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The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security*

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [68/11](#) and Security Council resolution [2489 \(2019\)](#), in which the Secretary-General was requested to report every three months on developments in Afghanistan.
2. The report provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan, including political, humanitarian, development and human rights efforts, since the issuance of the previous report dated 17 June 2020 ([A/74/897-S/2020/549](#)). The annex to the present report contains an assessment of progress made towards the achievement of benchmarks and indicators since the issuance of the report of 28 February 2019 ([A/73/777-S/2019/193](#)), in accordance with Security Council resolution [1868 \(2009\)](#).

II. Relevant developments

3. The implementation of the political agreement concluded on 17 May between the President, Ashraf Ghani, and the Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation, Abdullah Abdullah, encountered hurdles over the appointment of ministers, provincial governors and other positions, delaying the formation of the Cabinet. The continued release of prisoners and the observation of two ceasefires over Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha gave momentum to intra-Afghan negotiations, but attacks continued. The United States of America announced that it had reduced forces from 13,000 to 8,600, in keeping with the Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan and the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the United States of

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America and the Taliban, both signed on 29 February. The Government continued efforts to promote regional consensus on intra-Afghan peace and reconciliation, economic cooperation and connectivity, and the response to coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The spread of COVID-19, compounded by violence, natural disasters and food insecurity, added to the surge in humanitarian needs, with some 14 million people estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2020. Planning continued for the 2020 ministerial conference on Afghanistan.

A. Political developments

4. Since his inauguration on 9 March and further to the political agreement of 17 May, the President announced appointments to 10 ministerial positions and two State ministries, as well as other Cabinet and non-Cabinet positions. During the reporting period, the President appointed Ahmad Jawad Osmani as Minister for Public Health, Mahmood Karzai as Minister for Urban Development and Land, Tahir Zuhair as Minister for Information and Culture, Rangina Hamidi as Minister for Education, Mohammad Haroon Chakhansuri as Minister for Mines and Petroleum, and Ajmal Ahmady as Governor of the Central Bank. On 18 July, the President decreed the reappointment of Asadullah Khalid and Masoud Andarabi as the acting Minister for Defence and the acting Minister for the Interior, respectively. He also announced the heads of the two independent directorates of the National Directorate for Security and the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, as well as several other appointments in the Ministry of Defence and the National Security Council. A final list of nominations by Mr. Abdullah for his share in Cabinet posts, provincial governors, and the High Council for National Reconciliation remained pending. With tensions rising within Jam'iyat-i Islami, the party leader, Salahuddin Rabbani, issued a statement on 2 July reaffirming the party's opposition to the Government and suspending the party's chief executive, Atta Noor, and several other figures from the party's leadership council.

5. Since March, 14 of the 34 provincial governors have been replaced in line with the proposal of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance and by the decision of the President. Mr. Abdullah objected to those appointments, citing a lack of consultation and stating that the provinces included those where his ticket had gained a majority of votes in the 2019 presidential election.

6. On 6 July, based on a proposal by the new acting Minister for Women's Affairs, Hasina Safi, the President decreed the establishment of second deputy provincial governor posts to be reserved for women in all 34 provinces. Those posts are expected to focus on social and economic affairs and the advancement of women's rights. None of the first deputy provincial governor posts are currently held by women. On 12 July, the Independent Directorate of Local Governance introduced a woman as second deputy provincial governor in Logar Province.

7. In line with the political agreement, the former First Vice-President, Abdul Rashid Dostum, was promoted to the rank of Marshal, in a ceremony in Jowzjan Province on 15 July, presided by Mr. Abdullah. The associated authorities and privileges for the post of Marshal remain to be confirmed by the Presidential Palace.

8. On 21 July, the Office of the President issued a statement claiming that some of the ministers that Mr. Abdullah intended to put forward failed to meet professional requirements. The former President, Hamid Karzai, and the former Jihadi leader, Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, who helped negotiate the political agreement of 17 May, continued to urge the President and Mr. Abdullah to adhere to and implement the agreement as soon as possible.

9. The parliament made repeated calls for the two leaders to introduce their appointees for ministers and government positions so that a vote of confidence could be held, in accordance with the Constitution. Since mid-June, on several occasions, members of the Wolesi Jirga (lower house) have called on parliamentarians to endorse only competent candidates, rejecting any candidate with dual citizenship, to discontinue the practice of the former Administration of maintaining acting ministerial positions indefinitely and to introduce State ministers for a vote of confidence. Both houses urged progress towards intra-Afghan negotiations, as a priority and the greatest need of the Afghan people. On 19 July, the parliament approved a legislative decree for the creation of the State Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled Affairs. On 22 July, the parliament officially went into summer recess until 6 September.

10. The electoral management bodies continued activities despite limitations owing to COVID-19. On 31 May, the Afghan Women's Coalition for Peace addressed a letter to the President and Mr. Abdullah asking that electoral reforms be implemented prior to future elections. From 2 to 8 July, the Independent Election Commission held an online workshop with staff members from the 34 provincial offices on lessons learned from the management of the 2019 presidential election. From 21 to 23 July, the Commission held similar sessions with political parties and civil society organizations.

11. The technical teams of the Government and the Taliban continued their joint work in Kabul to implement the release of prisoners under the agreement of 29 February between the United States and the Taliban. On 16 July, the acting Minister for Foreign Affairs, Haneef Atmar, invited the Taliban to provide a new list of prisoners to replace the 400 individuals whom the Government had identified as not possible to release, owing to the nature of their crimes. The request was rejected by the Taliban. On 20 July, the Government made public the list of the 4,400 Taliban prisoners who had been released so far. On 30 July, the Taliban stated that the release of its remaining prisoners was completed and that the movement was ready to commence intra-Afghan negotiations after Eid al-Adha, provided that the Government released all the prisoners listed by the Taliban. On 31 July, the President announced that a consultative loya jirga would be convened to decide on the fate of the above-mentioned 400 Taliban prisoners and that the Government would release a total of 5,100 Taliban prisoners to accelerate the peace process. As at 2 August, the Government reported the release of 4,917 Taliban prisoners, while the Taliban had reported the release of 1,005 Afghan National Defence and Security Forces detainees.

12. On 23 May, the Taliban announced a three-day ceasefire over the Eid al-Fitr holiday. Taliban fighters were ordered not to go to the areas under the Government's control. The President announced that the Government reciprocated the ceasefire and that the negotiating team was ready for intra-Afghan negotiations. The President also called for a significant reduction in violence leading up to a humanitarian ceasefire. Violence levels decreased significantly during the three-day period, which was welcomed by the international community. In a joint statement on 27 May, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Germany, Indonesia, Norway, Qatar and Uzbekistan – countries that have offered to support intra-Afghan negotiations – encouraged the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban to take further steps towards “a permanent and comprehensive reduction in violence”. On 8 June, Mr. Abdullah announced that intra-Afghan negotiations would likely start in Doha, subject to progress on prisoner releases and a reduction in violence. The Special Envoy for Counterterrorism and Mediation of Conflict Resolution of Qatar, Mutlaq al-Qahtani, visited Kabul on 10 June, where he discussed the mediation efforts undertaken by Qatar. On 14 June, the spokesperson of the President stated that the Government concurred that the first meeting of the negotiations would take place in Doha, pending

an agreement on the venue. On 28 July, the Taliban announced a ceasefire for Eid al-Adha, instructing their fighters not to carry out any operations against the Government's forces during the three-day period. The President subsequently instructed security forces of Afghanistan to observe a ceasefire and to refrain from offensive operations until Taliban attacks resumed.

13. The Government continued to make efforts to strengthen regional consensus on peace. On 15 June, the acting Minister for Foreign Affairs, the United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, and the Presidential Special Envoy for Afghanistan of the Russian Federation, Zamir Kabulov, discussed, in an online meeting, regional consensus in support of the peace process. On 6 and 9 July, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted two online meetings that brought together over 40 countries and international organizations in support of intra-Afghan negotiations and a reduction in violence. Commenting on the two meetings on 17 July, Mr. Atmar noted that the participants had agreed that peace and prosperity in Afghanistan were directly linked to peace and prosperity in the wider region and had supported the achievements of the past 19 years, including the preservation of the Republic and its Constitution. He said that as many as 12 countries had offered to host intra-Afghan negotiations.

14. The international and regional partners of Afghanistan continued to support peace efforts. From 5 to 11 June, from 28 June to 2 July and from 24 to 30 July, Mr. Khalilzad visited Doha, Islamabad and Kabul; Tashkent, Doha and Islamabad; and Oslo, Doha, Kabul and Sofia, respectively. He encouraged the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban to resolve pending issues ahead of intra-Afghan negotiations and sought the cooperation of regional and international actors. Mr. Khalilzad held online meetings throughout those dates with the President and Mr. Abdullah. On 6 June, Pakistan announced the appointment of Mohammad Sadiq as the Special Envoy for Afghanistan, which was reciprocated on 7 July by the appointment by Afghanistan of Mohammed Omar Daudzai as Special Envoy for Pakistan. On 29 June, the head of the Taliban Political Commission, Mullah Baradar, met in Doha with the Special Envoy of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Afghanistan, Ebrahim Taherian. On 29 June and 3 August, the Secretary of State of the United States, Michael Pompeo, held online meetings with Mullah Baradar.

15. On 14 July, the United States announced that its forces had been reduced to 8,600 and five bases had been transferred to Afghan partners. On 14 July, the North Atlantic Council issued a statement underscoring that the presence of the Resolute Support Mission was conditions-based and expressing continued readiness to adjust in support of the peace process. The Taliban welcomed the reduction in the international military presence but noted delays in prisoner releases and the expected removal of Taliban members from sanctions lists.

