persistence, their tenacity, and their courage. True the present government, by giving them easier access to health, education, and legal services, and by fostering freedom of speech, has opened for them ground-breaking opportunities and has encouraged them to live up to their potential. But we should recognize that they function in an environment where obstacles still remain and male-centered mentalities often work against their progress.

This is why, I would like to address Afghan women's apprehensions regarding the Peace process. Do not forget that the Taliban ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. Five years that Afghan women cannot dismiss from their memory. Many Afghan women still bear the scars, emotional and physical, of those five years. They suffered indiscriminate discipline and abuse at the slightest infraction; many lost husbands, sons and fathers who were killed or disappeared; some were stoned to death in public places. Danger lurked all around. People stayed home, venturing out only on urgent errands; food was scarce; and everybody lived in fear. At the end of those five years, Kabul was a ghost city, with no electricity, bare shelves in the shops, and ankle-deep mud in the streets.

Remember? As I mentioned earlier, after the tragedy of September 11, 2001, you, our international partners crossed oceans, traveled thousands of miles, and sacrificed tremendously, to help relieve not only Afghans, but the world, from the Taliban's reign of terror. Twenty years later, Taliban terror has only become more lethal. Yet, you seem to insist that Peace will only happen once we bring their rule back. We cannot be convinced that Peace in Afghanistan can be achieved by reimposing Taliban rule. It will mean relinquishing all of our hard-earned achievements. Afghan women, who have the most to fear, read a darker subliminal message – that for Peace to come, Afghan women would have to pay the cost.

We beg to differ. Yes, we yearn for Peace. Yes, we dream of living a normal life in a stable and secure environment. Yes, we welcome the Taliban as our Afghan brothers and sisters. We certainly did so during the two short ceasefires in 2018 and 2020. They are Afghans and as such they have a right to live in Afghanistan. As a matter of fact, being Afghans most of them already do and those living in neighboring countries come and go at will.

But the Taliban need to understand that Afghanistan of today is no longer the political desert of 1995. The reality is that even in areas contested by Taliban today, a recent independent survey shows that 80% of residents would prefer to live under the Islamic Republic than under an Islamic Emirate ...

For the past two decades, Afghans have embraced and been active participants in strengthening the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan; we have a Constitution that sets the rules for political, social, economic, religious and legal interaction; and we consider ourselves, men and women, citizens with rights and obligations. Whoever elects to reside in Afghanistan has to abide by those rules.

Distinguished audience,

This is, to the best of my knowledge the general context of the peace process from an Afghan point of view. Of course, other actors involved in that process may have different concerns and goals, even different deadlines.

On behalf of all my Afghan sisters, I would like to state that Afghan women will not willingly be sacrificed on the altar of any other actor's political expediency. We will keep moving forward with our work for peace, as we have for years, knowing that the peace we seek to create will be one that is sustainable and beneficial to all Afghans.

3. Panellist remarks

H.E. MRS HASINA SAFI, MINISTER OF WOMEN'S AFFAIRS

Let me first thank the Security Council Arria-Formula for this opportunity and all the organizers such as our friends from UK, Germany, and Indonesia, and our representative Ms. Adela Raz from Afghanistan. Thank you very much for this opportunity. I think this is a great example of the platform of the Security Council for providing the opportunity to hear women's voices and we are very sure that throughout the process, our messages will be reflected.

I would like to start with a follow up on what Ms. Raz and her excellency the First Lady said and I want to be brief. The brief statement is that Afghan women can lead their issues themselves. I am very proud to not only say this as words, but you see a clear example which is myself, Dr. Sarabi, Ghezal, and many others. Starting at the age of fifteen years old as a librarian, today I am leading a ministry. This does not need any success story or any example. Like me, you will be able to find many strong ladies who can represent their voices themselves. So I would like to thank you very much for this opportunity and try to be as brief as I can but use as practical words as I can in order to make it easy for you to help us in the future process.

We started from awareness, we went to participation, we engaged in meaningful participation, and today we are demanding leadership. There is no doubt, as you can see many examples, not only on the table in Afghanistan but also around you. Without any doubt, it starts from the Security Council resolution, small short-term projects which were three months to six months until the second phase of the 1325 report which as indicated earlier, is one of the specific indicators of the government of Afghanistan.

Afghan women started their work from villages to districts to provinces and today in the capital they are trying to get organized again to see how they can bring in the numbers to practice. We started advocacy based on our constitution and we are very thankful to all the international partners who supported us along with our advocacy. Today, we are trying to change the number to quality. Today, we are trying to really decide and analyze our situations ourselves no matter if it is our bedroom, if it is our yard, if it is our district, our province, or the capital of our country, Kabul. We are trying to analyze various aspects of our involvement starting from social peace to political peace as her excellency the First Lady gave various examples of symposiums. That is how we started in order to really give the peace process a real picture, we defined the terms to ourselves and that was the real indicator of success to a successful peace process is investing in women.

How do we invest in women with social tools? What are the social tools? Talking, making ourselves, discussing what our day to day experiences are. A great example of that can be cultural initiatives like photography, painting, discussing cinema, theatres, etc. I would like to present here as well about what our government did in order to organize with what the women had been advocating. Since the last five years, we are very proud to say that we have a listener government. Especially his excellency the President. Without any doubt, we have a very strong backup from her excellency the First Lady. That is why the result we were expecting to come in ten years, we have it in five years. In the coming five years, we are also hoping to have the result of the coming ten years in five years. We would like you to stand with us.

One of the biggest things which we discovered as something which we have been advocating in which we really needed to bring to practice is the recent initiative which his excellency the president approved as a decree in the cabinet is the deputy government's position. Without any doubt, this is one of the greatest success

indicators. How do I define that? I define it, if a woman is the deputy governor, it is itself a success indicator in the local government. We are moving towards districts, we are moving towards villages and provinces. I think this position is the first concrete and tangible indicator.

Since this is a women's issue, the second indicator is that the Women's Ministry is one of the observers of the progress in order to give opportunity to the talented of talents in the provinces and in capitals. Throughout the process, the Ministry of Women's Affairs will be an observer of the process of announcing the recruitment and hiring of the positions. We are targeting it to happen at least fifty percent to seventy percent of this until the Geneva conference. That will be one of the other indicators.

As you know, we have many things for the first time in the government of Afghanistan. For the first time, we have a woman nominated as a member of the High Council of Judiciary System. This is not only in Afghanistan, but for the whole region, that for the first time we have a woman as a member of the High Council of the Supreme Court. For the first time, we have a woman in defense as a Deputy Minister. For the first time, we have a woman in Interior. For the first time, we have a woman for the Minister of Information and Culture. For the first time, we have a woman as an Education Minister. There are many examples which if I list, it will take all of your time.

But I would like to end with some points. We are very much moving along with the support of the international community. Three things which I think should be well noted by the international community. The first thing is, back our government up because they are listening to us. I am not saying that we have no challenges, as her excellency the First Lady was saying. We always have challenges because we are proof as qualified members of this society, so there is a feeling of insecurity now.

The second thing is to believe in the women's capacity not only in the capital, but also in the provinces. That is what presently our government is doing. The third thing is that we are thinking that the women of Afghanistan are not the only women creatures in the globe. IN the United States, Europe, Asia, and all around the world, women are facing problems. But they are moving along. We are ready to move forward and we are ready with the challenges. What I would like to say is, we are moving along with the international community in my specific statement to the Security Council because 1325 is one of the resolutions of the Security Council to back us up with supporting the Security Council in the second phase for the local governments. I would like to thank you very much. I am ready for any questions.

DR HABIBA SARABI, MEMBER OF THE AFGHANISTAN NEGOTIATING TEAM

Distinguished guests,

I am honored today to join such a notable panel and to have once again the opportunity of addressing the Security Council. The issue of the participation of women and the promotion of their rights during the negotiations between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban is one of vital importance, and forums like this can give us the opportunity to reflect on what has been done and underscore what remains to be done towards achieving a gender-sensitive sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

The past 19 years have seen a long process in the movement towards enhancing the rights of Afghan women. In 2003, women stood firmly during the Loya Jirga that

drafted the constitution of our new Afghanistan. The new foundational document established the equality of rights between men and women and created a prosper environment for the emergence of women as leaders of our society, key decision-makers in government and leaders of the civil society. Today, we continue to stand committed to these principles with the vision of a country that respects and promotes the rights of all its citizens.

I have four points to make in today's meeting. Firstly, the Afghan women have been the main victims of the last two decades of war. However, after the fall of the Taliban regime, a vibrant society came into being, and women and the new generation were integral part for such a change.

As the change has already occurred in Afghanistan the present generation of women has different demands. For instance, once women like my mother only wished for her daughter to get educated, but today my hopes for my daughter go far beyond just education: I want her to enjoy her full rights under our Constitution. We should keep these differences in mind and move forward.

The second point I just want to raise is about the level of violence in Afghanistan. Violence has taken heavy death toll on the civilians alongside the COVID-19. The widespread violence and Coronavirus pandemic necessitate to start intra-Afghan negotiation as soon as possible.

To launch the negotiation, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has designated 21 individuals, including four women, as its negotiating team to represent the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The four female members of the team work in four different committees in order to be voice their views on different issues concerning the Intra-Afghan Negotiation. I as chairwoman for the Outreach Committee on Vulnerable Groups, Human Rights and Women have had more than 40 consultative meetings with representatives of different segments of society to hear from them what they want out of the Intra-Afghan dialogue. We hear their demands for the preservation of our Republic and the protection of their civil rights and freedoms according to the constitution. Therefore, we want sovereign, democratic and united Afghanistan to be in peace with itself and world and where the achievements of the past 19 years, especially women's rights are protected.

