

Update on women, peace and security in Afghanistan December 5th 2017

The Informal Expert Group of the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security met on November 28th 2016 ([S/2016/1059](#)) to discuss the situation in Afghanistan, and decided to reconvene in one year to follow up and review progress and challenges. This note summarizes relevant developments on women, peace and security in Afghanistan over the last 12 months, a year in which the humanitarian and security situation deteriorated alarmingly.

The Security Council

In quarterly meetings at the Council in 2017, women, peace and security issues were regularly highlighted in the interventions by Council Members and the government of Afghanistan, as well as in the reports submitted by the Secretary-General. In one of these meetings, Ms. Sima Samar, Chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, also briefed the Council, and focused much of her intervention on women's rights and gender equality. In March 2017, the Council adopted **resolution 2344**, renewing the mandate of UNAMA for another year. Although the actual length of the resolution was more than halved compared to previous resolutions on Afghanistan, **core elements on women, peace and security were retained**.

Resolution 2344 (2017) requests UNAMA to assist in the implementation of constitutional provisions and international treaties regarding the full enjoyment by women of their human rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); to support the government's efforts in ensuring the inclusiveness of the electoral process, including measures to enable the full and safe participation of women; to strengthen the protection of children affected by armed conflict, including sexual violence against children; and to report to the Security Council relevant information on the integration of women into the political, economic and social life of Afghanistan. It expresses deep concern about the targeted and deliberate killings of women and girls, including high-level women officials and those promoting or reporting on women's rights, and called for parties to the conflict to take all feasible steps to protect civilians, including from sexual and gender-based violence, and hold perpetrators accountable. It reiterates the importance of women, peace and security considerations in the reform of the security sector, the international community's support to the implementation of the National Action Plan on 1325, and the participation of women and women's rights groups in the work of the High Peace Council and the implementation of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme. While it does not repeat certain details included in previous resolutions, such as the specifics of women's participation in all governance institutions, including elected and appointed bodies and the civil service, or mentions of the Law on Elimination of Violence Against Women and specific forms of discrimination, such as violence aimed at preventing girls from attending schools, it contains a shorter paragraph on the importance of women and girls' equal protection under the law and the need for enhanced efforts, including measurable and action-oriented objectives, to secure the rights and full participation of women and girls, their protection from violence, and equal access to justice.

UNAMA's strategic review

A strategic review of UNAMA was conducted in May and June, and its team met with women's groups. It reiterated that the mission should continue to pay particular attention to the participation of women in

all political processes, including national dialogue initiatives such as the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace, and that the Human Rights Unit continue to prioritize its monitoring, reporting, and advocacy on the promotion of gender equality the elimination of violence against women and conflict-related sexual violence. In his special report to the Council in August, the Secretary-General noted the intention of moving the post of **Senior Gender Adviser** from the Human Rights Unit to the Office of the Special Representative, consistent with Security Council resolution 2242 (2015) on women, peace and security and the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, and bringing UNAMA in line with the other special political missions. The report noted that the Senior Gender Adviser would provide strategic and political advice to the Mission’s leaders and across units, as they work to promote the meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and political processes and improve the representation of women in governance structures. This would be complemented by stronger efforts to mainstream gender expertise throughout all functional units.