16. The State Ministry for Peace and the negotiating team continued preparations for intra-Afghan negotiations, with outreach to civil society actors, youth groups, religious scholars, war victims, parliamentarians, journalists and entrepreneurs. On 8 July, the State Ministry for Peace launched an advisory board of civil society organizations to help channel voices from different segments of society to the negotiating table. Women's organizations continued public advocacy, with the Afghan Women's Network and the Women's Coalition for Peace, "Our Voice, for Our Future" demanding a permanent ceasefire and an immediate start of intra-Afghan negotiations in two statements, issued on 15 and 30 July. In July, the State Ministry for Peace began an outreach initiative to women around the country, intended to cover all 34 provinces. Afghan grass-roots movements continued to advocate for peace, despite the onset of COVID-19. On 8 July, the People's Peace Movement organized peaceful demonstrations and media conferences in 20 provinces. Attended by hundreds of supporters, the gatherings resulted in a four-article declaration demanding an

immediate ceasefire and the start of intra-Afghan negotiations. The Movement committed to continuing its advocacy for lasting peace amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

17. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continued its engagement to advocate for a reduction in violence and a ceasefire to facilitate a more effective COVID-19 response and build momentum towards intra-Afghan negotiations. On 21 June and 5 August, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Deborah Lyons, met Mullah Baradar in Doha to discuss confidence-building measures, including the release of prisoners and detainees, the human rights situation and efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19 and ensure humanitarian access in the conflict-affected parts of the country. UNAMA also furthered its work on conflict prevention and peacebuilding with subnational authorities and local communities. In four northern provinces, UNAMA implemented a local peace initiative that supported an inclusive group of youth activists, whose subsequent engagements with more than 120 youth representatives from four provinces led to a youth peace declaration on 18 June that received national publicity.

B. Security

18. The security situation in Afghanistan remained unpredictable and highly volatile. From 15 May to 12 July, the United Nations recorded 3,706 security-related incidents, representing a 2 per cent decrease compared with the same period in 2019. Armed clashes accounted for 58 per cent of all security incidents. During the reporting period, there were 2,153 incidents of armed clashes reported, representing a slight decrease compared with the same period in 2019. Anti-government elements were responsible for 95 per cent of all security-related incidents and 92 per cent of armed clashes. The use of improvised explosive devices and asymmetric attacks contributed to the overall high incident levels during the reporting period. There were 13 international military air strikes during the reporting period, compared with 299 in the same period in 2019. The number of air strikes by the Afghan Air Force increased by 65 per cent compared with the same period in 2019.

19. The highest number of security incidents was recorded in the southern region, followed by the eastern, central and south-eastern regions. Collectively, they accounted for 74 per cent of all security incidents in the country, while Kandahar, Helmand, Nangarhar and Wardak were the provinces that recorded the highest number of security incidents. Despite the high levels of conflict, neither pro-government forces nor anti-government elements achieved significant territorial gains. Although the Taliban did not declare its annual spring offensive in 2020, the levels of violence remained the same as during the same period in 2019.

20. High-profile attacks by anti-government elements continued, with 7 suicide attacks recorded during the reporting period, compared with 11 in the previous period. Three of the attacks were against installations of the Afghan national security forces, three were against a military convoy and one was against a district administration centre. All attacks were claimed by the Taliban. Compared to the same reporting period in 2019, the Taliban put less pressure on district and provincial capitals, while attempting to increase their control of roads between urban centres and attacks on bases, checkpoints and convoys. Criminality was a growing concern for the population in the past months, especially in Kabul City, Herat City and Mazar-e Sharif. Violent theft, burglaries, and abductions were reported more frequently than in the same period in 2019.

21. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) remained active. On 23 July, the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team issued its report,

estimating the current ISIL-K membership in Afghanistan at 2,200. During the reporting period, 9 incidents were claimed by or attributed to ISIL-K, compared with 109 over the same time period in 2019. Seven of the incidents were in the eastern region, including six in Nangarhar and one in Kunar provinces, and two in Kabul. On 2 and 3 August, ISIL-K claimed a complex attack on a prison in Jalalabad City, leading to the escape of members of ISIL-K and the Taliban. Over 70 casualties were reported, including among the Afghan national security forces, prisoners and civilians.

22. There were 12 incidents involving United Nations personnel during the reporting period, including 8 incidents of intimidation, and 4 criminal-related incidents.

C. Regional cooperation

23. During the reporting period, Afghanistan continued its engagement with the region, focusing on promoting consensus on intra-Afghan peace and reconciliation, economic cooperation and connectivity, and the response to COVID-19.

24. On 27 May, Afghanistan, the United States and Uzbekistan convened an online meeting at the ministerial level, at which they reaffirmed the importance of the trilateral format, committed to greater cooperation, and called on countries to support a durable political settlement to end the war in Afghanistan. On 28 May, at a videoconference hosted by Germany, representatives of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and the European Union discussed regional cooperation and the fight against COVID-19, as well as preparations for the Central Asia-European Union political and security dialogue, to be held later in 2020 in Tashkent.

25. On 3 June, the Special Representatives for Afghanistan of China, Pakistan, the Russian Federation and the United States held phone consultations noting some progress in the exchange of prisoners between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban and in preparations for intra-Afghan negotiations. On 9 June, a senior delegation from Pakistan led by the Chief of Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, visited Kabul to meet with the President and Mr. Abdullah. Discussions covered the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process and trade and connectivity issues between the two countries.

26. During the reporting period, Pakistan reopened five border crossings with Afghanistan for bilateral trade. On 17 July, China applauded the resumption of trade and exchanges between the two countries and supported the expansion of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan, to extend the benefits of the Belt and Road Initiative.

27. On 21 and 22 June, the acting Minister for Foreign Affairs visited Tehran for meetings with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mohammad Javad Zarif, and the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Ali Shamkhani. Discussions focused on cooperation on security, border management, Afghan refugees and migrants, and transportation. Iranian officials reiterated their commitment to efforts to reach consensus in support of intra-Afghan negotiations and the preservation of the Constitution.

28. Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran continued efforts towards enhanced transport connectivity. On 7 July, the Deputy Minister for Roads and Urban Development of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Khairullah Khademi, inaugurated the 628-km Chabahar-Zahedan-Pari Jan-Mashhad railway project, connecting the Chabahar Port in the Islamic Republic of Iran with Afghanistan and Central Asian

States. On 15 and 16 July, the Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Seyed Abbas Araghchi, visited Afghanistan to discuss the finalization of the draft comprehensive strategic partnership agreement between the two countries. He voiced his country's support for efforts to restore peace in Afghanistan while reiterating the need for regional convergence and economic development.

29. On 2 July, the President hosted an online summit with the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, and the President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, to discuss economic cooperation and regional connectivity, including the Lapis Lazuli transport corridor. On 13 July, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the three countries discussed the implementation of the decisions resulting from the summit to expand trade and transport links and extend the fibre-optic network, as well as other measures.

30. The third round of the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Vice Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue was held on 7 July. The three sides reached consensus on cooperation in the fight against COVID-19, the Afghan peace and reconciliation process and trilateral cooperation. China and Pakistan welcomed efforts by the Government of Afghanistan and relevant parties to expedite the exchange of prisoners and called for a reduction in violence and a humanitarian ceasefire.

III. Human rights

31. The conflict in Afghanistan continued to take a heavy toll on the civilian population. UNAMA released its midyear update on the protection of civilians on 27 July, documenting 3,458 civilian casualties (1,282 killed, including 138 women and 340 children; and 2,176 injured, including 259 women and 727 children) from 1 January to 30 June 2020, representing a 13 per cent decrease in comparison with the first half of 2019. The decrease was mainly caused by a drop in civilian casualties attributed to international military forces and ISIL-K, while civilian casualties attributed to the Taliban remained at similar levels, and civilian casualties caused by Afghan national security forces increased.

32. Anti-government elements remained responsible for the majority of civilian casualties (58 per cent), with the Taliban causing 43 per cent, ISIL-K responsible for 9 per cent and undetermined anti-government elements responsible for the remaining 6 per cent. Pro-government forces were responsible for 28 per cent of civilian casualties, mostly caused by Afghan national security forces (23 per cent), followed by international military forces (3 per cent), with the remainder attributed to pro-government armed groups and undetermined or multiple pro-government forces. Ground engagements (35 per cent) were the leading cause of civilian casualties, followed by improvised explosive devices (24 per cent), targeted killings (21 per cent) and air strikes (9 per cent).

33. The armed conflict in Afghanistan puts children's lives at risk more than any other. The country task force on monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children in armed conflict verified 620 child casualties (186 killed, including 57 girls and 129 boys; and 434 maimed, including 138 girls and 296 boys) during the second quarter of 2020. Anti-government elements were responsible for slightly more child casualties (225) than pro-government forces (215). Ground engagements remained the leading cause of child casualties, with 313 child casualties (82 killed and 231 maimed), accounting for approximately 50 per cent of the overall total during the reporting period. During the second quarter, the task force verified at least 19 children (all boys) recruited and used by the Taliban for combat roles, in particular in the north-eastern region, an increase in the verified cases compared with 4 children during the

previous quarter. Six children (three girls and three boys) were also verified as having been abducted by the Taliban. Of concern, the COVID-19 pandemic is believed to have increased the vulnerability of children to recruitment and use by parties to the conflict, including owing to deepening poverty, restrictions on movement and reduced access to essential services, such as education.

34. Attacks on health care continued during the year's second quarter, with 18 conflict-related incidents affecting health-care facilities and workers: 13 were perpetrated by the Taliban, 4 by Afghan national security forces and 1 by an unknown actor. Of the 18 incidents, 12 were direct attacks, including targeted killings, abductions and threats against health-care workers by the Taliban, and an air strike against a health-care clinic, as well as threats to health-care workers by the Afghan national security forces. On 21 June, UNAMA released a special report on the attacks, which significantly undermine health-care delivery in Afghanistan.