We ask the international community, to continue to proactively engage with us in achieving this goal and to continue to strengthen our gains of last 19 years, to have a prosperous and peaceful Afghanistan. I would like to urge the international community not to forget Afghanistan given the current economic problems due to Covid 19 pandemic as peace in Afghanistan is vital for peace and stability in the region and world at large.

The third point is that too often it is assumed that the demands for women's rights are coming only from women who reside in urban centers, but the truth is that women in the rural societies want the same rights. The only reason that they are often prevented from raising their voices is intimidation by extremist groups fighting the Afghan government.

The Taliban, in their statements, have called for the return of their so called "Islamic Emirate," but they must understand that the Afghanistan they will be negotiating with is a combination of the older generations that lived and rejected their regime and the younger generations that grew in an environment of freedom, equality and globalization. We are determined to take steps forward in the development of our country and not to go back to the ideologies of the past. We welcome the Taliban as members of our society but reiterate to them that they will be joining our system and not the other way around.

Distinguished guests,

Lastly, I would like to say that the negotiating team is ready to engage with the Taliban and take the necessary steps towards a peace that effectively safeguards and protects the rights of our women. We call on the Taliban to show their commitment to peace, put down their arms and talk to us at the negotiation table instead of indulging into violence. The people of Afghanistan are optimistic and they are watching us closely that how can we help in bring lasting peace. But we are ready to negotiate for a long- lasting and sustainable peace that ensures women's rights, and enable women to prosper as equal citizens of the society.

Thank you for your patience.

**MRS GHIZAAL HARESS, HEAD OF THE AFGHANISTAN
OMBUDSPERSON'S OFFICE**

First Lady of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, permanent members of the Security Council, and distinguished audience. I am very pleased to be addressing the Security Council once again, although only virtually to discuss our views and concerns about the peace negotiations. I would first like to thank the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations, particularly Ambassador Raz, and Permanent Missions of the United Kingdom, Germany, Indonesia, and Qatar for organizing this timely discussion of women and the Afghan peace process.

Today, I would like to briefly speak on the Afghan constitution and how it will be affected in the peace process and how that impacts the life of Afghan women. The constitution of 2004 marked a significant break from Afghanistan's decades of war. Despite the years of conflict following the adoption of the Constitution, Afghanistan has made notable progress with regard to the rule of law, democratic governance, human rights, and particularly women's rights.

Afghanistan's constitution of 2004 is the greatest constitution Afghanistan has ever experienced. This constitution introduces an Islamic Republic. It was approved following an inclusive process of constitution and comprehensive public consultation. It outlines a comprehensive set of rights and governance, which has been unprecedented in Afghanistan. It introduces democratic and representative institutions and it guarantees citizens' right to vote. It guarantees equality before the law and recognizes men and women and Muslims and non-Muslims as equal citizens. It gives equal value to Shias and Sunnis as the two major sects within Islam in the country. It introduces a meaningful separation of powers and a wide range of checks and balances. Again, quite unprecedented in Afghanistan. The constitution emphasizes the rule of law and on constitutionalism and it upholds freedom of expression in medium. These are just a few I could explain to you.

What I mentioned confirms that inclusivity is the foundation of our constitution. This constitution reconciles Islam, democratic values and principles, human rights in the Afghan culture in the best way possible. In a way that Afghanistan and quite a number of Islamic countries have not experienced. Despite the fact that this is the best constitution Afghanistan has ever experienced, the current constitution is not perfect. Nor any constitution anywhere around the world has proved to be perfect, especially if it is a constitution that is implemented. Constitutions improve over time through amendments and interpretations, two factors that keep the constitution a living document and relevant to the time and needs of the society it serves.

So far in the peace process, our constitutional gains have been placed in serious jeopardy by repeated suggestions that the constitution be changed to accommodate the demands of the Taliban. There are serious concerns over preserving democratic

governance, protection of human rights, and separation of powers enshrined in the constitution, We recognize that the constitution is as much a political document as it is a legal one. Therefore, political consensus for a constitution can guarantee a stable political order. In our case, a stable post-peace political order. Constitutional amendments as part of the peace process is inevitable. But the main question is: what would we like to amend and how?

Afghanistan's constitution allows amendments with specific conditions. First, provisions made to Islamic republicanism and Islam cannot be amended. Provisions related to human rights can be amended only if the objective is to improve them. Third, any other aspects of the constitution can be amended with due respect to the experiences and requirements of the time. We recognize the fact that the constitution must be flexible to be amended to become a more effective document over time and in order to ensure a stable political order. We emphasize on preserving the values and principles that we have fought for since 2001. We could be flexible in including institutional structures and systems of governance, but we cannot compromise on our values and principles being a republic state, representative institutions, and peoples' rights to exercise sovereignty and decide about their future.

The Taliban has proved since the mid-nineties that they do not believe in these principles. The concerns that I and many other fellow Afghans have do not only stem from our experiences under the Taliban. But the constitution of Taliban that was broadened before their fall, revised with five hundred members in 2005. This constitution has no mention of the word women. It does not recognize representative institutions and this regards followers of other sects and religious minorities. In their simple terms, our current constitution gives all its citizens the freedom and the space to raise their voices and allows us to decide for the future of our country. The Taliban's constitution is an authoritarian document. It does not recognize the people to lead the sovereign. It rather suppresses the voices and dictates the citizens. It particularly suppresses women and religious minorities. Plus, we repeatedly hear the terms Islamic emirate and Islamic regime, which are extremely vague. We have very few models of emirates around the world and the Taliban's version does not appear to be anything close to that. And worse, the Taliban's interpretation of the Islamic regime has been unique and extremely harsh. Same applies to women and minority rights and again, there are concerns over Taliban's interpretation of protection of their rights under Islam.

Any compromise to citizens' rights and liberties would erase the hard-earned gains of nearly two decades in Afghanistan. Peace in Afghanistan is a desire of every Afghan, but it has to be guaranteed to be an inclusive process. Not a process that seems to be inclusive of the insurgents, a minority, but the one which may result in exclusion of the majority of Afghans, of women, and of religious minorities.

I would like to thank the Security Council for their continuous support of the people of Afghanistan and would like to urge that they stand next to us and support us for continuing to preserve the gains and further promote them. Thank you

**SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
DEBORAH LYONS**

Acknowledgements: H.E. Rula Ghani, First Lady of Afghanistan, Baroness Fiona Hodgson, Fellow panellists, Members of the Security Council

Truly, I want to start off by thanking Afghanistan and the United Kingdom as the co-chairs of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan, a very important group, particularly important in this year and in the coming year, as well as of course Germany and Indonesia as the very important penholders, for convening this meeting.

Allow me to make our position clear at the outset: the Afghan peace process must represent the whole population – not part of it, not only half of it, but all of it. This must be a core priority – for Afghanistan, for the international community, and for the UN. Studies have shown that how a society treats women is a significant predictor of its stability and prosperity. In an incredible research done by Valerie Hudson and other researchers in 2016, 170 countries were surveyed. And the level of stability of those countries was not determined by their ethnocultural profile, nor by their level of democracy, or not even by the robustness of the economy. The single greatest predictor for stability for any of the 170 countries surveyed was how those countries treated and engaged women in their society. The research has been done. The evidence is there. Women must be part of any peace process representing their country. If they are, the peace agreement is far more durable, far more long-lasting and spreads to more of the community. So it is in everyone's interest to ensure that women's full participation in this important process happens – not only for its own sake, but to ensure that it results in a more stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

Since I started in this job, I have been heartened by the overwhelming support for women's participation and empowerment, and for a peace that preserves the rights of all Afghans. I heard this from Afghans, neighboring countries and the wider international community. For all of us, it is unthinkable that women would not be there when the future of Afghanistan is discussed and decided.

Already, there have been encouraging signs of women's participation. As you have already heard from my fellow panelists and the First Lady, women advocates have been working hard to get their messages out, and efforts are underway for women to contribute as experts, advisors and champions throughout the process: from discussions on the form and agenda of negotiations; through the negotiations themselves; and most particularly throughout the implementation of any agreement. Women can and should be present in as many roles as men – but not just because they are women, but because they are politicians, advocates, human rights leaders, peacebuilders, business owners, and community leaders. And all of these skills and perspectives are needed.

UNAMA has urged both parties to the peace talks to ensure women's meaningful participation in the process, and I thank member states for amplifying this message. I am encouraged how often the Islamic Republic Negotiation Team and the State Ministry for Peace have in fact reached out to women, youth, civil society and religious scholars. Indeed I have just come from a session this afternoon with the State Ministry of Peace where they were talking about the work they are doing at the local level in the provinces to bring together women in self-mobilizing groups to contribute to the peace talks. And I look forward to working with them in that. I urge Afghan political leaders, most particularly the Taliban leadership, and everyone involved, to listen to the points of views in these discussions.

Equally, we would like to see more women in both negotiation teams. I commend the extraordinary dedication that the women in the Islamic Republic team, represented here with us today, and the incredible contributions they have made in preparing for the challenging task ahead. I look forward to the Islamic Republic finalizing its negotiation structures, and appointing a significant number of women in the High Council for National Reconciliation and its leadership. We of course also urge the Taliban to show their commitment to empowering women's voices in the peace process, which could help ease the very real fears expressed by many Afghans about the potential for their rights to be eroded under a future peace agreement. It is time for the Taliban to demonstrate their commitment to the women of Afghanistan.

In addition, female victims of conflict, including women with disabilities, female-headed households, widowed women, and girls, must also be included. As demonstrated in UNAMA's midyear protection of civilians report, which was just

released today, women and girls are disproportionately affected by the conflict in Afghanistan: in the first six months of 2020, the conflict caused 397 female casualties and 1,067 child casualties, representing over 40 per cent of the overall civilian casualty toll. So when the peace process addresses, as it must, victims-centred justice, the women and girl must be front and centre.

