

Statement by
Ambassador Syed Akbaruddin, Permanent Representative
At
UN Security Council Open Debate on
The Situation in Afghanistan

17 September 2018

Mr. President,

Thank you for scheduling today's debate on the situation in Afghanistan. I also thank Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his thoughtful presentation, to Ramiz Bakhtiar, the Youth Envoy of Afghanistan for his passionate call to this Council for support to the aspirations of Afghanistan's youth and to the Secretary General's Special Representative Mr. Yamamoto for his informative briefing.

Mr. President,

2. The recent report of the Secretary General and the statements made earlier today portray the deteriorating security situation on account of the growing insurgency linked with criminal and terrorist networks. The challenges posed by the deteriorating situation does not mean we ought to also stoically accept the death tolls as common place. Rather, it should mean that it is time for us to strengthen our collective support for the Government and people of Afghanistan and the brave Afghan National Defence and Security Forces to counter the inhumanity of those who have banded together to ruthlessly brutalise the lives of the ordinary people of Afghanistan.

Mr. President,

3. The Security Council deals with multiple conflict situations. Many of them are addressed many times over in a quarter. The situation in Afghanistan, by any measure, now warrants that the 'business as usual approach', followed so far, needs to be reviewed. The Council's manner of addressing the issue through quarterly debates and an annual resolution may have served the purpose in the past. The present challenges necessitate a willingness to examine whether the attention being given is commensurate with the danger to regional peace and security emanating from the conflict in Afghanistan.

Mr. President,

4. During the past few months, we have followed with hope and anticipation the various peace efforts and overtures by the Government and people of Afghanistan towards bringing peace to their war-torn country. The Taliban have rejected the recent calls for a ceasefire by the Afghan Government and the civil society, including various religious leaders. In fact, they have treated such overtures with growing disdain and have increased their offensive operations, as the country prepares for parliamentary elections.

Mr. President,

5. All of us know and believe that there is no military solution to the issue. Yet, the Taliban, aided by their supporters, continue to pursue military operations perpetrating violence and destruction, like the recent attack in Ghazni, over several parts of Afghanistan. These offensives are planned and launched by those who are harboured in safe havens in the neighbourhood of Afghanistan. These sanctuaries have, for years, provided safety for the dark agendas of ideologically and operationally-

fused terror networks like the Taliban, Haqqani network, Daesh, Al-Qaeda and its proscribed affiliates such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed.

6. The agendas of these organisations draw financial sustenance not only from extortion and forced levies & taxes, but also benefit significantly from criminal networks operating drug cartels and stealing Afghanistan's natural resources. By some estimates, 60% of the Taliban's revenues are from the drug trade. Poppy cultivation is said to be the largest cash crop in Taliban-controlled areas.

7. The Council's Resolution 2405, adopted earlier this year, does focus on linkages between extremism, terrorism, drug production and illegal exploitation of natural resources of Afghanistan. However, it falls short of expectations in striving to cripple the Taliban's drug trade. The Secretary General's current report also fails to address this very key issue in an adequate matter.

8. Let us not forget that templates for curbing illicit trade by terrorist networks exist. For example, it is estimated that when targeted, the Islamic State's oil revenue fell over 3 years by nearly 90% from a monthly high of \$50 million to just \$4 million. By contrast, the opium produced in Taliban-controlled areas is estimated to account for 85% of global illicit production, valued between \$1.5 billion to \$3 billion. We feel it is time for this Council to try and replicate the success of the international community against the Islamic State's illicit business in Syria and Iraq by similarly crippling the Taliban's illicit drug trade. We hope that this important subject is addressed by the Secretary General in his next report and by the Council thereafter.

Mr. President,

9. India is willing to work with all countries in the region and beyond, keeping Afghan priorities at the forefront, so as to bring a lasting solution to the situation. Afghans should lead these efforts, not only between governments, but with civil society and business as stakeholders. India stands ready to support Afghanistan in every way we can. Our focus remains on the economic pillar of stability and reliable connectivity for the people of Afghanistan. We strongly believe that lack of connectivity directly impacts the economic, security and political situation in Afghanistan and we want to address this crucial issue for the benefit of the Afghan people.

10. For its part, it is time that this Council too looks beyond routine consideration to chart a more innovative way forward, so that the spiral of violence that is affecting the life of common Afghans is reversed.

I thank you, Mr. President.