35. Between 1 April and 30 June 2020, the country task force verified nine incidents of attacks against schools. Attacks were attributed to the Afghan National Army (two), undetermined armed opposition groups (two), the Taliban (two), two jointly attributed to the Afghan National Army and the Taliban, and one attributed to international forces. The nine incidents included two attacks deliberately targeting schools, resulting in two students injured, and seven attacks causing incidental harm to schools, resulting in seven students killed and seven injured.

36. The country task force also recorded a spike in denials of humanitarian access, with 11 incidents in the second quarter. The Taliban were responsible for 10 of those incidents, consisting of 8 abductions of humanitarian workers, 1 targeted killing and 1 incident of looting. Afghan national security forces were responsible for one incident of looting of humanitarian supplies.

37. During the reporting period, UNAMA documented 39 cases of violence against women and girls, including 19 cases of beating, 6 murders, 4 rapes, 3 cases of forced self-immolation or suicide, 2 cases of harassment, 1 forced marriage, 2 cases of forced prostitution, 1 case causing injury or disability, and 1 underage marriage. On incidents related to children, the country task force noted the likelihood of underreporting owing to the highly sensitive nature of rape and sexual violence and the cultural stigma surrounding such incidents.

38. On 20 July, the Deputy Minister for Women's Affairs, the Deputy Attorney General for Elimination of Violence Against Women, and the Women's Rights Commissioner of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, all women, held a joint press conference to report on violence against women and girls registered by their offices during the period from 21 December 2019 to 21 June 2020. The entities registered a total of 5,655 cases. The Deputy Attorney General reported registering 249 cases during the COVID-19 lockdown period. A draft family law is currently being considered by the Government. Areas of concern expressed by various actors include the age of marriage, provisions permitting polygamy, maintenance, and custody of children after the dissolution of marriage.

39. On the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, on 21 May, the President issued a third decree to pardon and commute the sentences of prisoners in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in prisons. As of mid-July, approximately 10,000 (including nearly 400 women) out of the estimated total of 41,000 prisoners and detainees at the time of the first decree on 26 March had been released for the purpose of COVID-19 prevention. Approximately two thirds of prisons continued to operate over their maximum capacity, leaving inmates vulnerable to infection. By mid-July, more than three quarters of prisons had reported positive cases of COVID-19 among inmates and staff. However, the prevalence of COVID-19 in the population of the penitentiary

system remained unclear, with testing appearing to be limited to those manifesting severe symptoms.

40. UNAMA estimated that more than half of the children originally held in juvenile rehabilitation centres were released. Overall, a very limited number of confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 was reported among children held in such centres, with the exception of Kabul. In May, one boy killed himself in the Kabul juvenile rehabilitation centre after being placed in isolation for being suspected of having COVID-19.

41. Media workers and human rights defenders faced increased levels of violence and intimidation. On 30 May, an improvised explosive device attack claimed by ISIL-K targeted a Khurshid TV minivan transporting media workers in Kabul, killing one journalist and one technician and injuring seven other staff members. On 1 July, officials of the National Directorate for Security searched the residence of two journalists in Khost, reportedly without a search warrant; on the same date, the National Directorate for Security arrested a journalist in Zabul for allegedly using inappropriate language about the President on social media.

42. Civil society organizations and the media community expressed concern about draft legislation in areas related to freedom of expression and freedom of association. A draft law on non-governmental organizations under consideration by the Government was deemed to introduce unnecessary restrictions on associations and disproportionate controls by the Government, including over legal, administrative, financial and operational matters.

43. On 27 June, an attack employing an improvised explosive device killed two employees of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. There was no claim of responsibility. In one province, a staff member of the Commission was threatened, reportedly by anti-government elements. UNAMA documented the killing of four human rights defenders, including one in Zabul, one in Paktiya and one in Ghazni that were unattributed, as well as one in Farah that was claimed by the Taliban. Two prominent Islamic scholars were killed in Kabul, one in an attack claimed by ISIL-K and the other by undetermined anti-government elements. Two human rights defenders were reportedly threatened by local leaders and anti-government elements.

44. UNAMA continued advising the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission on options for engagement on various issues related to peace, human rights and victim-centred justice. On 2 June, the Commission published a position paper on the inclusion of victims in the peace process, with proposals and options for the negotiating parties. On 25 June, the Chairperson of the Commission addressed the Security Council, covering the impact of COVID-19, trends in civilian casualties, the upholding of human rights in the peace process and the need for meaningful victim-centred justice measures.

IV. Coordination of development assistance

45. Preparations for the 2020 ministerial conference on Afghanistan continued in line with the agreed workplan between the Government and development partners. On 7 July, the co-hosts of the ministerial conference, Afghanistan and Finland, together with UNAMA, launched preparations for the new mutual accountability framework expected to be adopted at the conference. A drafting team appointed by the co-hosts focused on the alignment of the new mutual accountability framework with the draft of the new Afghanistan national peace and development framework II, which was presented by the Government at the Senior Officials Meeting held on 28 July. In addition to introducing substantial changes to improve delivery and to

facilitate reporting against deliverables, the team is considering relevant coordination, monitoring and verification mechanisms. At the Senior Officials Meeting, donor countries raised the need to launch intra-Afghan negotiations, combat corruption, promote the rule of law, advance women's rights and gender mainstreaming, and reduce poverty. The meeting was preceded by two events held on 27 July focused on the economic impact of COVID-19 in Afghanistan, and development and peace.

46. On 18 June, UNAMA published its fourth annual anti-corruption report entitled *Afghanistan's Fight against Corruption: Crucial for Peace and Prosperity*. According to the report, anti-corruption reforms in Afghanistan slowed down in 2019; fewer strategic and legislative initiatives were taken to fight corruption compared with previous years, and institutional gaps and functional responsibilities remained to be clarified. In the report, it was highlighted that the 2017 Afghanistan National Strategy for Combating Corruption had ended in December 2019 without a successor and that weak law enforcement support had resulted in the execution of only 173 of the 255 arrest warrants that had been pending since before the 2018 Geneva Conference. The report contained recommendations for the development of a realistic and long-term anti-corruption strategy, the swift appointment of commissioners of the anti-corruption commission and the boosting of law enforcement capacity dedicated to corruption investigations.

47. On 25 June, the High Council for Rule of Law and Governance, chaired by the President, approved assessment reports on the vulnerability to corruption of the Ministry of Finance, the Customs and Revenue Departments, and the public procurement system. The reports were released by the Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee on 28 June. Following media reports on the misuse of resources for preventing the spread of COVID-19, the President tasked the Office of the Ombudsperson on 30 June with receiving and inspecting any complaints. On 13 July, the High Council decided to finalize the revision of the National Strategy for Combating Corruption within three months. On 16 July, the Special Anti-Corruption Secretariat published its 2019 annual report on the implementation of the Strategy, noting the completion of 49 out of 102 benchmarks in 2019, bringing the total of completed benchmarks to 89.

48. On 8 June, the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre resumed trials in an open tent as a COVID-19 transmission prevention measure. Four trials were held in June and July, raising the total number of cases tried by the court since its inception to 76, with 289 defendants. On 23 June, the High Council of the Supreme Court authorized the use of remote hearings using videoconference technology with related internal guidelines approved on 5 July. On 22 June, two prosecutors and three subordinate staff members of the Office of the Attorney General were killed while on their way to work on the release of Taliban prisoners. On 13 July, a prosecutor was killed in the Breshna Kot area of Kabul while commuting to work.

49. The Government continued to pursue the implementation of subnational reforms. On 8 June, the Cabinet established a working group of the Ministries of Finance and Public Health and the Independent Directorate of Local Governance to promote the response to COVID-19 needs. On 1 July, the Wolesi Jirga approved amendments to the national budget, shifting funds from development projects in insecure provinces and from the operational budget to the new budget line for COVID-19-related interventions. Civil society representatives cautioned that budget amendments must comply with the guidelines of the International Budget Partnership on full budget transparency, public engagement and credible oversight.

50. In its report entitled *Afghanistan Development Update: Surviving the Storm*, released on 15 July, the World Bank warned of an economic contraction in Afghanistan of between 5.5 and 7.4 per cent in 2020. According to the report,

government revenues were set to decline sharply owing to a fall in customs revenues, which also added difficulty in tax collection. The incidence of poverty was likely to increase from 55 per cent in 2017 to between 61 per cent and 72 per cent in 2020 because of declining incomes and rising prices, in particular for food and other essential items.

51. The Government continued to work with partners on the COVID-19 response. On 17 June, the National Assembly approved a \$229 million loan from the International Monetary Fund to address the crisis. On 9 July, the World Bank approved the Afghanistan COVID-19 Response Development Policy Grant worth \$200 million to help Afghanistan mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. On 18 July, the President inaugurated the Government's COVID-19 economic assistance package, aiming to use \$244 million to support 90 per cent of households. The first phase will allocate \$86 million to provide food assistance to over 1.7 million families in 13,000 villages across all 34 provinces. The World Bank, the United Nations and the Data for Development Working Group completed preparations for the launch of a pilot project aimed at supporting the National Statistics and Information Authority in improving data collection and coordination. To be implemented from August 2020 through January 2022, the initiative is funded by a \$400,000 grant from the Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding and Partnership Facility of the Peacebuilding Support Office.

52. The spread of COVID-19 continued to have a disproportionate impact on women and girls. There are indications that women have limited access to COVID-19-related information and health-care services, that they face job losses and that they have experienced increased levels of violence and incidents of child marriage. The joint European Union-United Nations Spotlight Initiative was redesigned to address COVID-19-related increases in sexual and gender-based violence, covering education, victim services, legislative reforms and access to justice. The first phase of the three-year initiative budgeted at \$16.9 million was implemented in Herat, Kandahar and Paktiya provinces.

