



Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations

STATEMENT

BY

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(Please check against delivery)

Bismillah u-Rahman u-Rahim

Mr. President,

Mr. Secretary General,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ambassadors,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor for me to stand before you today, on this prestigious platform, in front of distinguished colleagues and partners, and represent my fellow countrymen and women.

Today, I am even more proud because just two days ago, around 3 million Afghans faced the threat of terrorism and risked their lives to vote in our young democracy's 4th presidential election.

Those who voted included men and women;
the very old, some voting for perhaps the last time in their lives,
and the very young, those voting for the very first of many times;
those living with a disability, for whom the journey was longer and more tiresome;
some who came out despite having their fingers cut off by Taliban during previous votes.

We all voted not just for a president, but we also voted for democracy.

We voted for our Constitution.

We voted for freedom and sovereignty.

We voted for prosperity and connectivity.

We voted for peace.

We voted for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

I congratulate you, my fellow Afghans, for exercising your right to vote.

And I thank wholeheartedly the brave and professional Afghan National Defense and Security Forces for protecting that right. 70,000 of our brave soldiers protected citizens during this historic vote. Because of their professionalism, most attacks—and *all* attacks that were intended to inflict mass casualties on civilians—were averted.

I also congratulate you and thank you, my fellow world citizens. The international community, particularly NATO-member countries, has stood by us over the past two decades as we recovered from war, as we rebuilt, as we re-imagined a New Afghanistan.

A New Afghanistan based on Islamic values, Afghan traditions, and hope for a permanent escape from our bloody past. You invested heavily and dearly in our vision for an Afghan democracy—even with the lives of your own countrymen and women—from the time when it was only an idea, to today, when you can witness those investments turned into policies, actions, institutions,

principles, and people. We, the young Afghan leaders of today, have embraced democratic values and principles, the same ones on which the United Nations itself was founded.

Your Excellency Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, I congratulate you on assuming the Presidency of the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. We support the broad range of goals pursued across the agenda of this General Assembly—advancing peace and security, enhancing quality education, eradicating poverty and addressing climate change. We also commend the efforts and leadership of the outgoing President of the General Assembly, Maria Fernanda Espinosa.

Mr. President,

Two years ago, His Excellency President Ashraf Ghani stood on this platform at the 72nd General Assembly and spoke of the uncertainty that challenged the global community with questions we must confront together to find solutions.

Since then, Afghans have created a bit more certainty in our corner of the world.

We Afghans confirmed our commitment to democracy and peace;

the ANDSF has proven itself as a solidified and professional institution able to protect our democratic process;

and the international community has taken a firm stand in solidarity with the Afghan people and government.

But still, uncertainty lies with those who stand in the way of peace.

To the Taliban and their foreign sponsors, HEAR THIS NOW, a message from the Afghan people: Join us in peace, or we will continue to fight. And, as my colleague Ambassador Adela Raz said last week here at the United Nations: “This is a fight we can win.”

Mr. President,

Today, I represent my people not only because it is my duty to be here, but because I, like the vast majority of my fellow citizens (about 60%), have spent the three and half decades of our lives in war. My colleague Ambassador Raz, and my colleague Ambassador Roya Rahmani, who represents us in Washington, are also part of this generation born and raised in war.

We are the New Afghanistan.

Increasingly, Afghanistan is a country driven and defined by the expectations of its youth, now more than ever. The opportunities afforded to us through the gains of the past 20 years have allowed us to change hope into something *much* more powerful—belief. We believe in our abilities to bring about the peace we have hoped for all of our lives.

We have already taken many steps, but we have a long way to go in this journey.

The next step belongs to us Afghans.

No matter the outcome of the presidential elections, one thing is clear—peace is and will remain the government’s priority, now further strengthened by the mandate bestowed upon the government by the Afghan people.

The next step in the journey to peace will be taken by Afghans, just as the first step was. In February 2018, President Ashraf Ghani extended an unconditional offer of peace to the Taliban, one that still stands today. In June, the unthinkable happened—a nationwide three-day ceasefire over the Eid holidays. They gave Afghans tremendous belief that peace is possible, and proved that the government has the ability to directly negotiate peace with our enemies.

In November, President Ghani presented the government’s roadmap to peace, and announced a negotiating team.

As 2019 began, Afghanistan’s journey toward peace continued with nationwide consultations with the Afghan people.

Here I would like to give credit to Afghan women, who were the *first* group of Afghan citizens to unite nationally around an agenda for peace. In February, 15,000 women were consulted from all 34 provinces on what would be acceptable to them in a peace agreement, and 3,000 of them came together in Kabul to endorse that agenda.