This leads me to the all-important issue of human rights in the context of peace. It is important for member countries to know that Afghans have overwhelmingly made clear that they wish to see fundamental human rights protected in any peace agreement. In a recent survey over 70 percent of Afghans stated clearly that human rights is of primary importance in the peace agreement. Afghan women have made substantial gains in the past 20 years. These gains cannot be lost. And it is important as well to understand that Afghanistan is now party to seven UN international human rights treaties. These are minimum human rights obligations, and they are here to stay. Women's rights are part of these – they are not separate, they are not disposable.

So much remains to be done, independently of how the peace process turns out. Some steps can be taken right now to support women's rights. One is to strengthen the protection of female human rights defenders, who experience alarming levels of harassment. We call on the Government and the international community to take concrete steps to support these women. Recent civil society initiatives, such as the draft Human Rights Defenders' Strategy, are indeed positive, but more is needed. Only by protecting and supporting these women can we ensure that their contributions are included. Secondly, I draw your attention to the recent draft Family Law of the Government of Afghanistan, and we look forward to working with them on this law, particularly as it relates to the age of marriage, polygamy, and maintenance and custody of children after the dissolution of marriage. As Afghanistan prepares for peace talks, it is critical that the Afghan Government signals to all Afghans, women and girls that there will be no regression on their most fundamental human rights. And the Taliban leadership must take notice.

So as we move into the peace negotiations, we should make sure that we are under no illusions that this will be easy, or that these issues will be resolved quickly. Women's rights and freedoms may be among the most challenging topics on the agenda in the peace process. The world will be watching. The world will be watching to see how all parties and individuals treat this important topic, and whether the peace negotiators are working for the benefit of 100 per cent of Afghans.

Achieving women's full participation in the peace process, and sustaining and building on their rights, will require concerted efforts on the part of many actors, including all of us here today. And we will all be asked to account for the part that we played.

We are providing as UNAMA technical support and expertise on peace processes and we continue to work closely with the Afghan Government, civil society organizations and the Taliban to make sure that the peace process is as positive as it needs to be for the women and men of Afghanistan.

The coming months will reveal the true commitment of all the parties to sitting together, alongside Afghans from all walks of life, and discussing what a peaceful Afghanistan looks like.

We urge the Afghan political leadership and the Taliban to show compassion and determination, as they go forward to work in good faith towards peace, with and for all Afghans.

Thank you.

H.E. MS SHEIKHA ALYA AHMED SAIF AL-THANI, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF QATAR

Thank you Amb. Jani,

Allow me to begin by thanking the distinguished Ambassadors of Germany, Afghanistan, the United Kingdom and Indonesia for co-hosting this timely Aria Formula meeting and as well for your kind invitation to me to join the panel.

Madam First Lady Rula Ghani, we have been inspired by your words today, and by your tireless efforts to fully integrate women and girls into Afghan society and into the workforce and as well creating the platforms at the national level to discuss the role of Afghan women as messengers for peace. Your representation here in New York through Ambassador Adela is true expel of Afghanistan achievement of this.

I am honored as well to share this virtual stage with three distinguished Afghan women leaders, H.E. Minister Safi, Dr. Sarabi, and Ms. Haris. I also commend SRSg Lyons for her and UNAMA's efforts to fulfil their mandate, including supporting the political peace process and the full participation of Afghan women in the peace process.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished participants,

I would like to recognize the role of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan, cochaired by the United Kingdom and Afghanistan which was launched last year in recognition of the growing importance of supporting and empowering women in Afghanistan, of which the State of Qatar is a proud member, in our pursue as a strong partner of Afghanistan in its march toward achieving peace, development and promoting and protecting human rights for all, including of course, for women and girls.

Conflict prevention, mediation and sustaining peace are given priorities in Qatar's foreign policy. Lasting peace in Afghanistan is a paramount issue for Qatar. In an effort to support Afghanistan restore peace and prosperity, Qatar has undertaken substantial mediation efforts to support and facilitate the peace process in Afghanistan. The significance, and success, of these efforts is reflected in the signing last February in Doha of the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the United States of America and the Taliban, which the Security Council welcomed as a significant step towards ending the war in Afghanistan. It is an Agreement that would unlock intra-Afghan talks between the Taliban and the Afghan stakeholders.

I would like to highlight the Intra-Afghan Peace Talks, which was held from 7 to 9 July in Doha, under the auspices of Germany and Qatar. A key objective of that meeting was to ensure women full representation during the talks. This is in line with Qatar's commitment to ensure the rights of women are safeguarded in peace processes. Moreover, without women's participation, a broadly-based peace settlement is less likely. The peace talks counted with the participation of around 11 outstanding women from sectors such as government, civil society and media.

In this, we welcome the emphasis made by the Security Council, including in its recent resolution [2513 \(2020\)](#) on Afghanistan, which affirms that any political settlement must protect the rights of all Afghans, including women, youth and minorities.

Mr. Chairman,

As Afghanistan makes headway toward peace, development, and promotion and protection of human rights for all, the commitment to consolidate the achievements made thus far in the area of empowerment of Afghan women and protection of their rights and interests should be upheld especially in the upcoming phase of intra-

Afghan negotiations and peace process. In this regard, I would like to reaffirm Qatar's steadfast commitment to support Afghanistan including continued support for an Afghani-led and owned reconciliation process with a view to bringing peace stability and security. In undertaking these efforts, we will continue to support the international community commitments to endorse the full participation of women in the peace process that will ensure that the eventual peace agreement would guarantee the protection of their rights and interests.

4. Interventions by members of the Security Council

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Statement by H.E. Mrs Kelly Craft, Permanent Representative of the United States of America

Thank you, Jonathan. I'd like to thank the distinguished briefers here today for providing us with their insight and expertise on this very important issue, and I also would like to thank the co-sponsors for organizing this meeting. I am going to try and make this very short, Jonathan, but it's really difficult when every word you have is important especially on an issue such as this.

We know that Afghan women, for far too long, have borne the brunt of this lengthy conflict and that they have been regularly excluded from discussions about Afghanistan's future. We recognize there have been social, economic, and political impediments in Afghanistan that have hindered meaningful inclusion of women and girls.

No country can be successful on the journey to sustainable peace and self-reliance while excluding half of its population. That is why the advancement of women's economic empowerment and the promotion of women's human rights is, and always has been, central to the U.S. efforts in Afghanistan.

Through the Trump Administration's diplomatic engagement and assistance programs, we continue to advocate for measures to respect and promote women's rights, combat gender-based violence, create quality educational opportunities, help women to join the workforce, and expand access to quality healthcare. We also advocate for more Afghan women judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement officers, as these government officials are essential for upholding women's rights and for ensuring equal access to Afghanistan's justice sector.

The protection and advancement of the rights of Afghan women and girls, and the meaningful participation of women, in all political processes are not only beneficial to the welfare of the Afghan people, but also the future stability and prosperity of the nation.

We welcome the appointment of four women out of the 21 members on the Intra-Afghan Negotiation team, one of whom briefed us today and highlighted the important role of women in negotiations.

For the negotiations to deliver lasting peace, women need to be substantively involved at every level and in all peace structures throughout this process. Their inclusion will help promote negotiation outcomes that reflect the needs not only of women, but of all Afghans, including on critical issues such as political, security, judicial and legal reforms, social and economic recovery, governing arrangements, and transitional justice.

For our part, the United States is training Afghan women in negotiation, persuasion, and advocacy across Afghanistan. In 2019, 25 Afghan women took part in the U.S.-funded training intended to develop the skills of a cadre of female senior officials to be able to participate in top-level negotiations and to assess their implementation. They, along with female members of the negotiating team, continue to receive mentorship through an online platform of collaboration tools and expert resources.

These negotiations will have a direct impact on the lives of all Afghans. I want to echo the UN Security Council UNAMA June Press Statement which underscores that the economic, social, political and development gains made in the last 19 years,

including with respect to the rights of women, children and minorities, must be protected and built upon. The ability of women and girls to participate in education, contribute to the economy, access health, social, and legal services, and engage in politics, law enforcement and the justice sector, must continue to expand in all parts of the country.

Women in Afghanistan have long championed these issues, and addressing them is critical for lasting and sustainable peace. We thank those today who have come here in support of Afghan women's meaningful participation in their country's future. The Trump Administration wholeheartedly supports these efforts.

Thank you.

FRANCE

Statement by H.E. Mr Nicolas de Rivière, Permanent Representative of France

Mr. President,

Let me first thank the UK, Afghanistan, Germany and Indonesia for this very timely meeting. I would like to pay special tribute to Ambassador Raz for her tireless efforts in promoting the Women, peace and security agenda in Afghanistan. And I would also like to thank the First Lady of Afghanistan for her engagement and the panelists for their contributions.

The tragic attack against a maternity in Dasht-é Barchi on May 12th cruelly reminds us that women and children are the first victims of terrorism. Violence must stop. We support the Secretary General's appeal for a ceasefire, as recently outlined by resolution 2532 on COVID19.

As the pandemic has taken a greater toll on women with consequences on their jobs and exposition to domestic violence, our priority must be to insure their safety, and to support women human rights defenders. We welcome the initiatives taken by President Ahsraf Ghani in response to the undergoing campaign "WhereIsMyName" to allow women to have their names on their identity cards.

The agreements of February 29th raised hopes. But there will also be no lasting peace without the full, equal and meaningful participation of Afghan women. We call on all negotiating parties to recognize this fact and take action to ensure higher inclusion of women in peace talks. We commend the designation by the Afghan government of several women in their negotiating team. It is sadly not enough. Women have to have a seat at both sides of the table and at all stages of negotiations. How can we ensure that the Taliban engage truthfully with women negotiators and on women's issues?

France hosted a delegation of Afghan women, to learn from their experience and to give these women from different backgrounds tools to engage in a negotiating process. We cannot accept the fallacy that women are absent because of so called insufficient adequate profiles when women play an instrumental role in the day-to-day life as educators, workers and community leaders. I want to ask collectively what more could be done to ensure that women are engaged in the proper training processes?