V. Humanitarian assistance

53. Humanitarian needs continued to rise in Afghanistan owing to ongoing violence, natural disasters and high levels of food insecurity, further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some 14 million people are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2020, up from 9.4 million at the end of 2019. A multisectoral response, coordinated by the humanitarian country team and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and delivered by the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, is under way.

54. As at 4 August, some 36,747 people across Afghanistan were confirmed to have COVID-19. More than 9 per cent of them were health-care workers. A total of 25,669 persons have recovered, and 1,288 have died. Without systematic tracking, the death toll of the pandemic is believed to be an underestimation. National health-care facilities continued to report challenges in treating patients with COVID-19, owing to shortages of supplies and trained staff. A nationwide lockdown remains in place, although measures to contain the spread of the virus continued to vary across provinces.

55. Since the start of the pandemic, the United Nations and its partners have reached at least 4.7 million people with risk communication and community engagement messages; delivered water, sanitation and hygiene assistance to 2.2 million people; screened 500,000 people at border points; traced 556,000 people; provided

psychosocial support to 218,000 people; and provided home-based learning materials to 54,000 children.

56. Widespread food insecurity and climbing malnutrition rates are threatening the lives of millions. Some 12.4 million people are in “crisis” and “emergency” levels of food insecurity, including almost 4 million people at the emergency level – one of the highest figures in the world. The United Nations and its partners provided 26,062 metric tons of food between 21 May and 30 July, reaching 69,673 people displaced by conflict, 472,031 people affected by COVID-19 and 16,506 people affected by natural disasters. The response to the pandemic in urban areas entails a planned scale-up in cash-based transfers of \$27.9 million for 2.5 million people, to be distributed between July and December 2020. More than 120,000 children with severe acute malnutrition have been reached with specialized assistance since the start of the year. In June and July 2020, the average prices of staple foods remained significantly higher compared with pre-COVID-19 prices, further threatening the coping capacity of those who had lost their livelihoods. The situation is more pronounced for internally displaced persons and returnees, with women carrying acute vulnerabilities within those groups.

57. Conflict and disaster continued to cause displacement. Since 21 May 2020, more than 19,530 people have been forced to leave their homes, increasing the total number of internally displaced persons to 112,700. Between 21 May and 30 June, health partners provided medical assistance to over 321,534 people, 61 per cent of whom were women and girls. Between January and August 2020, the United Nations and its partners provided emergency shelter, household items and cash support to more than 52,000 people affected by predictable floods.

58. The number of returnees arriving in Afghanistan has reduced from the spike experienced in March. Between 21 May and 4 August, there were 125,657 documented and undocumented returnees, bringing the total number since 1 January 2020 to 421,485. Deportees make up 31 per cent of total returns from the Islamic Republic of Iran (132,066 persons). Since the reopening of that country’s economy, with COVID-19 movement restrictions lifted on 27 April, a significant movement of Afghans back into the Islamic Republic of Iran was seen. Those flows were accompanied by reports of increased protection incidents among irregular Afghan migrants. On 7 July, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees convened an online high-level meeting and called for international support to the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan for the inclusion of Afghan refugees in national education and health services and the voluntary return and reintegration of those who wished to return home.

59. A 50 per cent increase in civilian casualties owing to improvised mines was observed in the first half of 2020, compared with the same period in 2019. Explosive remnants of war continued to cause a high number of civilian casualties, with children accounting for 80 per cent of the victims. From April to June 2020, the United Nations and its partners cleared 2.97 square km of land contaminated by high-impact explosives, benefiting 12 communities. Approximately 104,162 people received risk education.

60. Widespread insecurity, mine contamination and COVID-19-related movement restrictions presented challenges for humanitarian access. Since 1 January, aid workers reported 463 access-related incidents, a 12 per cent increase from the same period in 2019. Between 21 May and 3 August 2020, 1 aid worker was killed, 6 were injured and 33 were abducted. In addition, COVID-19-related movement restrictions have caused bureaucratic impediments, slowing down partners’ planned activities.

61. Two polio campaigns were suspended, with health personnel directed towards the COVID-19 response. However, the campaigns were restarted on 20 July. As at

4 August, 34 polio cases had been confirmed since 1 January, compared with 29 cases in all of 2019. Most of the cases are in areas where house-to-house vaccination campaigns had been banned since May 2018. Polio has now spread to eight new provinces, indicating declining immunity among people.

62. The United Nations Humanitarian Air Service international air bridge, established to facilitate the rotation of humanitarian personnel between Kabul and Doha, continued flying three times a week, transporting 724 passengers from 24 April to 4 August 2020. The airbridge will operate until commercial flights offer a reliable option. The Service continues to serve all regular domestic destinations.

63. The revised 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan requests \$1.1 billion to provide humanitarian assistance to 11.1 million Afghans. As at 4 August, the plan is just 25 per cent funded, leaving a funding gap of \$852 million.

VI. Counter-narcotics

64. The *World Drug Report 2020*, released on 25 June by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, revealed that the total area under illicit opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan decreased to 163,000 ha in 2019, down from 263,000 ha in 2018, a decrease of 38 per cent. Potential opium production, however, remained constant at an estimated 6,400 tons, due in part to the fact that no disease or drought affected the 2019 harvest. The report also revealed that Afghan opiate production accounted for some 84 per cent of the global total in 2018, a slight decrease from 88 per cent in 2017. From 30 April to 14 July 2020, law enforcement authorities conducted a total of 408 counter-narcotics operations, leading to seizures of 1,580 kg of heroin, 120 kg of morphine, 253 kg of opium, 1,305 kg of hashish and cannabis, 73 kg of methamphetamine, 5,840 litres of formic acid and 141 kg of tramadol. The seizures led to the arrest of 486 suspects, including 5 members of the Afghan National Police, and the confiscation of 82 vehicles and 28 weapons. In addition, 617 ha of opium poppy were eradicated in coordinated operations led by the Ministry of the Interior.

VII. Mission support

65. As at 30 June, vacancy rates at UNAMA were at 8 per cent for international staff, 6 per cent for National Professional Officers and 3 per cent for national staff, compared with the approved rates of 8 per cent, 3 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively. The proportion of female staff remained low, at 36 per cent for international staff, 42 per cent for United Nations Volunteers, 13 per cent for National Professional Officers and 9 per cent for national staff. Between 1 April and 31 July, UNAMA conducted 25 road and 88 air missions.

66. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNAMA continued to implement a range of measures to safeguard the safety and well-being of its staff in Afghanistan, while sustaining the delivery of critical programmes and activities throughout the country. Alternate work arrangements that have been in place since 11 May have reduced the numbers of international and national staff in offices. At a time when the pandemic curve was rising sharply and when all major airlines had suspended flights to and from Afghanistan, UNAMA used the Mission's air assets for special flights to Frankfurt, Germany, Addis Ababa, Islamabad and Kathmandu to reduce the footprint and ensure the rotation of critical personnel. All of the flights were carried out on a cost-recovery basis. The Mission's assets were also effectively used for medical evacuation operations within the country.

VIII. Observations

67. Several months after it was finalized, the political agreement between Mr. Ghani and Mr. Abdullah has still not been fully implemented. Key positions within the Cabinet remain vacant, and members of the High Council for National Reconciliation are yet to be appointed. The delays in the formation of the Government have stymied much-needed progress on priority issues, especially the peace process and governance reforms, as well as the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I urge the President, the Chairman of the High Council and the political leadership of Afghanistan to expedite the formation of the Cabinet and other senior appointments. As Afghans look towards the prospect of peace negotiations and the country's international partners consider their future assistance to the country, an inclusive and unified Government is needed to serve the interests of all Afghans at this critical moment.

68. Despite brief periods of respite during the two Eid ceasefires, the level of violence in Afghanistan remains far too high, with devastating consequences for all Afghans. I call on all parties to reduce violence, immediately and without preconditions. This is necessary to protect Afghan lives and livelihoods. It is critical, also, to allow Afghanistan to mount an effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the many other pressing humanitarian challenges the country is facing. Above all, reducing violence will create much-needed space for peace negotiations, enabling the parties to the conflict to gradually build confidence in each other and reassuring the Afghan people that their interests will be taken into account as Afghanistan embarks upon the long journey towards peace.

69. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban are expected to begin intra-Afghan negotiations towards a peace that is the long-standing demand of the Afghan people. I call on the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban to approach the negotiations in a spirit of commitment and conciliation. The process will not be swift or easy. The issues at stake are complex and go to the very heart of Afghan society. It is for Afghans themselves to determine the content and nature of the negotiations. It will be important that the process eventually lead to a peace agreement that affirms the country's commitments to international human rights standards, contributes to peace and security in the region and allows Afghan refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes in a dignified and orderly manner. An inclusive peace process, in which women, young people and victims of conflict are meaningfully represented, offers the best hope for a sustainable solution.

70. In line with their consistent demand, Afghan women must be given opportunities to participate actively at all levels of the peace process. The women members of the negotiating team of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, for example, have engaged extensively with a range of stakeholders in preparation for intra-Afghan negotiations. I expect a significant number of women to be appointed to the High Council for National Reconciliation, including to senior positions, and I similarly urge the Taliban to include women in their negotiating team. All parties are expected to do their part to ensure that women participate in a variety of roles and that the peace process reflects the experiences and expertise of Afghan women in all their diversity.

71. As Afghanistan prepares for peace negotiations, it is critical that the Government signal to all Afghans, in particular women and girls, that there will be no regression on their most fundamental human rights. I am concerned about some provisions of the draft family law, in particular regarding the age of marriage, polygamy, and the maintenance and custody of children after the dissolution of marriage, and I call on the Government to engage with women activists and human rights defenders as the draft law is reviewed.

