



SECURITY COUNCIL INFORMAL EXPERTS GROUP ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

Summary of the meeting on Afghanistan held on July 10th 2019

On 10 July 2019, the Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security (IEG) held a meeting on Afghanistan, ahead of the Security Council's consideration of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The IEG received a briefing from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of UNAMA, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, who was joined by UNAMA experts on human rights, peace and reconciliation, and elections, as well as the Deputy Country Representative of UN Women. The SRSG reaffirmed UNAMA's commitment to advancing the women, peace and security agenda, in collaboration with the United Nations Country Team, and women-led civil society organizations in Afghanistan, and provided an overview of progress, challenges, and key developments since the previous meeting.

Council Members asked questions related to women's meaningful participation in peace and reconciliation processes; women's participation in elections; the promotion and protection of women's human rights; engagement with religious leaders; Afghanistan's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security; and the levels of gender expertise and gender balance in UNAMA. Below are the main points raised in the meeting.

- Women's meaningful participation in resolving conflict and building peace in Afghanistan, including through representation and participation in peace initiatives, remains a priority. In the Intra-Afghan dialogue of 7-8 July 2019, 10 of the 60 participants were women, with the final declaration read by a woman, signaling the importance of the inclusion of women in the peace process. Persistent patriarchal attitudes and entrenched gender inequality remain the biggest obstacles to women's participation, despite high-level political will and support for women's participation by the international community.
- The Government has taken concrete steps to ensure women's participation in Government-facilitated dialogues on peace, including providing for a 30 per cent quota for women's participation in the Loya Jirga, held 29 April – 3 May 2019. The Loya Jirga communiqué called for, inter alia, the preservation of human rights, particularly women's rights. Women chaired 13 of its 50 committees and were elected as two of the five deputy heads of the assembly. In preparation for the Loya Jirga, the Office of the First Lady, with support from the High Peace Council, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and the Afghan Women's Network and other civil society organizations held a six-month consultation process with 15,000 Afghan women from across all 34 provinces, culminating in a national conference of Afghan women for peace (National Women's Consensus for Peace).
- In preparation for the presidential election, scheduled for 28 September 2019, the Independent Election Commission commenced a 22-day top-up voter registration process across Afghanistan. To support women to register to vote, voter registration centres provided female-only registration stations that were staffed by women. 37 per cent of newly registered voters are women, building on the 30 per cent of women that voted in the parliamentary election in October 2018. While none of the presidential candidates are women, three women have been nominated as candidates for vice president. The two bodies responsible for oversight of elections, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the Election Complaints Commission (ECC), are both chaired by women. In addition, three of the nine commissioners of the IEC and two of the five commissioners of the ECC are women. There remain negative attitudes towards women's participation in public life. Harassment of women candidates, including sexual harassment, and a lack of access to financial resources for campaigning are the two key obstacles to women's participation.
- Women and girls continue to be disproportionately impacted by armed conflict, including through displacement, economic insecurity, and lack of access to essential services. In 2018, women comprised 10 per cent of conflict-related civilian casualties, with a similar pattern in the first half of 2019 due to an increase in improvised explosive devices, airstrikes, and ground fighting in residential areas. In addition, households that have lost male family members are particularly vulnerable due to economic insecurity resulting in marginalization, gender-based violence, and negative coping strategies, such as child, early and forced marriage.

- Conflict-related sexual violence remains chronically underreported due to stigmatization, fear of reprisal, discrimination, limited mobility, and lack of access to health services. This is compounded by the underrepresentation of women in the justice sector. Although efforts are ongoing to recruit more women into the Afghan National Police, women police officers are subject to harassment and abuse, which negatively impacts their ability to protect women in the community.
- Only a small proportion of sexual and gender-based violence cases are investigated and result in prosecutions, with the majority being mediated by family or community members or resolved through informal justice mechanisms. Enhanced monitoring and reporting of sexual violence are required to fully understand the scope and prevalence of sexual violence, as well as addressing harmful social norms that protect perpetrators and blame victims. In some areas of Afghanistan that remain under the control of anti-government elements, there are reports of gender-based violence and “punishments” for women accused of “immoral” activities, including speaking to non-familial males or being outside the home without a male chaperone.
- The UN is increasingly working with religious leaders and women human rights defenders on gender equality and women’s participation to address narratives regarding restrictions on women imposed by the Taliban. In this regard, the leadership of Muslim-majority countries, including those on the Security Council, can help create an enabling environment for advancing the rights of women and women’s participation within an Islamic framework.
- Afghanistan is currently finalizing the second phase of its National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, to be launched in August 2019. The second phase is being developed in consultation with women’s civil society organizations, with support from the international community, under the leadership of the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Refined indicators and the involvement of lead government agencies is expected to enhance implementation of the action plan in this second phase.
- UNAMA has reached gender parity within its senior international staff. However, concerted efforts must be made to address the gender imbalance of national staff. In this regard, UNAMA has initiated a UN Volunteers programme for national staff, with the immediate goal of recruiting national women staff, and in the longer term, creating a talent pipeline for national women for substantive positions.

UN Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Experts Group, and the Office of the SRSG on Sexual Violence, shared some recommendations to the group. The recommendations called on Council Members to maintain the extensive provisions on gender equality and women’s protection and empowerment in UNAMA’s mandate in upcoming negotiations for a new Council resolution on Afghanistan. This should include supporting women’s meaningful participation in any peace talks with the Taliban, as well as decision-making bodies involved in the peace process, including during informal and formal peace negotiations, calling for the government and international partners to devote adequate resources to implement the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, demanding the protection of women human rights defenders, and calling on the Afghan government to sign the Arms Trade Treaty and make concrete efforts to stop the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the country. In addition, the recommendations called on the Council or the IEG to encourage the UN mission and country team to:

- Undertake a joint gender and conflict analysis, in line with the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs’ Women, Peace and Security Policy, building upon UN Women’s gender-sensitive conflict analysis, as well as UNAMA’s conflict mapping.
- Support the advocacy and outreach efforts of women-led civil society organizations and their demands for an active role in the peace process vis-à-vis efforts led by the Afghan government or others.
- Further support linkages between the national and subnational level to ensure women’s priorities for peace at the district and provincial level are understood at the national level, that information regarding peace and reconciliation processes is widely communicated, and that women are meaningfully included in local peacebuilding initiatives.
- Support women-led organizations’ demands for confidence-building measures by the Taliban, for example, the re-opening of girls’ schools in Taliban-controlled areas, the protection of women human rights defenders and women-led NGOs, full access by women health workers including for vaccinations, and women-led monitoring against misogynistic coverage of women candidates or harassment and threats, including of a sexual nature, intended to humiliate and demean women contesting political office.

- Support women to monitor the implementation of any agreements with the Taliban, including as they relate to humanitarian access corridors, ceasefires, and peace and reconciliation.
- Promote joint messaging initiatives encouraging a culture of peace to contribute to preventing violent extremism, including by engaging youth and women.
- Provide more detailed reporting on the implementation and financing of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.
- Further support the government to meet its obligation to protect victims from all forms of sexual violence and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable.
- Make full use of Security Council resolution 2331 (2016) in their review of the national strategy to counter violent extremism and renew efforts to address the under-reporting of conflict-related sexual violence including when employed as a tactic of war and terrorism, or in the context of human trafficking.

The Co-Chairs closed the meeting, thanking SRSG Yamamoto, UNAMA and the UN Country Team for their participation, and committed to following up on the recommendations.