Mr. President,

Let me conclude by reaffirming that safeguarding human rights, especially women's rights remains a priority of our position with regard to the situation in Afghanistan. This matter will be one of the revelator's of the Taliban's claim to accept that Afghanistan has changed since they were ousted from power. There can be no turning back. We must collectively reiterate our support for an inclusive peace

process, in which UNAMA and the United Nations in Afghanistan have a key role to play. This will be an essential condition for a strong support to the future Afghanistan from the international community.

I thank you very much.

VIET NAM

Statement by H.E. Mr Dang Dinh Quy, Permanent Representative of Viet Nam

Mr. President,

I would like to thank the Afghanistan, Germany, Indonesia, and the United Kingdom for holding this meeting. I would also like to welcome the presence of Her Excellency, Mrs. Rula Ghani, First Lady of Afghanistan. I also thank the panelists for their comprehensive statements.

Mr. President,

Security Council Resolution 2513 marks a significant milestone for Afghanistan. It has laid foundation for the pursuit of the strong desire of Afghan people, including, Afghan women, for durable peace and prosperity. Viet Nam firmly supports the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned inclusive peace process and welcomes the recent efforts of the Government, especially in protecting and enhancing women's role. We welcome the increasing participation of Afghan women in various aspects of society life, as well as the peace process with nearly 25% of the negotiation team being women. We also commend UNAMA, regional and other countries for contributing to peace and development in Afghanistan.

Despite the progress made, Afghan women and girls are still among the most vulnerable groups. We are concerned over the recent violence and terrorist attacks which killed hundreds of women and girls. Sexual violence, gender-based discrimination, the COVID-19 pandemic and the use of women and girls in illicit drug activities remain critical challenges. While advancing the role of women in the peace process is important, it is also crucial to address the root causes of the current challenges, particularly in achieving sustainable peace and promoting socio-economic development, where women can fully participate in and benefit from.

In this regard, I would like to make three points:

First and foremost, we must further strengthen protection for Afghan women. A timely permanent ceasefire can put an end to violence and sufferings. Women, including women in politics and their families, must be protected from violence, discrimination and intimidation. It is also crucial to equip women and girls with better tools to protect them from conflict-related risks as well as to build their resilience against climate change, diseases and natural disasters.

Second, we encourage efforts to promote meaningful participation of women at all stages of the peace process and in building the future of Afghanistan. Obstacles, resistance and other risks to such participation should be removed. Awareness and education are key.

Third, we call for strengthened partnership in the protection and empowerment of women in Afghanistan. International partners, including UNAMA and UN Women, should provide further technical support to the Afghan Government in this connection. UNAMA can also lead by example by finding ways and means to increase proportion of its female staff, especially National Professional Officers (NPOs) and national staff.

I thank you.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Statement by H.E. Mr José Singer Wiesinger, Representative of the Dominican Republic

First and foremost, let me congratulate Afghanistan, Germany, Indonesia and the United Kingdom for bringing us together to discuss such a pressing issue. I would like to thank the briefers for the valuable observations.

Afghan women have fought outstandingly and ferociously for gender equality.

They have made great progress since the fall of the Taliban regime which had exposed them to endless suffering.

Their contributions are evident in all fields including the security sector, government, civil society, media, and science and technology.

Today, Afghanistan has women ministers, governors and judges, with 28% of women comprising its parliament and the first women ambassador to the United Nations.

The country is in the second phase of its National Action Plan on WPS with the enactment of the Elimination of Violence Against Women Law and the decision of its Attorney General to put women's rights protection on top of his agenda.

Despite much progress made, Afghan women continue to make strides towards more equal rights and the country is a difficult place for women to thrive, especially in rural areas.

This is a moment for both fear and hope for Afghan women, as intra-afghan negotiations approach.

It is a collective responsibility of the Government of Afghanistan, the Security Council and the international community, to support their hard-won rights.

Afghan women are in a fight not just of their rights, but of their lives. The Taliban continues to prevent women and girls from exercising many of their fundamental human rights despite their discourse and, regrettably, women have been left out of more than 20 rounds of its informal talks.

Taliban's leader said in February that women's rights would be guaranteed under Islam.

These incongruences and their misogynistic past, are some of the reasons for the existing mistrust.

Additionally, COVID-19 lockdowns exacerbate the dire situation many Afghan women already face, related to domestic violence and other gender-based violence. Women's inclusion is even more crucial given their critical inputs on the link between combating the pandemic and building peace.

Intra-Afghan talks are the best means to end this conflict and to have a fully unified force to pursue success, a pursuit that must count with the participation of every segment of society with the goal not just to stop violence, but to foster tolerance.

The Dominican Republic shares the concern of many Afghan women, that their rights may be compromised if a peace settlement is rushed and limited to core security issues of terrorism, as it has been the case before.

Protecting women's rights needs to be one of the key objectives of this process.

Therefore, we insist that women and young women, including women living in rural areas, need to participate actively and meaningfully in all stages and dimensions of the peace process to guarantee its sustainability and possibilities to materialize.

They are an essential component that speaks to the collective aspiration. There's a window of opportunity here. Women's participation won't circle solely around military action, power sharing and territorial gains, but can ensure that issues like political and legal reforms, social and economic recovery and transitional justice are priorities in any peace accord.

Mr. Chair,

Women Human rights activists in Afghanistan are under attack. A month ago, a young women human rights activist and member of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, Fatima Khalil, was killed.

Human rights defenders must be protected and threats and attacks against them must be investigated and prosecuted. These types of violence could hamper the peace process.

Finally, it is critical that the Council engages more often and systematically with the UN Group of Friends of Afghan Women, Co-chaired by Afghanistan and United Kingdom, as a key strategic and useful platform to provide its full support to Afghan women in order to safeguard their important gains towards their rights and to ensure that any prospective outcomes in the peace process guarantee these rights.

Thank you.

TUNISIA

Statement by H.E. Mr Kais Kabtani, Permanent Representative of Tunisia

At the outset let me thank the delegations of Afghanistan, Indonesia and the UK for organizing this timely meeting and for giving us the opportunity to listen to such distinguished briefers to whom we express our full appreciation for the remarkable presentations they shared with us.

We continue to follow closely the complex situation in Afghanistan, particularly the progress towards intra-Afghan negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban, as stipulated in the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan concluded in February, which Council members unequivocally supported in resolution 2513 adopted in March.

We hope that these forthcoming negotiations will end the war in Afghanistan and pave the way for a much-needed long-term sustainable peace in this country and we call on all parties to carry out confidence-building measures to facilitate the commencement of these negotiations, including through stopping attacks and all forms of violence.

We urge them to comply with Security Council resolution 2532, demanding a general and immediate cessation of hostilities and to respect the appeal of the Secretary General in this regard.

Having said that, we strongly believe that the meaningful and effective participation of Afghan women in these negotiations is not only important but also indispensable to the process.

Likewise, it is equally crucial to underline that any political settlement in Afghanistan should safeguard the rights of women as enshrined in the constitution and clearly reflect the important gains achieved in this country in terms of women's empowerment.

The Security Council stand on this is very strong and its message is very clear as articulated in paragraph 3 of its resolution 2513.

In fact, this meeting is an occasion to reiterate this message and recommit to these objectives, along with our commitment to advancing the peace process in Afghanistan.

We fully support the Government of Afghanistan in its commitment and endeavors to secure equality, empowerment and the full realization of the rights of women and girls and to promote the advent of a new peaceful and reconciled Afghanistan with women participating fully and equally in decision making and contributing to the prosperity and stability of the country throughout all segments of society.

In Tunisia we have made a strategic choice upon independence in 1956, that of women's equality and empowerment. More than 6 decades later, Tunisian women, acting especially under the civil society, played a pivotal role in the country's peaceful political transition.

In closing, I can't find a stronger expression which best encapsulates the merits of women's empowerment than the Nobel Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai's when she said, I quote "We cannot succeed when half of us are held back."

I thank you for your attention

NIGER

Statement by H.E. Mr Aougui Niandou, Deputy Permanent Representative of Niger

Thank you, Mr. President,

If the past is willingly forgotten, the wounds are still alive, and for Afghanistan to heal, the time has come to give a voice to women because they have carried the brunt of the suffering during these decades of war. Countless people have shared stories of pain, so I will not go into them again. Instead, what I intend to do today is to celebrate their abnegation and to inscribe ourselves into the mindset of making the women of Afghanistan the driving force behind this intra-Afghan peace process that is source of so much hope for the Afghan people and the international community.

Mr. President,

Despite significant progress, our current models of society continue to oppress women in the most unsuspected social intertwining. Therefore, and as we have said time and time again, the success, materialization, and credibility of the afghan peace process lies on the involvement of the women in every step from pre-negotiations to the intra-talks.

This should first and foremost start with inclusivity. As has mentioned H.E. Adela Raz, "inclusivity means the inclusion of women and also the voice of youth and different ethnic groups." In that respect, Niger would like to advocate for a process that not only fosters and enhances the rights of women but also solidify the gains made in the past two decades. Achieving this entails "the ongoing representation of women on negotiation teams, the provision of gender expertise – both training and technical input – to mediators and negotiation teams to understand how women's rights are part of issues under discussion (whether that be ceasefires, political power sharing, and justice efforts); and mechanisms for civil society to input ideas, concerns and proposals," as stated in studies of the International Peace Institute Global Observatory.

We also believe that there should be a concerted effort to promote women leadership not only from the government but also the international community. As such the meeting of today provide a great template as it is a collaborative effort from

all those that care about Afghanistan and is lead by an all-woman panel. Although provisions have already been made for women representation, putting them in charge in the bureaucracy and making them the face of civil service both nationally and abroad, will be crucial in normalizing the their participation in public life but also set the precedent for future generations of girls and boys.