72. Developments in the peace process have highlighted the importance of cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbours. I am encouraged by the increased interest among the country's regional partners in supporting the peace process and by the Government's efforts to convene various multilateral forums to engage regional countries, as well as other international stakeholders, on issues of mutual interest. As the peace process unfolds, it will provide valuable opportunities for Afghanistan to expand its political, economic and cultural ties with regional countries and, in doing so, to contribute to the stability and prosperity of the region as a whole.

73. The conflict continues to cause horrendous harm to civilians, in particular women and children, who have suffered immense physical and psychological trauma throughout decades of war. I condemn the use of indirect fire during ground engagements in civilian-populated areas and the use of pressure-plate improvised explosive devices, which function as improvised anti-personnel mines. Many of the victims continue to suffer long after the initial incident has occurred owing to long-term disabilities, psychological trauma, financial loss and poverty, and uncertainty about their future. It is critically important that the parties to the conflict recognize and address this harm and incorporate victim-centred justice into the peace process.

74. Human rights defenders, media workers, civil society activists and staff of human rights institutions are critical in protecting fundamental rights and promoting democratic values. They must not be a target. I am deeply saddened by the killing of two staff members of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission in Kabul in June. I call on all parties to immediately cease such attacks. I also urge the Government of Afghanistan to ensure the transparency and effectiveness of investigations into such attacks, ensuring that perpetrators are promptly brought to justice and that the result of the investigation is communicated to the relatives of the victims. The Government is expected to do all it can to implement effective protection mechanisms for human rights defenders, so that they are able to conduct their critical work without fear of violence or reprisal.

75. The vibrant civil society and media institutions of Afghanistan play a critical social role, which must be protected and supported. I am concerned about some provisions in the draft law on non-governmental organizations that appear to introduce unnecessary restrictions on associations and disproportionate government control over their activities. The Government's decision to place a hold on the amendment of the law provides a welcome opportunity to engage in further consultations. I encourage the Government to continue its dialogue with civil society, non-governmental organizations, and development and humanitarian partners to ensure that the law complies with relevant human rights standards and facilitates the activities of this critical sector.

76. I welcome the constructive engagement between the Government of Afghanistan and international donors at the Senior Officials Meeting held in July. At the meeting, donors expressed a clear desire for the realistic sequencing of the country's policy priorities and for the Government to make tangible progress against key governance and development indicators. As the attention of the international community turns towards preparations for the 2020 ministerial conference, the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have further constrained the fiscal environment, which could affect the scale of international financial assistance well into the future. That makes it all the more critical for the Government of Afghanistan to demonstrate its commitment to introducing concrete reforms. I urge the Government to take further steps to combat corruption, which remains a source of profound grievances among Afghan and international stakeholders, to accelerate efforts to build capacity within State institutions and to ensure accountability in senior leadership and integrity throughout the public service.

77. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the vulnerability of the civilian population, which has already suffered greatly from ongoing conflict and recurrent disasters. The country is home to 12.4 million acutely food-insecure people, including almost 4 million at the emergency level, making Afghanistan the site of one of the world's largest hunger crises. Against that backdrop, I am concerned about the immense harm the pandemic will inflict upon the population and economy of Afghanistan. Some 35 million people are expected to require some form of relief assistance to weather the impact of the pandemic. The consequences are likely to be particularly severe for the most vulnerable Afghans, many of whom rely on insecure income sources to support their families. The humanitarian partners of Afghanistan, including the United Nations, will continue to support the Government in providing immediate assistance to people in need. I call on donor countries to pledge generous support to the updated Humanitarian Response Plan, which remains severely underfunded, to allow for the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance and ongoing social protection throughout the pandemic and its aftermath.

78. I thank all the United Nations personnel in Afghanistan and my Special Representative, Deborah Lyons, for their continued dedication under challenging conditions to fulfilling our commitments in support of the people of Afghanistan.

Annex

Progress achieved against benchmarks

I. Security

Benchmark: sustainable Afghan security institutions and processes capable of ensuring peace and stability and protecting the people of Afghanistan

Indicators of progress

Metrics

Increase in the number of national police and national army personnel mentored, trained and operational according to an agreed structure

- In the reporting period, the Government continued to implement the 2017 Afghan National Defence and Security Forces road map, with the aim of further developing capabilities, developing leaders, ensuring the unity of command and military efforts, and countering corruption. The Afghan national security forces remain reliant on external funding (the Afghan Security Forces Fund of the United States of America, the Afghan National Army Trust Fund of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the law and order trust fund for Afghanistan implemented by the United Nations Development Programme).
- The Ministry of Defence made improvements related to Afghanistan National Army training efforts, with the Unified Training, Education and Doctrine Command of the army achieving “full operating capability”; the Ministry merging its 13 “branch schools” into four “capability schools” (combat arms, combat support, combat service support and general service); and an increased number of soldiers directly progressing into advanced training following basic warrior training.
- Current personnel numbers in the Afghan security forces are provided in the table below. In April 2020, the attrition¹ rates reported by the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior were 2.1 per cent and 2.6 per cent,² respectively, which is in line with statistical norms.

Personnel in the Afghan security forces

Force element	Overall authorized strength ^a	Actual strength (as of January 2020)	Actual strength (as of April 2020)
Afghanistan National Army ^b	227 103	182 173	182 747
Afghan National Police	124 626	99 375	105 671
Total	351 729	281 548 (80%)^c	288 418 (82%)^c

Source: United States, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, 30 January 2020; United States of America, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, 30 April 2020.

^a Including a total of 11,663 civilians (5,790 Ministry of Defence and 5,873 Ministry of the Interior).

^b Including Afghan Air Force.

^c Percentages are approximate.

¹ In this context, “attrition” is defined as personnel not reporting for duty, not casualties.

² United States of America, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, 30 April 2020.

II. Peace, reintegration and reconciliation

Benchmark: national dialogue and regional engagement towards pursuing constructive and inclusive processes to foster a political environment conducive to peace

Indicators of progress

Metrics

Development and implementation of inclusive national and regional processes to enhance peace, reintegration and reconciliation efforts

- On 7 April 2019, the Government announced the formation of a leadership council for peace and reconciliation, comprising 37 people, to create a politically inclusive advisory team for negotiations with the Taliban.
- On 29 April 2019, the Government convened a five-day consultative loya jirga (“assembly”) on peace in Kabul, aimed at developing the parameters for talks with the Taliban. More than 3,000 delegates from across the country participated, with women comprising 30 per cent of the delegates, chairing 13 of its 50 committees and acting as two of the five deputy heads of the assembly. The then Chief Executive, Abdullah, as well as major opposition politicians, including presidential candidates, boycotted the event, claiming that it was intended to bolster the re-election campaign of the President, Ashraf Ghani.
- On 28 May 2019, a delegation of 24 Afghan political figures, including the former President, Hamid Karzai, alongside 14 Taliban representatives, attended a meeting in Moscow marking 100 years of diplomatic relations between Afghanistan and the Russian Federation. The Taliban delegation was led by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Head of the Taliban Political Commission.
- The United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, held talks with the Taliban in Doha from 29 June to 9 July 2019, with a two-day pause for the intra-Afghan peace conference. Hosted jointly by Germany and Qatar, the conference was attended by representatives of the Government of Afghanistan in their individual capacities and by representatives of political parties, civil society and the Taliban. Participants reached consensus on a two-page resolution that called for all parties to meet the demands of the Afghan people by obtaining peace through inclusive negotiations. They also called for the release of prisoners, the protection of public infrastructure and a reduction in civilian casualties, and stated that post-war Afghanistan should have an Islamic legal system, women’s rights in political, social, economic, educational and cultural affairs as part of the Islamic framework of Islamic values, and equality for all ethnic groups.
- In a consolidation of the State’s peace architecture, on 29 June 2019, the President announced the appointment of his former Chief of Staff, Salam Rahimi, as State Minister for Peace Affairs and issued a decree on 27 July 2019 dissolving the secretariat of the High Peace Council.
- On 7 September 2019 the President of the United States, Donald Trump, called off peace negotiations between the United States and the Taliban. The talks resumed in mid-January 2020 following reported internal consultations among the Taliban leadership around the details of a proposed reduction in violence.

*Indicators of progress**Metrics*

- On 21 February 2020, the Secretary of State of the United States, Michael Pompeo, announced that United States negotiators had come to an understanding with the Taliban on a “significant and nationwide reduction of violence across Afghanistan”. On 22 February 2020, the period of reduced violence started.
- On 29 February 2020, in Doha, following several months of negotiations, the United States and the Taliban signed the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the United States of America and the Taliban, which outlined a reduction in the number of United States forces to 8,600 troops and a proportional reduction in the number of coalition forces in 135 days, followed by a drawdown of all international forces within another 9.5 months, conditional upon the Taliban’s adherence to the various counter-terrorism commitments. On the same day, in Kabul, a Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan was released. In both documents, the efforts of the United States to facilitate dialogue with Afghanistan and the Taliban on confidence-building measures were noted, including the possible release of prisoners and detainees ahead of intra-Afghan negotiations, as well as the intention that diplomatic efforts be undertaken with regard to potentially lifting Security Council sanctions on Taliban members.
- In accordance with the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan and the Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America, on 9 March 2020, the United States announced the start of its conditions-based reduction of forces to 8,600 over 135 days.
- On 11 March 2020, the President of Afghanistan signed a decree for the release of 5,000 Taliban prisoners, in two phases. The first 1,500 prisoners would be released based on age, health and remaining sentence. The remaining 3,500 Taliban prisoners would be released conditionally on progress in intra-Afghan negotiations and further reductions in Taliban violence. All releases required guarantees that the prisoners would not return to combat. The Taliban spokesperson described the decree as “not satisfactory” and repeated the demand that 5,000 prisoners be released before the beginning of negotiations.
- On 26 March 2020, the State Ministry of Peace announced the formation of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan negotiating team. Led by the former Director General of the National Directorate for Security, Masoom Stanekzai, the 21-member team comprises representatives of various political and social constituencies, including 4 women.
- On 14 July 2020, representatives of the United States and the Taliban issued separate statements to mark the 135-day milestone since the signing of their Agreement. The Department of Defence of the United States announced that, in line with the Agreement, the United States had withdrawn from five military bases and had reduced its force numbers to mid-8,000. The United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation added that the troops of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization had been reduced proportionally. The Taliban spokesperson welcomed the international military reduction and base

