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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

19 June 2019

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

**Statement by H.E. Ms Gillian Bird,
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the
United Nations**

As delivered

Australia welcomes the significant momentum for peace in Afghanistan.

The Government of Afghanistan has taken important steps towards bringing this long-running conflict to an end.

The recent ‘peace jirga’ sponsored by the Government of Afghanistan was a significant opportunity for Afghan community representatives to focus on what peace means to them. Securing such buy-in of people from across Afghanistan is essential to reaching a sustainable political settlement to the conflict.

We encourage the Afghan Government to persevere with its efforts to build a national consensus on the terms of a settlement.

Australia also welcomes the efforts led by US Special Representative Khalilzad to engage in meaningful negotiations with the Taliban. The progress made has been important, and we hope the momentum developed will continue toward a comprehensive agreement.

While these negotiations were never going to be easy, we are disappointed that the Taliban continues to resist direct talks with the Afghan Government. We do not believe that a sustainable political settlement is viable without such talks, and call on the Taliban and other parties to begin immediately discussions without preconditions.

We encourage the Afghan Government to continue its effort to ensure the people of Afghanistan can vote freely and fairly in credible Presidential elections on 28 September, without the threat of violence, and call on the Taliban to respect and engage with this process.

Australia stands firm in its support for peace in Afghanistan, as part of a committed international community. We were pleased to hear today about the formation of a Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan, and look forward to participating in this important initiative. We appreciate UNAMA's role, under the able leadership of SRSG Yamamoto, in leading and coordinating the UN's efforts in Afghanistan, and we remain committed to the NATO-led international coalition, and its effort to support Afghanistan's security and development.

While the outlook for peace is promising, we must not forget the millions of Afghans who continue to struggle in the face of a protracted humanitarian crisis. Australia is helping respond to a range of needs, including lifesaving food and nutrition assistance. We encourage humanitarian partners to continue to find better ways of coordinating to meet the needs of the Afghan people.

We know Afghans are ready for peace. Australia stands ready to support them, and we look forward to working with the Afghan Government and other partners to help secure a sustainable political settlement and contribute to the post-peace economic action plan and development agenda.