Mr. President,

Ensuring women's participation and promoting their rights in this peace process would not be complete without a meaningful participation of the civil society. As mentioned by a former MP and civil society activist, and quoted in the Special Report of the US Institute of Peace, "women leaders in this sector have been a "pressure group," keeping a check on government policies and calling for immediate action in certain cases such as the Presidential Executive Order on the Elimination of Violence Against Women Law (EVAW)." These groups can not only help normalized a culture of advocacy when it comes to women, but also ensure that every voice is heard especially for those living in rural areas as they represent the majority of Afghan women.

To conclude Mr. President, I would like to reiterate what has been said in previous meetings on this subject, that is, history has shown that any time women are engaged and are given a meaningful place at the table, lasting peace and sustainable development follow. As we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Women Peace and Security agenda, we must support the Afghan government in not only fostering and enhancing the rights of women and other groups but also solidify the gains made in the past two decades, so that their vision for the future of Afghanistan is fully taken into account.

ST VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Statement by H.E. Dr Halimah DeShong, Deputy Permanent Representative of St Vincent and the Grenadines

Thank you Ambassador,

As a member of the Group of Friends of Afghan Women, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines welcomes this opportunity for dialogue with Afghan women on concrete ways in which the international community can continue to support the remarkable progress you've made toward the reconfiguration of Afghanistan's economic, political and social systems. However, we recognise that the full realisation of gender justice remains tied to the success of the peace process, and its promise of inclusive and sustainable development. We wish to thank Germany, the United Kingdom, Afghanistan and Indonesia for hosting this timely meeting, given the imminent intra-Afghan negotiations. We are particularly grateful for the expert insights shared by our distinguished keynote speaker, H.E. Rula Ghani, First Lady of Afghanistan, as well as those by distinguished speakers and panellists H.E. Dr. Hasina Safi, H.E. Adela Raz, H.E. Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al-Thani, Dr Habiba Sarabi, Ms Ghezal Haris, and SRSF Deborah Lyons.

The full, effective and meaningful participation of diverse Afghan women in all political and socio-economic processes, including the upcoming intra-Afghan negotiations, is essential to guarantee the institutional changes required for gender justice. It is indeed vital that we support the decisive actions to which our panellists spoke, in order to preserve and extend the hard-won gains Afghan women have made over the past 19 years. We recognise as significant, the various steps to implement the National Action Plan to effect resolution 1325; the greater involvement of women as decision-makers in government and executive positions of the civil service; the

increased participation of girls in education; and a growing shift in public consciousness in support of the expanded political and socio-economic participation of women and girls. Indeed, women and youth have demonstrated remarkable leadership in COVID prevention education. The inclusion of four women in the 21-member negotiating team of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is also noteworthy. To extend these gains, we support the Secretary General's call for greater participation of women in the growing domestic architecture for peace, including the Ministry of Peace Affairs and the High Council for Peace and National Reconciliation.

Afghan women have consistently advocated for more inclusive government, emerging as leaders at various stages of the peace process. You have stood as drivers of peace and development. You (alongside other members of civil society) have led calls for ceasefire. It is an honour for Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to stand with you as friends, and for the international community to learn with you, as we recommit to redressing historical gendered inequalities and all gender-based harms. In solidarity with you, we lend our voice to the call to secure your necessary and effective participation in the upcoming negotiations, and all subsequent dialogue and actions to promote a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan.

We denounce the recent surge in violence that continues to claim the lives of civilians, including women and children, and members of the Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF). These attacks run counter to the spirit of "the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan," welcomed in resolution [2513 \(2020\)](#). As the commencement of the intra-Afghan negotiations fast approaches, there is urgent need for a cessation of all hostilities, to ensure that important gains made towards rebuilding more inclusive institutions and relations are not jeopardised.

In closing, we wish to pose the following question:

What are some concrete steps that must be taken at the institutional and decision-making levels, as well as at the level of capacity building, to ensure that diverse women participate in the upcoming and subsequent negotiations, as well as in political and socio-economic processes in general?

BELGIUM

Statement by H.E. Mrs Karen Van Vlierberge, Deputy Permanent Representative of Belgium

Mr. President, dear colleagues,

We thank H.E. Rula Ghani (First Lady of Afghanistan), H.E. Ms Hasina Safi (Minister of Women's Affairs), Dr Habiba Sarabi (member of the negotiation team), SRSB Deborah Lyons and H.E. Sheikh Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al-Thani (PR of Qatar) for their interventions. We have listened closely to your recommendations and experiences and I want to emphasize that you can count on us to support your efforts.

The past twenty years Afghan society has made progress in realizing the rights of women as guaranteed by Afghanistan's constitution. I want to commend the Afghan government for its dedication and efforts. Women leaders are demonstrating today across all sectors of society why a country should never exclude half of its talent.

All eyes are currently focused on the intra-Afghan peace talks to be launched in Doha. I reiterate the importance of full and meaningful participation of women of diverse and representative backgrounds in peace talks. Current female participation

should be scaled up and any future agreement must guarantee the human rights of women and girls. We join the call of the vast majority of Afghans, both men and women, who will not accept turning back the clock to darker times.

The level of violence in Afghanistan remains alarmingly high. We call on all sides to immediately end this unacceptable suffering and stress the importance of accountability. Sometimes, women are specifically targeted, such as the recent atrocious attack on a maternity ward in Kabul, which this Council condemned in the strongest terms. We also condemn violence against women-led NGO's and women human rights defenders (including the killing of Fatima Khalil), educators, health workers and journalists. We are furthermore concerned about reports of an increase in domestic and gender based violence as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and urge for the response/policies to be inclusive and gender responsive.

The conflict in Afghanistan is the world's deadliest for children. We are deeply concerned at the scale and severity of grave violations of children's rights in Afghanistan. Protecting girls and boys should be at the center of our work. We urge all parties to swiftly implement the recommendations agreed by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

From our side we are supporting the implementation of the National Action Plan for Resolution 1325 together with UN Women. We are also a proud member of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan. The EU is working to prevent and end violence against women in Afghanistan through the joint Spotlight Initiative with the UN.

As outlined in the latest EU Council Conclusions on Afghanistan, any future support that is expected from Belgium or its EU partners will be conditional upon the continued commitment of that country to promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls.

The promotion of women's rights in Afghanistan falls squarely within the mandate of this Council. Soon this Council will renew the mandate of the UN mission in Afghanistan. We expect the promotion of women's participation and women's rights to remain at the center of its work.

Thank you.

ESTONIA

Statement by H.E. Mr Gert Auväärt, Deputy Permanent Representative of Estonia

First off, I wish to welcome the presence of the First Lady of Afghanistan today and I want to thank Afghanistan, Germany, Indonesia, and the UK for organizing today's meeting, as well as all the panelists for their comprehensive interventions.

Estonia expresses its firm support to Afghanistan on remaining committed to advancing women's empowerment and safeguarding the rights of women and girls as enshrined in Afghanistan's Constitution. We have seen considerable progress, however, a lot of challenges remain towards securing equality, empowerment and the full realization of women's rights.

We emphasize the importance of preserving and building on the achievements of the past two decades with regard to the women's rights in Afghanistan.

Estonia hopes that the intra-Afghan negotiations will start as soon as possible and bring along a long-term sustainable peace.

Estonia underlines the importance of promoting and protecting the rights of the Afghan women and girls in the peace process, which has to be inclusive and involve all layers of the society. Women need to be substantively involved at every level from pre-negotiation to the actual talks.

Women must be the essential participants of the greater infrastructure of the peace process. Empowerment is not simply having a diverse set of people in a system, but also letting them drive the narrative and establish the framework.

Estonia has and will continue to support the reforms that Afghanistan has taken in this regard.

Since 2011, we have provided health education and support to women and girls in Northern and Eastern Afghanistan through our development cooperation. This proved to be especially useful in the health crisis we are facing now. In addition, we contribute to the higher education of women in Afghanistan through development and entrepreneurship courses.

The role of women in all fields of life must be valued more, especially now, during the pandemic. Women continue to be disproportionately more impacted by COVID-19. Women and girls face distinct and increased risks because of the pandemic in many fields; from health to economy, from security to social protection, including increasing levels of violence.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is impossible to encompass all the complexities associated with the issues at hand in a four-minute statement. However, the message should be clear:

What has been accomplished must be preserved and built upon. Women must be meaningfully included in every step of the peace process.

I thank you.

CHINA

Statement by Mr Yao Shaojun, Minister Counsellor

Co-Chairs,

I thank all briefers for their briefings and appreciate the four Co-hosts holding this “Arria-Formula” meeting.

Women are important builders of, contributors to and participants in the Afghan Peace Process. The international community should support Afghanistan in enhancing the protection of women, ensuring women’s full participation and decision-making in political life and peace process.

At the same time, it is also important to adequately accommodate and respect social realities, cultural practice and religious traditions, build up the country’s capacities relating to women’s empowerment, and respect the country’s national ownership.

First, the states concerned bear the primary responsibility for promoting the effective participation of women in the peace process.

China firmly supports an inclusive peace process that is “Afghan-led and Afghan-owned”. We encourage Afghans to discuss the women empowerment in their dialogues and negotiations and reach an agreement on the country’s future political architecture.

China is ready to provide a platform for intra-Afghan talks. We will continue to work with others under mechanisms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and the trilateral China-Afghanistan-Pakistan dialogue.

Second, equal development opportunities, poverty eradication, and high-quality education are important conditions for Afghan women to participate in the peace process effectively.

The international community should help Afghanistan leverage its strengths into regional cooperation and ensure all its people, including women, benefit from the development. Recently, through the Gwadar Port on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Afghanistan's re-export business has started formal commercial operation.