	closures yet noted the delays in prisoner releases and the removal of Taliban members from sanctions lists. On 30 July 2020, the Taliban stated that the movement had completed the release of all remaining prisoners, per the Agreement of 29 February, and was ready to commence intra-Afghan negotiations after Eid al-Adha, provided that the Government of Afghanistan released all the Taliban prisoners on their list. On 31 July 2020, the President of Afghanistan announced that a consultative loya jirga would be convened to decide on the fate of the 400 Taliban prisoners on the list and that the Government would release a total of 5,100 Taliban prisoners to accelerate the peace process.
Increased ability by the Afghan authorities to gather and provide substantiated, updated and accurate information to the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011)	- In 2019 and 2020, the Government continued to provide substantiated, updated and accurate information to the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). - On 30 April 2019, the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted its tenth report pursuant to resolution 2255 (2015) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan (S/2019/481). On 30 April 2020, the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring team submitted its eleventh report pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan (S/2020/415). The reports were based, in large part, on information provided by the authorities of Afghanistan.
Increased public support for the peace process through engagement at the community level and with civil society	- On 28 February 2019, following a six-month consultation with 15,000 Afghan women across 34 provinces, the Office of the First Lady, with support from the High Peace Council, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Afghan Women's Network and women's civil society organizations convened a national conference of Afghan women for peace, culminating in the submission of a 15-point declaration to the President, who undertook to have it considered at the five-day consultative loya jirga ("assembly") on peace convened in Kabul on 29 April 2019. - In April 2019, in Nangarhar Province, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) facilitated a peace jirga between two tribes in Sherzad district, in which, for the first time, women participated. The jirga concluded with the adoption of a resolution regulating water distribution. In July 2019, in Kunar Province, UNAMA facilitated consultations between two tribes that culminated in a peace jirga, resolving a decades-long land dispute; a quarter of the jirga were women. - Leveraging its convening capacity, UNAMA supported Afghan women's preparation for an Afghan peace process. From 15 to 17 December 2019, UNAMA co-hosted, with the Afghan Women's Education Centre, a workshop for Afghan women on their strategic engagement in a peace process, held in Kabul. In Helmand Province, UNAMA provided a platform for dialogue between religious scholars and women on local efforts to reduce violence and on how the role of women, young people and minorities could be enhanced, in support of peace. UNAMA also worked with more than 1,000 women from the western region of Afghanistan over a five-month period and assisted them in developing

*Indicators of progress**Metrics*

their vision for peace, culminating in the release, on 9 January 2020, of a 13-point declaration highlighting the need to preserve the gains of the past 18 years, address past atrocities, ensure a victim-centred peace process and establish a monitoring mechanism for any eventual peace agreement. On 20 February 2020, UNAMA facilitated consultations between government and civil society leaders, including women activists, to reiterate the imperative of supporting women's leadership roles in the Government and future intra-Afghan negotiations.

- On 16 February, in Ghazni Province, members of the People's Peace Movement convened a rally in support of peace, which was attended by 400 people from Pashtun, Hazara and Tajik communities. The participants called for durable peace, a ceasefire and an end to violence.
 - In April and May 2020, UNAMA provided advice to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission on options for engagement on issues related to peace, human rights and transitional justice, including how to bring the perspectives of victims into the peace process and public discourse.
 - In the same period, through local radio broadcasts, subnational authorities and communities in over 25 provinces called for a humanitarian pause, peace and COVID-19 prevention. A women's shura council in Sarobi district, Kabul, that had been established and supported through a local peace initiative sponsored by UNAMA, redirected its work to support COVID-19 prevention efforts. Similarly, in May and June 2020, women and youth groups in Kabul used social media channels to broadcast COVID-19 prevention messages alongside peace messaging and engaged with local authorities and members of the United Nations country team to support the distribution of aid to vulnerable families.
 - In June 2020, in the northern region, UNAMA concluded a local peace initiative that supported an inclusive group of 16 youth activists who were trained in peace advocacy and whose engagements with more than 120 youth representatives from four provinces led to the adoption of a 41-article youth peace declaration that received national publicity.
 - On 8 July 2020, an advisory board of civil society organizations launched a mechanism aimed at bringing voices from different segments of society to the negotiating table, and various civil society actors engaged in developing plans for how to put forward their priorities on peace.
-

III. Governance and institution-building

Benchmark: extension of government authority throughout the country through the establishment of democratic, legitimate, accountable institutions, down to the local level, with the capacity to implement policies and to become increasingly capable of sustaining themselves

Indicators of progress

Metrics

Increased ability of the Afghan authorities and independent electoral institutions to manage and conduct genuine and periodic elections, with due regard to women's participation and constitutionally guaranteed quotas

- In the reporting period, both the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission completed their operational plans, as well as capacity development and training plans, which provided a detailed overview of the activities and processes, ensuring that all the required activities were identified and sequenced and that the activities met all legal requirements outlined in the revised elections law and in the regulations, procedures and guidelines of the Commissions. The tasks included stakeholder engagement, coordination with relevant partners and institutions, electoral operations, including voter registration, candidate nominations, and polling and counting preparations, as well as run-off planning and post-election activities to enhance the potential of Afghan institutions to conduct credible, inclusive and transparent elections.
- The Independent Election Commission developed its voter registration planning for the 2019 presidential election and, after extensive consultations, the Commission approved the conduct of a top-up registration exercise limited to new voters and building on previous registrations. The Commission also approved the use of technology, especially in the areas of voter registration and verification (biometric voter registration and biometric voter verification) and results transmission and management.
- In March 2019, the President appointed seven new commissioners to the Independent Election Commission and five to the Electoral Complaints Commission, as well as the heads of the secretariats of the two electoral bodies. The new appointees were nominated by political parties and civil society organizations and selected by 17 presidential candidates on 1 March 2019.
- In May 2019, the Independent Election Commission completed the final results (from 33 provinces) for the 2018 parliamentary elections. In May, the President appointed two international non-voting commissioners to each of the two Commissions.
- On 28 September 2019, the Independent Election Commission conducted the presidential election. The preliminary results were announced in December 2019 and the final results were announced in February 2020, declaring the incumbent President, Mr. Ghani, the winner, with 50.64 per cent of the votes, while the then Chief Executive, Mr. Abdullah, obtained 39.52 per cent of the votes.
- Following a political impasse on the final results of the presidential election, on 17 May 2020, Mr. Ghani and Mr. Abdullah signed an agreement specifying a 50 per cent share in the Government for Mr. Abdullah, including appointments to ministries and provincial governors; the creation of a High Council of Government and a High Council for Peace and National Reconciliation; electoral

*Indicators of progress**Metrics*

	reforms; and the promotion of the former Vice-President, General Abdul Rashid Dostum, to the position of Marshal. The agreement has not yet been fully implemented.
Establishment of the Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee and development of anti-corruption benchmarks	• In 2019, the Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee published 18 reports, including assessments of the vulnerability to corruption of the National Assembly, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In January 2020, the Committee published a report on the Ministry of Finance and, in July 2020, assessments of the vulnerability to corruption of the public procurement system and the Customs and Revenue Departments. • In March 2020, the Cabinet approved asset recovery regulations, thereby completing the legislative framework on asset recovery.
Empowerment of anti-corruption institutions to enable them to oversee a whole-of-government approach to anti-corruption	• In July 2020, the Special Anti-Corruption Secretariat published the 2019 annual report on the implementation of the 2017 National Strategy for Combating Corruption, in which it reported that, out of a total of 102 benchmarks in six pillars, 89 had been fully completed in 2018 and 2019, 5 were in the final stages of implementation and 3 were partially implemented, while there was limited progress on 2 benchmarks and no progress on 3. • In 2019, the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre tried 23 cases in its primary court involving 83 accused persons, which resulted in 66 convictions and 17 acquittals. Also in 2019, the appeals court of the Centre heard 12 cases involving 46 convicted persons, which resulted in the confirmation of the convictions of 41 persons and the reversal of the conviction for 5. As of July 2020, the Centre has tried a total of 76 cases involving 289 defendants. • The Access to Information Commission was included in the 2020 annual budget, and the Government has appointed public information officers in 59 government bodies, providing Afghans with individual counterparts from whom to request information. • In August 2019, the President appointed the Palace Ombudsperson, who is mandated to receive and investigate complaints involving senior officials and administrative units in the executive branch and in independent budgetary units.
Annual publication of the asset declarations of public officials	• In 2019, the number of public officials and civil servants who had registered their assets surpassed 21,000. The Asset Registration and Verification Agency continued to consolidate the legal framework for the verification and sanctioning of non-compliance.
Increased capacity of civil servants at the central, provincial and district levels to discharge functions and deliver services	• During 2019/20 the Civil Service Institute organized 96 training programmes for 2,411 civil servants and facilitated 326 training programmes overseas for 1,180 civil servants. The Institute also developed 12 courses with educational materials. • To attract young people into public administration, the Civil Service Institute launched the eighth round of its administrative internship programme for new graduates of public and private universities.

Indicators of progress

Metrics

Increased transparency and effectiveness of civil service appointments

- During the reporting period, the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission conducted recruitment and oversight for 30,000 civil service positions, including the mass recruitment of teachers.
- In 2019, the Commission established its own Exam Content Research and Development Centre. Since then, a total of 693 senior civil servant positions were filled using the new electronic computer-based written exam in Kabul, including by 56 women. The Commission also established provincial electronic examination centres in Balkh, Kandahar, Herat, Jalalabad, Bamyan and Khost.
- The Commission has continued to enter data in its human resource management and information system. The biometric and biographic information of 427,365 civil servants from 50 line ministries and agencies has so far been verified and entered into the system.