In April, the Afghan government organized a historic national consultative jirga for peace which laid out the people’s demands for a peace agreement.

Each of these has been a significant step in an on-going Afghan-led process that is geared toward an inclusive, sustainable and dignified peace, for all Afghans.

As we prepare to take the next step in this process, we are committed to the principles of inclusivity, sustainability and dignity. The Afghan people have demanded a ceasefire to immediately stop the bloodshed; they have demanded that talks must happen between the Afghan government and the Taliban; and they have demanded that the Islamic Republic be preserved as the foundation of our nation-state. We want not only to preserve the gains we have made, but to maintain the foundation that will allow us to advance those gains.

Throughout this process, we have welcomed and appreciated assistance from our international partners that has been aligned with our principles of peace-building and that has supported our Afghan-led peace process.

Peace is our common objective and terrorists are our common enemy—we must not rush the former, at the risk of empowering the latter.

I would like to thank our international friends and partners that have supported our peace efforts, including the United States of America, the European Union, Germany, Norway, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, and Uzbekistan among others.

Today, Afghans fight on the frontlines of global terrorism so that others can maintain peace in their homes and on their land. But peace is not a permanent state of being. Peace requires care

and constant reappraisal, undertaken by partners who share the same values, even as the fault lines between war and peace across this globe shift. The terrorists that Afghan soldiers are holding at bay today, pose a threat to us all.

Terrorism is an idea, as much as it is a form of violence. We must continue to work together to extinguish the ideologies behind terrorism, wherever they may exist. The zero-tolerance approach that has been called for repeatedly must no longer be a talking point, and instead become an action point. We need more institutional cooperation. We need more decisive action within the region. A strengthened collective security approach must take into account the wide nexus of transnational criminal activities as a whole, inching the flow of terrorist fighters, their recruitment and resources that allow them to remain lethal.

Fighting terrorism is the basis of our critical partnership with the United States and our NATO partners, one to which Afghanistan remains firmly committed.

I pay tribute to all those members of the military and their families, not only our brave ANDSF, but those from all countries who have fought shoulder-to-shoulder with us including 2,438 US and 1,099 coalition soldiers who alongside Afghans paid the ultimate sacrifice. We Afghans will never forget your sacrifices and we thank you.

Mr. President,

As the discussions at this General Assembly have shown, terrorism and conflict are only a couple of today's many threats. Detrimental effects of climate change and humanitarian crisis are also priorities, ones that we face daily in Afghanistan. These challenges will only be tackled with a new scale and scope of international cooperation. We need to look beyond the prism of individual interests if we are to address these challenges and meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

Afghanistan has invested in the fulfillment of these goals—aligning them with our own national development agenda, the Afghanistan Sustainable Development Goals. These goals are embedded within the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework and our National Priority Programs.

Still a predominately agricultural economy, Afghanistan has felt tremendous adverse affects of climate change. For our people, prolonged drought has been a matter of life and death, driving many out of their homes and into severe poverty. It is an issue we still struggle to find long-term solutions to while simultaneously providing immediate humanitarian relief to those affected.

Last week's Climate Action Summit reaffirmed the urgency with which new measures are needed to mitigate the effects of this threat. We will continue these important discussions in the upcoming Conference of the Parties meeting in Chile in December.

Mr. President,

I want to close with a forward-looking message centered on the promise of the United Nations. Afghanistan's journey in re-emerging from the rubble and steadily progressing, is a testament to the importance of international and multi-lateral cooperation.

This year, Afghanistan celebrated the centenary of restoring our full sovereignty. Over the last two decades of that century, you helped us build our democracy. Now we stand confidently on its strong foundation, and we continue to advance toward self-reliance, prosperity and peace.

The New Afghanistan continues to transform itself into a center for cooperation, connectivity and development in our region. Afghan-led initiatives such as the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, are already paying economic dividends, opening new frontiers for trade and the movement of goods, people, and ideas throughout South and Central Asia.

Afghan democracy, we can now say, is a success story, which belongs not only to Afghans, but to us all.

Mr. President,

Yes, time has witnessed our progress, but time still remains an agony for us.

Afghans agonize over the death of each of our compatriots—we lament each moment of time that takes an Afghan life as it passes.

Our mission now is to bring peace that can end the suffering of all Afghans. Only when we have peace will each and every Afghan be able to experience the freedoms and opportunities of this democracy we have sacrificed so much to build.

And no Afghan will truly be able to live in peace and freedom, until the day that every single Afghan lives in peace and freedom.

It is the day we live and work for, the day we know we will achieve in solidarity with our international friends and partners.

It is the day which we no longer just hope for, but which we believe in.

Thank you.