



Security Council

Fifty-fourth Year

4039th Meeting

Friday, 27 August 1999, 11.25 a.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Andjaba	(Namibia)
<i>Members:</i>	Argentina	Mr. Petrella
	Bahrain	Mr. Buallay
	Brazil	Mr. Fonseca
	Canada	Mr. Fowler
	China	Mr. Shen Guofang
	France	Mr. Doutriaux
	Gabon	Mr. Dangué Réwaka
	Gambia	Mr. Jagne
	Malaysia	Mr. Hasmy
	Netherlands	Mr. van Walsum
	Russian Federation	Mr. Gatilov
	Slovenia	Mr. Žbogar
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Richmond
	United States of America	Ms. Soderberg

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

The meeting was called to order at 11.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Afghanistan, Egypt, Finland, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Norway, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in which they request to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Abdullah (Afghanistan) took a seat at the Council table; Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt), Ms. Rasi (Finland), Mr. Sharma (India), Mr. Danesh-Yazdi (Islamic Republic of Iran), Mr. Takasu (Japan), Mr. Kazykhanov (Kazakhstan), Mr. Honningstad (Norway), Mr. Haque (Pakistan), Mr. Alimov (Tajikistan), Mr. Arda (Turkey), Ms. Ataeva (Turkmenistan) and Mr. Vohidov (Uzbekistan) took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, and in the absence of objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

I invite the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Kieran Prendergast, to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Prendergast: Let me start, if I may, with the military situation, since for the past month Afghanistan has been gripped by renewed and more intense fighting than usual between the Taliban and the United Front. The Security Council was briefed on the developments during informal consultations on 28 July and again on 5 August. The Secretariat's information comes mainly from public as well as Afghan sources, since the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSM) has no presence in the areas of active fighting. The Taliban launched their long-anticipated summer offensive on 28 July. On 5 August, the United Front launched a counter-offensive against Taliban forces north of Kabul and in certain northern areas along the Oxus River. The United Front subsequently recaptured within a week virtually all their lost ground. The front lines then returned more or less to their pre-fighting configuration.

The United Nations Mission estimates that around 1,200 Taliban and 600 United Front fighters have been killed in the past month. This fighting, however, has made little overall difference to the military balance between the two warring sides. The greatest impact has been on the civilian population, who have suffered greatly and whose plight I shall describe later.

On 11 August, the Taliban launched yet another initiative. They quickly seized territory in the Shomali plains north of Kabul, including towns along and adjacent to the so-called Kabul old road. Taliban forces currently are in the vicinity of the airbase at Bagram, but it appears that neither side is seeking to occupy the airbase, which no longer has its former strategic importance. When Commander Masoud held it he progressively used it less because of its vulnerability to Taliban missile attack. To relieve pressure on his forces near his stronghold of the Panjsher valley, Commander Masoud has made some diversionary attacks on Taliban forces on the eastern flank in the provinces of Laghman and Kunad, and also more limited ones to the west in Goa province. The United Front claimed to have captured some five districts in Laghman and Kunad. The Taliban partially refute this claim.

In the past week, the United Front claimed that Taliban aircraft had bombed civilian populations in Takhar province in northern Afghanistan. The Taliban claimed to be challenging Commander Masoud's western supply route into Taloqan, one of his main command centres. The United Nations can confirm that fighting is continuing between the two sides in Bangi district on the Kunduz/Takhar provincial border. The renewed Taliban

attacks have been reinforced by a large influx of recruits from the religious schools or madrassas in Pakistan. An estimated 2,000 to 5,000 young students, including Afghan and others, have joined the war.

If I may turn to the political situation, the present condition is that it is at a stalemate. There has been no direct contact or meeting between the two warring sides since their bilateral meeting in the margins of the "six-plus-two" high-level meeting at Tashkent on 19 and 20 July. Nevertheless, UNSMA, the United Nations Mission, has continued its quiet, behind-the-scenes diplomacy. In an effort to test the readiness of the two sides to meet again, the acting head of UNSMA was in contact with Commander Masoud on a number of occasions during the period from 10 to 12 August. Commander Masoud indicated his continued readiness, despite the ongoing fighting, to meet with the Taliban to discuss a political solution to Afghanistan's problems. He made clear that he was not interested in surrender to the Taliban.

With his consent, the United Nations Mission passed this message privately to the Taliban leadership in Kandahar. Mullah Omar's response was that the Taliban could not reopen direct talks with the United Front until they, in his words, "show their sincerity". Despite inquiries by the United Nations Special Mission, the Taliban have not clarified what measures of sincerity the United Front would need to demonstrate in order to persuade the Taliban to resume dialogue with them. The car bomb attack in Kandahar on 25 August, reportedly aimed at Mullah Omar, could make it even more difficult to bring the two sides back to the negotiating table.