Afghanistan has made new progress in integrating into regional economy. China welcomes this and calls on regional countries, especially neighboring countries, to increase investment in Afghanistan's infrastructure construction.

Third, the international community should do their best to support Afghanistan's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and create a favorable environment to promote women's development and participation.

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens the lives and health of all Afghan people, including women, and increases the pressure on the country's economic and social development.

So far, China has provided three batches of anti-epidemic supplies to Afghanistan, and such assistance is making a difference in Afghanistan. We call for strengthening regional cooperation and connectivity to help Afghanistan safeguard public health, revive its economy, and protect women's rights.

We wish that through the efforts of the Afghan people and with the help of the international community, the women of Afghanistan could enjoy further development and make more contribution to the peace process.

Thank you, Co-Chairs.

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Statement by Ms Dina Gilmutdinova, Counsellor

At the outset, let me thank the invited speakers for the informative briefings. We have attentively listened to the First Lady of Afghanistan Rula Ghani, Minister of Women's Affairs Ms. Hasina Safi, as well as Special Representative of the Secretary General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) Ms. Deborah Lyons, Dr. Habiba Sarabi, Ms. Ghezel Haris, and to the Permanent Representatives of Afghanistan Ms. Adela Raz and of Qatar Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al-Thani.

We have carefully considered the objective of the today's meeting. We stand in solidarity with the people of Afghanistan in their aspiration to end protracted war, restore peace and stability. A political solution to the conflict in this country remains more relevant than ever, especially now when the window of opportunity for direct talks is open. We have a genuine interest in promoting the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process and the subsequent stabilization in the country.

The conflict in Afghanistan has already resulted in numerous civilian deaths, as well as casualties, with women and children on the front line, and displacement.

Afghanistan continues to be shaken by large-scale bloody terrorist acts, including in Kabul.

Russia continues to support bringing all Afghans together at the negotiating table to decide their own future. Inclusive political settlement with representatives of all parties and sociopolitical groups, including women, is at the heart of our efforts. We are convinced that broad discussions are the key to achieving peace in the country.

The swift start of intra-Afghan talks is our high priority. We strongly believe this should be a common goal of consolidated efforts of the regional partners and international community that would help Afghan people to achieve lasting peace. Unfortunately, not all commitments are fully met so far. Further delays in intra-Afghan negotiations, with creating some new preconditions, can somehow undermine fragile peace process. We sincerely hope that Afghans won't let themselves lose the momentum and will find an "acceptable-by-all agreement" enabling to pave the way to sustainable peace in the country, that is united, independent and free of drug and terrorism. Russia will remain committed to supporting the people of Afghanistan in achieving a peaceful future.

Thank you.

SOUTH AFRICA

Statement by Ms Harshana Goolab, First Secretary

Thank you to the Missions of Afghanistan, Germany, Indonesia and the United Kingdom for organising this meeting. Thank you also to Her Excellency, the First Lady of Afghanistan and the panellists for their interventions.

Allow me to begin by reiterating South Africa's support for the political processes in Afghanistan and the recent agreement reached by the political leadership and hope that the parties can build on these positive developments by injecting renewed impetus and support for the start of the intra-Afghan peace talks.

Afghanistan is at a critical juncture in its peace process and the steadfast commitment by women to continue to play an active role in the peace process will ensure that Afghanistan finds lasting peace and security for all Afghan people.

A critical part of the intra-Afghan dialogue must be to ensure that the vast gains made in women's and girls' rights are protected. Sustainable peace will only be achieved if women know that they will never again be subjected to the deprivation of their fundamental and essential rights; the participation of women in all levels of the peace process will ensure this.

As previously stated by South Africa's Minister of International Relations and Cooperation during the Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict on 17 July 2020, South Africa, recognises that sexual violence is inextricably linked to gender inequality. We must continue to strongly advocate for the equal participation and full involvement of women in all processes in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

This year is a significant year as we commemorate the 20th anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325, the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action and the 75th anniversary of the signing of the Charter of the United Nations, amongst others. It is also the review year for "silencing the guns" on the African Continent.

These commemorations will be hollow if we do not take steps to fulfil their objectives and implement the ideals and commitments that we have made by adopting these landmark outcomes.

South Africa also believes that if we are to advance the course of women's rights and their empowerment, the onus is on Member States to continually look at measures to strengthen the full and effective implementation of all Security Council decisions. This includes the recommendations of the 2015 Global Study pertaining to women, peace and security in line with Security Council's resolution 2493 which was unanimously adopted last October, under South Africa's Presidency of the Council, at the annual open debate on women, peace and security, which emphasised the imperative of implementing all Council decisions on WPS.

South Africa welcomes the Government of Afghanistan's continued efforts to advance the promotion and protection of women's rights. This includes the diverse representation of women in the Government of Afghanistan's Negotiation Team, the implementation of Afghanistan's second iteration of their 1325 National Action Plan and the Women, Peace and Security agenda and hopes that this commitment continues during future discussions.

5. Interventions by other Member States

NORWAY

Statement by H.E. Ms Susan Eckey, Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of Norway

Excellencies, ministers, colleagues,

Let me begin by extending a heartfelt thanks to our co-hosts Afghanistan, Germany, Indonesia and the UK for convening this important Arria meeting, and for inviting Norway to participate. My deepest thanks as well to her Excellency First Lady Ghani for her most insightful remarks, as well as to our eminent panelists.

Excellencies,

Afghanistan has figured prominently on Norway's foreign policy agenda for the last two decades.

Norwegian military and civilian assistance has had a strong focus on women's rights, opportunities, and equality. We have also long been an active proponent and supporter of Afghanistan in its efforts to follow up the UN Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security.

Norway supports the Doha agreement and the US-Afghan joint declaration and we hope intra-Afghan negotiations will commence soon. We are ready to assist the parties if they so wish.

We share the expectation of a unified international community, articulated by a unanimous Security Council in resolution 2513, that any political settlement *inter alia* "must protect the rights of all Afghans, including women, youth and minorities". Inclusion of women in peace talks and the protection of human rights, including for women, will remain a priority for Norway.

Afghan women have been in the vanguard of promoting peace and understanding. This is true all the way from the grassroots level up to Her Excellency First Lady Ghani and the government. As the First Lady is with us per video link today, I would like to commend her especially for the nation-wide peace movement that she has initiated.

Even though Afghan women have so clearly demonstrated their commitment to peace, women's participation in peace talks in Afghanistan has generally been low, with women present at the table in very few of the dialogue initiatives throughout the years. The future of an Afghan peace process is uncertain at this moment, but we are well aware that many Afghans and many Afghan women fear that achievements from the last 19 years might be lost in a future peace agreement.

Involving women is a matter of political will – and political courage. Women should not be observers to peace. They should be contributors – with equal rights and obligations. The record shows that women's inclusion in peace processes leads to more sustainable outcomes. In other words, it is the smart thing to do, as well as the right thing to do.

The Afghan Government has pledged to include women leaders in peace talks – and to ensure an inclusive and consultative process. There have been Intra-Afghan dialogue events where Afghan women had the opportunity to express these concerns to the Taliban as well. The international community should hold all parties accountable in this regard.

Excellencies,

The Covid-19 pandemic raises some specific challenges for peacebuilding.

Norway urges the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 2532 with its call for an immediate cessation in hostilities in relation to the threat from Covid-19.

Certainly, the pandemic changes our ways of working, but it does not change the imperative of ensuring women's inclusion in peace and security.

We need to engage women partners on a strategic level with long-term, flexible and predictable funding. The fact that they do much with little means should not be an excuse to keep the budgets small. Rather – we need to enable them to do more.

Unfortunately, we need to also focus on their security. Women peacebuilders and human rights defenders are exposed to threats and violence. This is a human rights problem - and a democratic problem. When key players are unable to do their jobs, or are restricted in their activities, this in turn undermines our efforts for peace. Their security is a priority area for Norway.

Finally, we need to focus on women's participation in all phases of our peace and security efforts. Norway is committed to working for women's inclusion from the very start of a peace initiative through to its conclusion. If women are to be influential, we cannot invite them in when delegations are already set and the agenda is agreed, nor can we exclude them when that agenda is to be implemented. Full, effective and meaningful participation throughout the peace process – this is how Afghan women can truly make a difference for their country.

Norway will certainly continue to stand by them in this endeavor. During our upcoming term on the Security Council, we will do our part to make sure this agenda remains a top Council priority, working with our partners – including our good colleagues here today – to support Afghan women in their quest for peace, justice and equality. Thank you.

UZBEKISTAN

Statement by H.E. Mr Bakhtiyor Ibragimov, Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan

Mr. President,

First of all, I would like to commend the Permanent Missions of Indonesia, Afghanistan, the United Kingdom and Germany for convening this Arria Formula meeting on Afghanistan and thank Her Excellency Hasina Safi, Minister for Women's affairs of Afghanistan, Dr. Habiba Sorabi, Ms. Ghezal Haris, Ambassador Al-Thani of Qatar, and Secretary General's Special Representative Deborah Lyons for their informative briefings. Special thanks go to the First Lady of Afghanistan, Her Excellency Rula Ghani, for joining us today and her inspiring address.

Mr. President,

In Uzbekistan, we closely follow the situation in Afghanistan because the prospects of stable and sustainable development in Central Asia are inextricably intertwined with the achievement of a durable peace in this country.

Therefore, Uzbekistan has always supported and will continue to support political processes aimed at establishing a long-awaited peace in Afghanistan.

In this regard, in Tashkent we welcomed the United States – Taliban Agreement signed in Doha last February as an important step towards ending the war and opening the door to intra-Afghan negotiations. We also expressed support for the agreement reached by political leaders of Afghanistan to form an inclusive Government and Supreme Council on national reconciliation.

These steps are, indeed, the important prerequisites for achieving a sustainable and comprehensive peace in Afghanistan as well as ensuring security in the region as a whole.