Other relevant updates: December 2016 until today

- The **budget of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security** has been prepared by the government, but not yet been agreed on and pledged by the donors, the government, and the UN. No mutually agreed financing mechanism has been identified. The government has proposed to establish a unit in Ministry of Foreign Affairs to coordinate the implementation of NAP1325. The working group on Women, Peace and Security -well-attended by government, civil society, donors, and UN representatives- continues to meet every month or every two months, and remains a common platform for various stakeholders. When presenting its candidacy to membership of the Human Rights Council in September, the government committed to ensuring full implementation of the national action plan and to remain committed to the meaningful participation of women in political decision-making, including the peace talks, the security and justice sectors, legislative processes, and economic programmes.
- The percentage of women in the **High Peace Council** increased from nine to 20 percent, including at senior levels. In the provincial peace committees across 34 provinces, women’s representation stands at 16 per cent and likely to increase to 22 per cent, in comparison to 9 percent in the past. However, in actual talks and negotiations, including this year’s Kabul Process or recent talks in Muscat, Oman, the absence of women has been noted. For example, a key meeting of the Kabul Process in June was attended by 47 Afghan and foreign dignitaries and this included only two women.
- During both the first and third quarters of 2017, **women casualties increased** by 24 and 23 per cent respectively compared with 2016, mainly from the impact of aerial operations, improvised explosive devices, and suicide and complex attacks. UNAMA documented executions and lashings of women for alleged “moral crimes” by anti-government elements or, at least in one case, for refusing to marry the Taliban’s shadow governor. Other reported incidents included the beheading of a woman for openly criticizing the practices of the Taliban, or the killing of the sister of a female member of the Afghan National Police who they had targeted. In a high-profile case, the First Vice President and leader of the Junbish-e-Milli party, Abdul Rashid Dostum, was indicted along with nine co-defendants for the alleged arbitrary detention and sexual assault of a political rival in November 2016.
- Chronic instability, combined with impunity, discriminatory cultural practices, limited presence of women in security and justice sector and access constraints contribute to the **underreporting of conflict related sexual violence across Afghanistan**. The annual report of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, covering the period from March 2016 to March 2017, noted an **increase of 8.6 percent in the number of cases of violence against women** recorded by its offices across the country. According to the Special Prosecutor on Elimination of Violence against Women, 2,442 cases were registered with prosecution offices across the country, with 149

cases adjudicated. Prosecution units for the elimination of violence against women are now present in all 34 provinces, with 24 units staffed with at least one female prosecutor. The **revised Penal Code included a progressive definition of rape**, being gender-neutral, requiring modern definitions of consent and protecting privacy, dignity and bodily integrity. The government launched a **national action plan to eliminate early and child marriages** for the period 2017-2021 and a revised strategy to eliminate violence against women (2016-2020).

- The **Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate**, acting on behalf of the Security Council's Counter-terrorism Committee, **visited Afghanistan** at the beginning of the year to formulate recommendations and identify technical assistance needs across **24 priority areas**. These included: facilitating the **recruitment of women into the security sector** and their retention, as well as raising the awareness and training of male officers in human rights principles and gender issues; enhancing **women's participation in developing and implementing strategies and programmes to counter-terrorism and violent extremism** that can lead to terrorism, in accordance with Security Council resolution 2242 (2015); and ensuring that the **national CVE strategy** takes into account women's inputs and creates a consultative conducive to women's participation, including initiatives to prevent radicalization in prisons and strengthen rehabilitation and reintegration. Suggested ways of operationalizing these priorities include introducing a comprehensive gender analysis of the local push and pull factors associated with the radicalization and recruitment of women and girls.
- On International Women's Day, the government launched the **Women's Economic Empowerment National Priority Programme**, in line with the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework and the outcomes of the Brussels Conference in October 2016. At this year's Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security, the government of Afghanistan reported that this programme has already supported just over 100,000 women in the agricultural and livestock sectors and is recruiting 3000 female teachers and 900 community midwives and nurses. Women's participation in community development councils is estimated to be relatively high, around 40 percent.
- The **provincial administrations** continued to establish **gender and women's affairs committees** mandated with mainstreaming concrete gender equality initiatives in the work of departments in their respective provinces. Committees are now operational in at least 12 provinces and dozens of gender specialists have been recruited and posted in the offices of provincial governors.

Recommendations

The **main recommendations presented in the last IEG meeting on Afghanistan were taken forward** this year: the Security Council covered the key women, peace and security issues in its resolution on Afghanistan in March; the strategic review addressed the issue of gender advisory expertise in the mission; the Counter-terrorism Committee integrated gender in its assessment, visit, and technical assistance recommendations; and measures were introduced to increase the representation of women in UNAMA's overall staff -albeit with very limited results with regards to national staff so far. In addition, the SG's quarterly reports to the Council have included analytical information on gender-specific trends and developments and the differentiated impact of conflict on women, men, boys and girls, as well as sex and age disaggregated data, and sexual and gender-based violence was better defined in the revised Penal Code, which included the practice of bacha bazi. These steps are welcome but many of them require follow-up and political and financial support.

The longer list of recommendations presented in the first meeting of the IEG on Afghanistan is still relevant. Much more remains to be done, including allocation of adequate resources to implement the **National Action Plan on women, peace and security**, ensuring **women's representation in actual talks** and negotiations, as well as in the **justice and security sector**, supporting the independence and effectiveness

of the **Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission** to monitor, investigate, and report on the human rights abuses and sexual harassment committed by military personnel and in detention centers, and protecting **women human rights defenders** in insecure areas.