In a separate initiative, the Pakistan Government has sought to bring the two Afghan sides together. Pakistan has indicated that its initiative was taken in response to a telephone appeal made by the President of the Islamic State of Afghanistan, Professor Rabbani, to the Prime Minister of Pakistan. Accordingly, a Pakistan delegation led by the Additional Secretary at the Ministry of the Interior, Rustan Shah Mohamed, met a United Front delegation in Dushanbe on 18 August and subsequently met with Mullah Omar in Kandahar before returning again to Dushanbe on 22-23 August. The United Front have publicly rejected any Pakistan effort at mediation, asserting that Pakistan's military and political support for the Taliban makes this impossible. Privately, however, the United Front have welcomed the direct contact with Pakistan in order to convey their viewpoint. To date there has been no public Taliban comment on the talks.

If I might now raise the issue of human rights, it should be recalled that the Secretary-General, in a statement of 6 August, expressed his alarm about reports of massive forced displacements of civilians from the areas where fighting has been raging in Afghanistan. In this context, the Secretary-General pointed out that the parties responsible for committing criminal acts such as forced displacements subsequently turn to the United Nations and the international community as a whole to help save their own people from disasters provoked by those who claim to be their country's leaders.

The United Nations has compelling evidence that the Taliban, in the course of their attack in the Shomali plains, have meted out completely unacceptable treatment to the civilian population. The Taliban assert that they have only destroyed houses used by opposition guerrilla fighters. But the extent of the destruction of homes and crops and livestock does not seem in any way compatible or commensurate with these Taliban claims. Furthermore, the Taliban have conducted a policy whereby the menfolk have been separated from families of internally displaced persons transported by the Taliban to Jalalabad. The Taliban have also carried out detentions and arrests of those suspected of supporting or favouring the United Front. These detentions have included five United Nations Afghan national staff members or their dependants. All but one have been released within the 72 hours of detention permitted under the United Nations security protocol with the Taliban authorities.

The growing use of boy soldiers by both sides, but particularly by the Taliban in their recent offensive, is another alarming trend. As members of the Council are aware, the Secretary-General expressed his deep concern over reports of the involvement in the Afghan conflict of students, some as young as 14, and he called on the warring parties to respect the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In terms of the humanitarian situation, reports of forced displacement and the burning of houses and crops in the Shomali valley have been confirmed by an increasing number of sources. The flow of internally displaced persons into Kabul is ongoing. More than 30,000 internally displaced persons were counted at checkpoints at the outskirts of the capital between 8 and 20 August. It is believed that the number of internally displaced persons in Kabul may be as many as 40,000. However, estimates on the exact number of internally displaced persons are difficult, as many people prefer not to disclose their place of origin or identity for fear of

retaliation from the Taliban authorities. Many of these internally displaced persons have found accommodation with friends and relatives in the city. The United Nations has not obtained, to date, official permission from the Taliban authorities to conduct independent identification of internally displaced persons in the capital.

As of 22 August some one thousand families are housed in the ex-Soviet Embassy compound in Kabul. The size of the families — between two and four members — is much smaller than usual as they are mainly women with young children and the elderly. The relative absence of young men is notable among the internally displaced persons. These families came with very few personal possessions. The World Food Programme has organized emergency feeding for the people in the compound.

A United Nations assessment mission is currently in the Panjsher valley and we expect to have more detailed information on the numbers, location and condition on the numbers, location and conditions of the internally displaced persons in the valley, as well as coordination requirements, by the beginning of next week. An estimated 60,000 people are currently displaced in the area. Most seem to be accommodated with local families, although some 15,000 people are reportedly camping in the open with no shelter. This causes serious concern, as the valley is very difficult to access.

There are also approximately 10,000 internally displaced persons, including women and children, in Kunduz and Taloqan provinces as well as in the northern area of Pulikhumbri.

Systematic destruction of the agricultural base in the Shomali valley is reportedly under way for military and other reasons. It seems that, in addition to the widespread burning of houses, boundary walls around properties are being demolished and irrigation systems destroyed. These are ancient irrigation systems, resulting in the loss of trees and important fruit crops that were due for harvesting. If carried out over a wide area, and not just close to strategic roads, as has been the case in the past, this sort of action will have a devastating impact on the livelihoods of the local communities. Many of these people had returned to their villages from Pakistan during the period 1994-1995 after the rehabilitation of the irrigation systems on which they depend.