We are convinced that the cohesion of all domestic political forces, the development and practical implementation of a unified comprehensive peace program for Afghanistan, agreed on regional and global levels, is a main condition in advancing a peace process in this country.

We also believe that today Afghanistan should be regarded as a country with a myriad of opportunities rather than as a “hotbed” of terrorism and drug-trafficking.

Mr. President,

Uzbekistan has welcomed a decision to hold the first round of intra-afghan negotiations in Doha. Herein, we fully share the position of the Afghan side that the upcoming negotiations in Qatar should be conducted without external interference, strictly adhering to a principle of “Afghan led and Afghan owned”.

The participants of the intra-afghan negotiations may also opt for convening subsequent rounds of negotiations in other countries, including Uzbekistan. Therefore, our side is ready, provided that there is such a request, to host one of the rounds of inter-afghan negotiations in the city of Samarkand.

In this regard, I would like to recall a statement of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, His Excellency Shavkat Mirziyoyev, made at the high-level Conference on Afghanistan held back in 2018 in Tashkent: (quote) “Uzbekistan is ready, at any stage of the peace process, to create all necessary conditions for organizing on its territory direct negotiations between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban Movement” (end of quote). This statement unequivocally shows Uzbekistan’s strong commitment to facilitate the Afghan peace process.

Mr. President,

In Uzbekistan, we firmly believe that in the intra-afghan negotiation process it is crucial the participation of women to preserve their rights, fully functioning civil society and other positive achievements gained in Afghanistan over the past 19 years.

From this perspective, we’ve welcomed a European Union’s program on supporting Afghan women through their education and trainings in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan launched last November as a practical step of international community’s concerted efforts in rendering to Afghanistan needed assistance which, on the one hand, advance women’s rights, and, on the other hand, help in nurturing national cadre in this country.

In Uzbekistan we’ve established an Educational Center for Afghan citizens in the city of Termez where currently 172 students, including 46 women, are studying in such fields as agriculture, railroad management, medical nursing and other areas.

We believe that the further expansion of constructive collaboration with Afghanistan in the field of education would provide us with an opportunity to organize on the basis of this Center various short-term courses for Afghan women thus empowering them with knowledge to make their own contribution to the development of their country.

Mr. President,

The outbreak of COVID-19 across the globe has significantly altered international community’s efforts in extending needed technical-humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, first and foremost, to women and children putting them in a very difficult situation.

Uzbekistan, despite current challenges, has provided Afghanistan with humanitarian aid which included medical supplies, foodstuffs, children clothes, etc. Most importantly, our border with Afghanistan remains opened for all cargo transits, which was commended by President Ashraf Ghani during his recent remarks.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that Uzbekistan will continue to support the peace process in Afghanistan and remains committed to expand close cooperation with the Government in Kabul, the United Nations and other stakeholders in advancing a durable peace settlement in this country.

Thank you, Mr. President.

6. Concluding remarks by Baroness Fiona Hodgson of Abinger, CBE, Honorary Member of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan

Thank you so much Jonathan for your kind introduction. Distinguished Members of the Panel, Your Excellencies, Members of the Security Council, Ladies and Gentlemen – it is such a pleasure to have been asked to be part of this meeting this afternoon, co-hosted by Afghanistan, Germany, Indonesia and the UK.

We've listened to some excellent speeches – it's always an honour to hear from the First Lady – and our panellists have made some outstanding and inspiring contributions. As well we've had some very thought provoking interventions from Security Council members and other participants.

We meet at a critical time. Since the US-Taliban Agreement on the 29th of February, many Afghans and friends of Afghanistan have hoped that we might be nearer to genuine negotiations and nearer to peace in Afghanistan than ever before.

But with that hope and anticipation comes a nervousness about what that may mean for the women and girls of Afghanistan.

Whilst there is a recognition that the future of Afghanistan must include everyone, including the Taliban, memories of what life was like under their rule prior to 2001 remain. The ongoing violence in the country serves as a reminder and does not instil confidence and it is incumbent on the Taliban of 2020 to prove to all Afghans – especially Afghan women and girls – that they deserve to have a stake in Afghanistan's future.

I first met a group of women from Afghanistan in 2006 in Washington and I was struck then by the enormous courage of the women of Afghanistan – and again today I am reminded of their bravery. I visited the country now many times and met Afghan women from all walks of life.

All the Afghan women we have heard from today have had the courage to put their heads above the parapet and to take part in public life in spite of all the threats.

The attack in May as we've heard from others on the Medicins San Frontieres-run maternity ward in Kabul, which killed 24 women, children, and babies – is the most extreme and barbaric example of targeting women and their rights and it reminds us of the risks that so many women face there.

Yet despite continued challenges, Afghan women have taken great strides in terms of asserting their rights and helping build their country.

As Her Excellency, the Minister Hasina Safi said, Afghan women can lead their issues themselves. There are more girls at school, more women in college, more women in positions of leadership in politics, in business, the military and in public life. Also demonstrated by the recent initiative of Afghan women deputy governors.

We have with us today some outstanding examples of Afghan women – Her Excellency Adela Raz, Dr. Sarabi, Her Excellency Ms. Hasina Safi and Ms. Ghezal Haris and, of course Her Excellency, the First Lady.

We cannot let all the gains that have been made for Afghan women be pushed back. We need to build on what has been achieved so far. Ms. Ghezal Haris reminded us of the inclusivity and equality enshrined in the Afghan Constitution.

Now is the moment for all of us – friends and supporters of Afghanistan and her people – to be listening to the voices of Afghan women themselves: what type of futures and society they want to build for their country.

And this must mean all Afghan women – not only the excellent panel of Afghan women leaders, but we must not forget that there are Afghan women leaders of every age, from every walk of life and socio-economic background, in Kabul and every province of the country. Rural women are among the most vulnerable.

An inclusive peace process means women being involved at every stage and at every level. And as the SRSG Deborah Lyons reminded us, a peace process must represent the whole Afghan population. Only that way will it be possible to build a peace that is long lasting and sustainable and preserves the many achievements Afghanistan has made over the years.

As the SRSG told us, how a society treats women is a prediction of its stability. Women must be at front and centre. And so it was so heartening to hear from Her Excellency Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al Thani, Permanent Representative of Qatar, on her country's commitment to trying to help to bring peace and ensure the rights of women are protected in the peace process.

This is not an easy time in Afghanistan – after 40 years of war, and with the global pandemic wreaking havoc in Afghanistan as it has in many other countries. And as Dr. Sarabi stated, Afghan women have been the main victims of the last four decades.

However, as the First Lady said, the Afghan women have found their voice and I hope that through events like this one today, we can offer support to Afghanistan to help ensure that a long-term, sustainable peace is achieved for all and that all Afghans are able to build the future that they deserve. Thank you.

7. Written statements of members of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan

AUSTRALIA

Australia thanks the Permanent Missions of Afghanistan and the United Kingdom, as co-chairs of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan, as well as Germany and Indonesia, as Security Council co-penholders on Afghanistan, for the opportunity to outline Australia's support for the full and meaningful participation of women in the Afghan peace process. Australia wishes to amplify the voices of Afghan women during this UN Security Council discussion.

Australia hopes Afghanistan will very soon move towards intra-Afghan negotiations and a sustainable, inclusive political settlement to the decades-long conflict.

Australia regards women's rights and meaningful participation as critical for achieving durable peace in Afghanistan. The intra-Afghan negotiations will coincide with the 20th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which has intensified global focus on how the meaningful inclusion of women in these dialogues can transform the prospects for peace.

Women are powerful mediators, peacebuilders and leaders. They make important and unique contributions to durable peace. A focus on gender equality and the realisation of human rights will accelerate sustainable development, inclusive economic growth and community resilience.

Australia echoes the Afghan people's recognition of the importance of women's inclusion, as enshrined in such documents as the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned 15-point declaration produced by the April 2019 Consultative Loya Jirga on Peace, and the National Women's Consensus for Peace's Statement. We support Afghan women's meaningful participation in all dimensions of the peace process, including as active contributors to: leadership councils; negotiating teams; consultative shuras; and technical and advisory teams.

Australia warns that a non-inclusive Afghan peace process threatens not only the prospective for peace but also women's rights more broadly. In Afghanistan, the last 19 years have seen improvements in Afghan women's rights, including achieving constitutional and legal protections and increasing the numbers of girls in school.

Yet, Afghanistan is still consistently assessed as among the worst countries in the world to be a woman, with nine out of ten Afghan women having experienced intimate partner violence in the past year, among other human rights violations. Much work remains to uphold this half of the Afghan population's rights, and harness their potential, so that Afghanistan can thrive.

To preserve, maintain and build on the rights and aspirations of Afghan women, empowering women has been a focus of Australia's diplomatic, military and development cooperation with Afghanistan since 2001. Australia is actively supporting the mainstreaming of women's empowerment through Afghanistan's National Peace and Development Framework. We welcome strengthened support for women's participation and rights at the next pledging conference in November 2020.

Our development cooperation supports national efforts to eliminate violence against women, by supporting women's shelters and increased access to justice, influencing community attitudes towards violence and advocating for the protection of women's rights. It also delivers girls' education in rural and remote areas of Afghanistan and targets the most critical humanitarian needs of women and girls.

To amplify the voices of Afghan women in the movement towards a peace settlement, Australia has supported key prominent women's activists to share their messages on the peace process with an international audience. To help overcome COVID-19 restrictions, Australia is also offering online support to Afghan women's rights supporters, enabling them to link up and draw support from the global WPS Agenda community. The recently launched PeaceFem App offers critical data and tools to women's rights advocates, peace mediation teams and Women, Peace and Security practitioners.

Australia continues to condemn in the strongest terms any act of terrorism, and especially those perpetrated against women and children, such as the May terrorist attack on a maternity clinic in Kabul.