Strengthened civil service reform supported by a comprehensive approach to capacity-building and donor-funded technical assistance

- On 19 January 2020, the Commission launched its new 2020–2025 Strategic Plan, the vision of which is to establish “an efficient and impartial civil service administration, run by qualified civil servants, that advances the country’s economic development goals and serves the interests of all Afghan citizens”.
- The Tackling Afghanistan’s Government Human Resource Management and Institutional Reforms Project, funded through the World Bank, started in early 2019 and has supported the Commission in developing and introducing its new human resource management and information system and drafting new policies, administrative procedures and regulations.

Implementation of the subnational governance policy and development of subnational regulatory, financing and budgetary frameworks

- On 6 March 2019, the Subnational Governance Subcommittee of the High Council for Rule of Law and Governance approved the subnational governance policy implementation action plan, establishing five working groups led by the respective government institutions to support the implementation.
- On 3 December 2019, the draft local council law was finalized and adopted by the parliament. On 2 February 2020, the Independent Directorate of Local Governance reported that the draft local administration law had been finalized.

Development and publication of criteria for administrative boundaries

- In 2019, the Independent Directorate of Local Governance produced procedures and guidelines for the establishment of municipal boundaries. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) supported the Deputy Ministry of Municipalities of the Directorate in establishing boundaries for seven provincial municipalities (Farah, Uruzgan, Nimruz, Ghor, Nili, Paktiya and Nuristan) in 2018 and 2019.

Establishment of adequate infrastructure for functioning government institutions, especially at the subnational level

- In 2019, construction commenced for 33 provincial administration conference halls, which are expected to be completed by the end of 2020.

*Indicators of progress**Metrics*

Establishment of credible and accessible judicial and penal systems that respect and uphold the human rights of all citizens

- In late 2019, the Supreme Court, with assistance from the United Nations and donors, organized a penal code conference to enable senior members of the judiciary to share their experiences and comments in applying the 2018 Penal Code, which resulted in 54 recommendations for amendments to the code.
- On 23 June 2020, the High Council of the Supreme Court adopted procedures to accelerate and facilitate online trials and prevent delays in case proceedings owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Supreme Court is currently developing courtroom procedures for remote hearings and other relevant institutions.
- With more than 100 cases under its jurisdiction, the International Crimes Directorate in the Office of the Attorney General is currently undertaking investigations of war crimes and crimes against humanity involving all parties to the conflict, including senior members of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan.

IV. Human rights

Benchmark: improved respect for human rights of Afghans, in line with the Afghan Constitution and international law, with particular emphasis on the protection of civilians, the situation of women and girls, freedom of expression and accountability based on the rule of law

*Indicators of progress**Metrics*

Reduction in the number of incidents of unlawful use of force and intimidation of civilians, through compliance of relevant actors with international law

- In 2019, UNAMA documented a 5 per cent reduction in civilian casualties compared with 2018 and the lowest overall level of civilian casualties since 2013. In 2020, UNAMA recorded a 13 per cent decrease in civilian casualties at the midyear point compared with the same period in 2019. UNAMA noted some improvements as a result of its advocacy, including: an increased acknowledgement by the Taliban of civilian casualty incidents and improvements in investigation capacity; the conduct of an external “lessons learned” exercise with international military forces based on a UNAMA recommendation; and the establishment of limitations on search operations by the National Directorate of Security Special Forces, which coincided with a documented reduction in civilian casualty levels from those operations.

Improved awareness by Afghans of their rights and by the Government of its obligations

- In 2019, UNAMA organized 297 awareness-raising workshops across Afghanistan on the protection of civilians, child protection, women’s rights, the elimination of violence against women and girls, due process rights of detainees and the right to freedom of expression, with a total of 7,163 participants, including 2,795 women. UNAMA also undertook 537 outreach meetings to advocate human rights concerns with State authorities, civil society and community and religious leaders.

Improved impact of, and support for, legal and policy measures to combat violence against women and girls

- On 17 April 2019, UNAMA and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published the biennial report on the treatment of conflict-related detainees, covering the period from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2018. The report noted an overall reduction in credible allegations of torture and ill-treatment by conflict-related detainees held in the custody of the Afghan national security forces: from 39.0 per cent in the previous reporting period to 31.9 per cent. The decrease is attributed to concerted advocacy and technical support by UNAMA leading to the Government's adoption of specific measures.
- From 4 to 14 March 2020, UNAMA convened eight events across Afghanistan to mark International Women's Day, which raised awareness of issues related to the rights of women and girls. The United Nations also partnered with the National Masculinity Alliance – a network of civil society representatives, religious leaders, government officials and representatives of the private sector – in the organization of a series of events under the theme "Each for equal" which culminated in a 1,000-man march in support of gender equality in Afghanistan.
- On 6 July 2020, the President decreed the establishment of second deputy provincial governor posts to be reserved for women in all 34 provinces.
- During the reporting period, UNAMA published 10 public reports on the protection of civilians, covering incidents in the armed conflict that resulted in civilian casualties.
- From January 2019 to June 2020, UNAMA documented 403 cases of serious violence against women and girls: 128 cases of murder, including so-called "honour killings", 95 cases of rape, 44 cases of forced self-immolation or suicide, 17 cases of forced marriage and 17 cases of underage marriage.
- During the reporting period, the Legislative Committee of the Ministry of Women's Affairs led a detailed review of the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (2009). In April 2019, the Cabinet Legislative Committee established a committee to revise the draft family law and, in June 2020, the draft law was presented again to the Committee for review.
- In January 2019 and January 2020, the Office of the Attorney General held conferences on strengthening the justice system's response to violence against women. In May 2019, the Ministry of the Interior endorsed the sexual harassment complaint mechanism. In June 2019, the Legislative Committee of the Ministry of Women's Affairs began work on a draft regulation on emergency funds for victims of violence against women. In October 2019, the Cabinet Legislative Committee proposed to amend article 640 of the Penal Code, concerning so-called "virginity tests", so that they could only be carried out based on a court order. In November 2019, the Attorney General announced the establishment of a directorate dedicated to handling complaints of harassment against women in the workplace.

Indicators of progress

Metrics

Improved awareness of, and support for, legal and policy measures related to combating impunity and furthering transitional justice

- During the reporting period, through 65 countrywide events with a total of 1,571 participants, UNAMA supported the Government, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and civil society in the promotion of increased democratic space, the protection of human rights defenders, accountability for human rights violations, the fight against discrimination, the promotion of inclusive and human rights-compliant peace and reconciliation processes, and victim-centred justice.
- On 14 February 2019, the Afghanistan Centre for Memory and Dialogue, a civil society initiative, was inaugurated. The Centre has a collection of “memory boxes” that survivors and the family members and relatives of victims have created and filled with carefully chosen personal objects and stories of loved ones.
- In 2019, UNAMA organized a series of discussions with local Islamic scholars, and produced an internal report, on issues related to the promotion and protection of human rights under Islamic law.
- In January 2020, UNAMA facilitated a three-day workshop for the commissioners of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission to discuss opportunities for their engagement on issues related to peace, human rights and transitional justice.
- Between March and July 2020, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission published position papers on modalities for the inclusion of victims in the peace process and the issue of prisoner releases vis-à-vis victims’ rights and transparency.
- During the reporting period, UNAMA continued promoting and disseminating to various interlocutors the compilation of 34 provincial road maps for peace.

Government fulfilment of reporting requirements on international human rights covenants and conventions and implementation of the recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review of Afghanistan under the auspices of the Human Rights Council

- UNAMA and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights conducted a workshop in January 2019 for 49 representatives of government ministries, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and civil society organizations (including 11 women) on their role in the universal periodic review process and in the implementation of relevant recommendations.
- In 2019, a high-level committee was established within the Office of the Attorney General’s to investigate the November 2018 allegations of sexual abuse against children in Logar Province, in line with the recommendation emanating from the universal periodic review of Afghanistan.
- On 5 March 2019, the Child Rights Protection Law was adopted through presidential legislative decree No. 362, a recommendation from the universal periodic review of Afghanistan. The law includes provisions prohibiting bacha bazi and the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict.

Increased capacity and commitment of the Government of Afghanistan and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, as the Afghan national human rights institution, to respect, protect, fulfil and promote human rights

- In 2019, the Legislative Committee of the Ministry of Women's Affairs developed a draft regulation aimed at governing the registration of marriage. In March 2019, the Cabinet Gender Committee approved, in principle, two policies, one on the protection of women in war and emergency situations and the other on increasing women's participation in elections.
- In September 2019, the Government informed the Chair of the United Nations Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of the appointment of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission as focal point to liaise with the Subcommittee.
- From 25 November to 10 December 2019, UNAMA organized eight activities as part of the global 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign throughout Afghanistan
- In December 2019, UNAMA and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission jointly organized nine events in eight provinces to mark International Human Rights Day, which was attended by 576 participants (199 women).
- During the reporting period, UNAMA supported the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission on institutional "change management" matters, including on functional review, financial sustainability and victim-centred justice. In October 2019, the Commission was reaccredited with an "A" status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions. In 2020, UNAMA strengthened its engagement with the Commission's Special Investigations Team on its civilian casualty tracking methodology and relevant principles of international humanitarian law.
- During the reporting period, UNAMA provided technical assistance to the High-Level Committee of the Office of the Attorney-General on child-friendly investigatory approaches in the prosecution of sensitive cases concerning sexual abuse against children.