Australia strongly encourages both the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban to heed Afghanistan's many diverse voices— particularly those of Afghan women – as part of the intra-Afghan negotiations. An inclusive process will not only benefit women, but also provide the basis for an enduring, sustainable peace for all Afghans.

IRELAND

Ireland is proud to be a member of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan and also, with Afghanistan, a 2018 co-founder of the UN Group of Friends of Peace Processes. We wish to recognise the tireless work of the Afghanistan Permanent Representative, Ms. Adela Raz, in highlighting the importance of women's participation in the Afghan Peace Process. It is priority for us to share our own lived experience of overcoming the legacy of conflict on the island of Ireland. Last February, when we brought together leading voices in the Northern Ireland peace process and UN Ambassadors whose countries are currently engaged in their own peace processes, we were delighted to benefit from Ambassador Raz' knowledge and expertise.

Gender equality, a priority for Ireland, is key to ensuring meaningful, inclusive and sustainable peace processes. Women are vital to inclusive peace processes, not only to represent gender-based views, but also because of their engagement with other marginalized community groups. Women peacebuilders are aware of the realities on the ground, the needs of their people, and how to reach the furthest behind first. Women fought for their seat at the table in Northern Ireland and from that seat, they ensured a focus on education, human rights, integration and reconciliation. People across the island of Ireland continue to reap the benefits of having women's voices at that table.

We need to work harder, including at the UN, to systematically involve women from the beginning, not just on "women's issues", but as equals and experts in their fields. The start of the new process in Afghanistan provides opportunities for real and sustained engagement in this regard.

Afghan women have already made a huge contribution as agents of change and we are delighted to have heard from so many distinguished panellists at this Arria, including Dr. Habiba Sarabi, as a member of the negotiating team.

However, it is not a task for women alone to ensure that gender perspectives are included in the Afghan Peace Process and in its implementation. It is the duty of everyone involved in, and us as partners to, the peace process.

It has been Ireland's long-standing concern, especially in this 20th anniversary year of UNSCR 1325, that those who wage wars – in the main not women – should

not shut out women when it comes time to set the parameters for peace. We believe that Afghanistan's commitment to advancing women's empowerment and safeguarding the rights of women and girls, including through the implementation of their WPS National Action Plan, can pave the way for important change in this regard. We appreciate UNAMA and track II partners' role in ensuring that women's participation is coordinated and meaningful and believe this momentum should be maintained throughout the negotiations.

Ireland hosted two events in 2019 aimed at bringing together Afghan and Northern Irish women's rights activists to discuss women's role in peace processes. The first, co-hosted with APRAN, highlighted the need for negotiators to focus on protecting the gains made in fundamental rights for women, children and minorities over the past 19 years, and to ensure compromises do not become trade-offs. Training women to leverage democratic mechanisms, promoting further international aid, using women's power to leverage grassroots networks to act as cross-community mediators and enhancing unity among Afghan women for greater national influence were all noted as integral parts of the process. Similar themes arose at our second event in Dublin, during an audience discussion that followed a screening of Nahid Shahalimi's documentary "We the Women of Afghanistan". We share the wish of Afghan women for a strong implementation process and for all voices to be heard, including those of Taliban women.

Ireland strongly welcomes this Arria meeting and is committed to supporting Afghanistan in its crucially important effort for full and meaningful participation of women in a peace process to drive lasting change.

POLAND

Mr. President,

As a founding member of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan Poland strongly believes in a profound role that women have in the Afghan society. We support changes that have occurred in the legal and cultural spheres which constitute the foundation for equal rights and opportunities for women and girls in Afghanistan.

It is needless to say that women have suffered severely during Afghanistan's long lasting war and they deserve a better future. This is something which was fought ferociously in the years since the fall of the cruel regime. Through almost two decades women have generously and bravely contributed to the Afghan society. Today they are ministers and governors, judges and soldiers and Afghanistan's parliament has a higher percentage of women than many parliaments in other countries.

One of the key provisions of the SCR 1325 on women, peace and security unanimously adopted 20 years ago is a gender perspective in post-conflict process. This has to be addressed and reflected in the intra-Afghan peace process. Thus we welcome the efforts made by the Afghan government in advancing women's empowerment and safeguarding the rights of women and girls as enshrined in the Constitution. Despite these important gains the existing conflict along with the COVID-19 pandemic have caused prolonged humanitarian suffering, disrupted social and economic progress and deprived many women and girls of the full realization of their fundamental rights.

In the last months we have witnessed and strongly supported all positive initiatives helping to find a peaceful and sustainable resolution to the conflict in Afghanistan. Women's participation in the peace and reconciliation process is a crucial element of the promotion and protection of the significant achievements on human rights, rule of law and freedom of speech. We would like to underline that the

future peace agreement cannot be based on arrangements which compromise unquestionable gains achieved on women rights.

Mr. President,

Allow me in closing to voice Poland's strong support for Afghan women and once again underline their crucial role in the future of the Afghan society.

I thank you.

TURKEY

Mr. President,

We would like to express our appreciation to the Permanent Missions of Afghanistan, United Kingdom, Germany and Indonesia for organizing this meeting. We also thank the panelists for their insightful remarks.

After decades of conflict, now is the time to seize the historic momentum to establish sustained peace, stability and security in Afghanistan.

Turkey welcomes all efforts that aim at reducing violence and supporting peace in the country. It is crucial that all parties involved make best use of the opportunity to bring the forty-years-old war to an end.

At this critical juncture, addressing challenges and promoting dialogue with all segments of the Afghan society remain vital.

Long-awaited intra-Afghan negotiations should lead to a lasting and comprehensive peace agreement that puts an end to the ongoing bloodshed, safeguards the human rights of all Afghans, including women and children, and upholds the rule of law.

Achievements of the last 18 years in Afghanistan need to be consolidated. This requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the security, development and political tracks.

Mr. President,

We would all like to see peace in Afghanistan. But peace gained at the price of the rights of women is no peace.

First of all, women must be fully included in the upcoming intra-Afghan negotiations. Their voices must be heard.

We must also ensure that Afghan women and girls have their rightful roles in the future of their country.

The women and girls have been the most severely affected groups by the war in Afghanistan.

To help their resilience, we have been providing support to the Afghan people through the most comprehensive development programme of history.

Since 2001, the status of Afghan women and girls have changed profoundly.

Today, women are in every sphere of life, from government to private sector, including at the highest levels.

All these efforts towards the empowerment of women and girls should not be wasted.

The Taliban must accept the reality that today's Afghanistan is very different from the country that they ruled in the past.

Finally, access to education of Afghan women and girls will continue to be critical for the promotion of a culture of peace and ensure sustainable development in Afghanistan.

This has a central role in Turkey's assistance efforts to Afghanistan. We have built more than 100 schools in the country, where more than 700.000 Afghan citizens have received education. We attach particular attention to the education of girls. Habibe Kadiri High School for girls, operating in Jowzjan/Afghanistan since 2008 has changed the lives of hundreds of girls and their families.

We call on all member states to continue to support Afghan women and girls.

Mr. President,

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of Resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) which set the foundation for the Women, Peace and Security agenda. We should make use of this agenda to increase women's participation in all stages of the peace process, as well as their engagement in the implementation of the peace agreement.

International community's efforts for the peace process is valuable. However, we should prevent duplications in these efforts and act together. Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, which is the largest platform that bring together all important actors in Afghanistan, can be used to this end. Turkey is ready to do its part, in its national capacity as well as in regional and international fora.

Thank you.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Mr. President,

The UAE thanks Germany for convening this meeting today.

We meet at an important moment for Afghanistan, following the historic signing earlier this year of "The Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan". This is a positive development that paves the way for intra-Afghan negotiations. The United Arab Emirates reiterates its hope that this represents a step towards achieving peace and security throughout Afghanistan. Much progress has been made to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in Afghanistan. Critical achievements include, for example, the scholarization of millions of girls, the fact that more than a quarter of Parliamentary seats are held by women, and that increasing numbers of women have been appointed to decision-making and executive roles in government and beyond.

Despite these important gains, the ongoing conflict has prolonged human suffering, impeded social and economic progress, and stymied the development of Afghanistan. As we look forward to a brighter future for the women of Afghanistan, the UAE would like to make four recommendations:

First, women must be included as part of any peace negotiation in Afghanistan. If women are sidelined, the prospects for sustainable peace are slim and long-lasting peace will remain elusive. It is there for essential to support women's meaningful participation at this stage and as a member of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan, the UAE supports the call for women to be an integral part of the peace process.

Second, women at senior positions of leadership are ideally placed to represent the interests of women and girls in policy making relating to peace and sustainable development. This high-level advocacy supports gender responsive and inclusive national systems which respects the promotion and protection of human rights of the women and girls of Afghanistan.

Third, achieving gender equality and empowering women requires multidimensional efforts, including tackling social norms and cultural practices that fuel inequality. This approach is especially applicable during the COVID-19 pandemic which has disproportionately affected women and girls, with increased reports of domestic violence and gender-based violence in many societies.

Finally, governments and international organizations can also continue to play a key role in promoting progress in Afghanistan. The UAE has been doing its part to assist the women and girls of Afghanistan through the Sheikha Fatima “Carpet of Peace” project. This initiative has created thousands of traditional carpet production jobs in Afghanistan and employs more than 4,000 people, 70 percent of whom are women. The initiative works with Afghan communities across the country, providing livelihoods to women who would otherwise have no income.

Today, as we stand in solidarity with the people of Afghanistan, the UAE reaffirms its support for the full and meaningful participation of Afghan women in the peace process and the promotion and protection of their rights in their journey towards peace. Women have suffered deeply during Afghanistan’s forty years of war, and they desperately long for peace. We must ensure that they can reach their full potential and fully contribute to the development of their nation.

Thank you.