V. Economic and social development

Benchmark: government policies, supported by the international community, that promote sustainable economic growth and contribute to overall stability

Indicators of progress

Metrics

National priority programmes are designed and implemented with international support and endorsement

- During the reporting period, the national priority programmes were designed and costed, and they had an implementation plan that was endorsed by donors, relevant development councils and the Cabinet, with the support of both international and government budget funding.
- All 10 national priority programmes were completed by February 2019 under the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework.
- As part of the budget reforms, the Government moved from input-based to results-based budgeting.

More equitable distribution of development assistance and government expenditure throughout Afghanistan

- Development partners continued their fiscal support through existing mechanisms, such as the Afghanistan reconstruction trust fund, the law and order trust fund for Afghanistan, the Afghanistan infrastructure trust fund and bilateral mechanisms, with allocations across Kabul and the 34 provinces.
- In line with presidential decree No. 305, by mid-2020, a total of 238 plots of land in Herat Province and 114 apartments in Kabul had been distributed to the families of martyrs and of defence and security forces. A total of 3,710 acres of land in seven provinces had also been distributed to families of national defence and security forces, with a further 32,004 acres of land given to returnees and 5,500 plots of land to internally displaced persons.

Increased revenue collection and sustainable growth based on Afghan resources

- In 2019, gross domestic product grew by 3.15 per cent, indicating high levels of political difficulty, and owing to only 2.0 per cent growth in the private sector. Exports grew by 11 per cent (year-on-year) in the first quarter of 2020, from \$182.5 million to \$202.4 million. Export growth was driven by an 18 per cent (\$24.4 million) increase in exports of vegetable products owing to improved agricultural output.
- Revenue performance was stable throughout 2019, but government revenue estimates for 2020 were revised downward from 209 billion afghanis to 144 billion afghanis in the midyear budget review. Domestic revenue collection has rapidly deteriorated in recent months with the COVID-19 crisis. By July 2020, revenues were down by one third, and economic activities, trade and remittances were highly disrupted.

VI. Regional cooperation

Benchmark: sustained and effective regional coordination in support of prosperity, peace and stability

Indicators of progress

Metrics

Improved coordination of regional bodies and increased regional investments

- During the reporting period, Afghanistan strengthened its engagement with regional bodies.
- The President attended the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit on 13 and 14 June 2019, the eighth Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference on 9 December 2019 and an online summit of the Non-Aligned Movement Contact Group on COVID-19 on 4 May 2020. On 2 July 2020, he also hosted a summit with the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, to discuss economic cooperation and regional connectivity, including the Lapis Lazuli transport corridor.
- In April 2019, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Afghanistan Contact Group discussed the draft road map for cooperation between the Organization and the country, which was adopted by Heads of Government in November 2018.
- In June 2019, Afghanistan and Pakistan reviewed the implementation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity. In November 2019, a delegation from Pakistan arrived in Kabul to discuss the formation of a technical committee to solve issues between the two countries under the plan. In June 2020, another delegation from Pakistan visited Kabul to discuss the facilitation of an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, as well as trade and connectivity.
- Senior officials of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan met in Ankara in June 2019 and in New York in September 2019 regarding the implementation of confidence-building measures. In December 2019, the eighth Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference adopted the Istanbul Declaration, including a new confidence-building measure on agriculture development and expanded measures for disaster management and environmental protection. A proposal to establish a confidence-building measure on the empowerment of women was also supported. In February 2020, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan discussed the security of regional infrastructure projects under the relevant confidence-building measure.
- In July 2019, the Prime Minister of Uzbekistan met with the Chief Executive of Afghanistan and agreed on the construction of the Surkhan-Pul-e-Khumri electricity line between the two countries, and the first meeting of the countries' Intergovernmental Commission for Trade and Economic Cooperation was held in Tashkent.
- In September 2019, Afghanistan participated in the third China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue, at which the countries discussed building trust and reconciliation efforts. In July 2020, during the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Vice Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue, cooperation on COVID-19 and the Afghan peace and reconciliation process were discussed.

*Indicators of progress**Metrics*

- In October 2019, Kazakhstan and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe organized a round table on fostering cooperation with Afghanistan, focused on synergies between organizations involved in assisting Afghanistan, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the United Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.
 - In November 2019, the Council of Ministers of the Economic Cooperation Organization reaffirmed the commitment of member States to promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan, including through the special fund of the Economic Cooperation Organization on the restoration of Afghanistan.
 - In January 2020, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy launched the Green Central Asia initiative, supporting dialogue on climate change and associated risks.
 - In February 2020, the Special Envoy of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Afghanistan met with the President in Kabul for discussions on economic cooperation, counter-terrorism and the fight against extremism and drug trafficking. In June 2020, acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Tehran, where they discussed cooperation on security, border management, Afghan refugees and migrants, and transportation.
 - During the reporting period, there were also a number of regional projects. In February 2020, the President laid the foundation stone for the Central Asia-South Asia power project, to transmit electricity from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, through Afghanistan, to Pakistan. Construction is already ongoing in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. In October 2019, the port of Gwadar in Pakistan opened for commercial shipping as a component of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and started taking cargo under the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement. Also in February 2020, the Government of India allocated \$13.9 million for the further development of the port of Chabahar in the Islamic Republic of Iran, with cargo from India having already been delivered to Afghanistan through the port. In April 2020, Uzbekistan launched a regular freight train service from Tashkent to Hairatan, Afghanistan. Efforts continued for the development of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan electricity transmission project.
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VII. Partnership between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community

Benchmark: coherent support by the international community for Afghan priorities within an Afghan-led coordination framework

Indicators of progress

Metrics

Increased proportion of aid aligned with the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and government priorities

- The draft Afghanistan national peace and development framework for the period 2021–2025 was presented at the senior officials meeting held on 28 July 2020. Covering peacebuilding, State-building and market-building, the revised framework is aimed at increasing external aid on budget, anticipating a post-peace scenario. The Government pledged to continue pursuing its economic growth strategy, prioritizing agriculture, extractives, regional connectivity and human capital development. The framework further contains proposals for strengthening rule of law institutions, combating corruption, improving public financial management and bolstering subnational governance.
- Donors sought tangible results on anti-corruption, good governance, democracy, the rule of law, poverty reduction, the centrality of the work of civil society organizations, inclusive growth and the rights of minorities. They called for the inclusion of human rights, women's rights and gender in all three pillars of the framework. The framework will be further revised before the 2020 ministerial pledging meeting, which is scheduled to be held in November 2020.

Improved accountability of procurement and contracting on behalf of the Government and the international community

- The National Procurement Authority complied with the Open Contracting Data Standard and published more than 75 per cent of the contracted information online; it also developed the first phase of eGovernment procurement software, now ready for pilot implementation in four public entities.
- A public key infrastructure service was procured and implemented in e-tendering.

Strengthening of the Joint Coordination Monitoring Board in support of the Kabul process and as a means of facilitating a regular review of progress on Afghan priorities and mutual commitments

- Joint Coordination Monitoring Board sessions were held in July 2019 and July 2020. Messages underscored an urgent need for the Government to address rising poverty and unemployment, corruption, economic development planning, institutional capacity, and regional cooperation and integration. Among the 63 deliverables in the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework, 18 were fully achieved by the July 2020 meeting, 34 were on track and 11 were incomplete, mainly attributable to security concerns. The overall implementation rate was 71 per cent. A new framework is being prepared for the 2020 ministerial pledging conference.

VIII. Counter-narcotics

Benchmark: sustained trend in the reduction of poppy cultivation, narcotics production and drug addiction

<i>Indicators of progress</i>	<i>Metrics</i>
Decrease in poppy cultivation, narcotics production and addiction rates	- The total area under illicit opium poppy cultivation decreased in 2019 to 163,000 ha, from 263,000 ha in 2018, a 38 per cent decrease. Potential opium production, however, remained constant at an estimated 6,400 tons.³ - Afghanistan now appears to be the second most important source country of cannabis resin worldwide, being identified as the source of 19 per cent of the seizures reported for the period 2014–2018.
Increase in effective interdiction and counter-trafficking efforts	- In the first half of 2020, Afghan authorities conducted 1,242 counter-narcotics operations leading to the seizure of 910 kg of heroin, 127 kg of morphine, 3,204 kg of opium, 3,464 kg of poppy seeds, 355 kg of methamphetamine, 23 kg of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, 46 kg of 3,4-methylenedioxymetamphetamine (MDMA), 70,581 kg of hashish and cannabis, 141 kg of tramadol tablets, 5,840 litres of formic acid and 221 litres of acetic anhydride. In addition, 917 ha of opium poppy and 5 ha of cannabis were eradicated. - By comparison, in 2019, 3,661 counter-narcotics operations were conducted, leading to seizures of 2,990 kg of heroin, 6,903 kg of morphine, 33,611 kg of opium, 1,251 kg of methamphetamine, 646,000 kg of cannabis and hashish, 197,698 kg of poppy seeds and 48,221 MDMA tablets, known as K-tablets in Afghanistan. A total of 95 heroin manufacturing laboratories and 1 methamphetamine laboratory were dismantled, and 30 drug stockpiles were destroyed. - When comparing similar timelines, the figures for 2020 are significantly lower than those achieved in 2019, possibly due to the challenging political and security environment since 2019.
Increase in licit agriculture and related private capital investment in areas previously used for poppy cultivation	The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock implemented an alternative development programme in 20 provinces. The programme provided services to 24,807 farmers. A total of 2,660 poultry coops were constructed and 53,200 pullets were distributed; 2,660 women beneficiaries were trained in poultry management; 6,552 farmers were trained in dairy management, disease control and market access, and 204 milk processing centres were established; and 723 ha of fruit orchards were established.

³ Until 2018, Afghanistan Opium Surveys were conducted by the Ministry of Counter Narcotics of Afghanistan and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Data for 2019 were obtained from the Illicit Crop Monitoring Programme of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.