As in the past, the use of landmines continues, which has added to the ranks of the disabled, the orphaned and the widowed. Both parties to the conflict have bombed and

rocketed with impunity areas inhabited by civilians. I am afraid it is the case that the warring parties in Afghanistan have, time and again, exhibited a callous disregard for the way in which their activities cause loss of life, limb and livelihood to the people of Afghanistan.

It is deeply disturbing that the fighting in Afghanistan, reignited by the Taliban's offensive on 28 July, resumed immediately after the Tashkent meeting of the group of the "six plus two" on 19 and 20 July.

This fighting in Afghanistan has almost a ritual quality, with the front line moving to and fro. It is also extremely troubling that outside support for the warring parties has not diminished. On the contrary, as the Secretary-General indicated in his statement on 6 August, in addition to reports about ongoing deliveries of ammunition and other war-making materials, there are now thousands of non-Afghan nationals taking part in the fighting. If this trend is not reversed by the warring Afghan parties and their outside supporters, the nature of the senseless war in Afghanistan will increasingly evolve towards an even more widespread and destructive regional conflict.

The unabated involvement of neighbouring and other countries in the Afghan conflict not only continues to fuel the fighting inside the country but also appears to call into question the practical significance of the various declarations agreed upon by the members of the group of "six plus two", a group that includes all of Afghanistan's neighbours. As members of the Council may be aware, the Secretary-General, in his message to the Tashkent meeting of the "six-plus-two", explicitly stressed the need for concerted and effective action of that group. Regrettably, we cannot say that this has taken place.

The apparent trend of growing disunity among the members of the "six plus two" can be expected to call into further question the relevance of that group as presently constituted. It should be recalled in this connection that the "six plus two" were originally assembled almost two years ago with a view to adopting a joint strategy *vis-à-vis* a peaceful solution to the Afghan conflict.

As we all know, this has not happened. A new formula of Member States' support for the peace-making efforts of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy may be required. It is therefore the sincere hope of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy that today's debate in the Security Council will generate new ideas

and approaches for the United Nations and the international community as a whole with regard to the senseless fighting in Afghanistan. Hopefully, today's debate will facilitate the return of a sense of international urgency with respect to the twenty-year-old Afghan tragedy so that finally a peaceful solution can be more realistically envisaged. We owe it to the heroic Afghan people who are the real victims of this unprecedented catastrophe inflicted upon them.

May I end by saying that the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, would very much have liked to be present today and had he been he would have delivered these remarks, but unfortunately he is in hospital, and I am sure the Council will want to send him their best wishes for a speedy recovery.

The President: I thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs for his comprehensive briefing.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, Mr. A. Abdullah. I welcome him and invite to make his statement.

Mr. Abdullah (Afghanistan): Mr. President, may I express our pleasure on seeing you chair this meeting and congratulate your country for the services it is rendering to the international community.

And may I at the outset seize the moment to express my delegation's heartfelt gratitude for your timely calling of this crucial debate on the ongoing alarming situation in Afghanistan.

My delegation is very much delighted that the United Nations, following years of scepticism or illusion, appears perhaps for the first time now — and only amidst the latest open upsurge in foreign military involvement in Afghanistan — to have developed an in-depth perception of the long-standing bitter reality of Pakistani intervention in Afghanistan. To this reality, *inter alia*, the remarks of 30 July 1999 by Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, head of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA), on the presence of thousands of armed Pakistani nationals fighting alongside the Taliban provides credible testimony.

Likewise, in giving further reference to the preceding context, I take this opportunity to thank you, Sir, and the members of the Security Council for the statement made by the Council condemning the 28 July large-scale military onslaught by the Pakistani-Taliban troops. The onslaught, as is widely known, inflicted insurmountable suffering on the innocent civilian population of the provinces of Parwan

and Kapisa, north of Kabul, including 300,000 internal refugees, by means of forced displacement, deportation and separation of women and children from their menfolk and also, recently, by a scorched-earth policy.

For too long, the world has generously given Pakistan the benefit of the doubt that it might eventually aspire to the genuine desire of the international community to bring peace to Afghanistan by putting an end to its interventions there and thus coming out not guilty. Today, the sad irony remains, however, that having felt the pulse of the world, Pakistan has cynically pushed to navigate the streamlining of its interventions in Afghanistan towards the ulterior motive of occupying the country, with flagrancy and impunity. Perhaps this could best be spelled out by a Pakistani daily, the *Frontier Post*, dated 23 August 1999, just four days old, quoting renowned Pakistani politicians, which I now wish to read out:

“According to a joint press statement issued here on Sunday [22 August] the Northwest Frontier Pakistan chief of Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party, Mukhtar Khan Yousafzai, and central vice chairman, Misal Khan, said that, on the one hand, Pakistan was sending its delegations to talk with different factions in Afghanistan to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan, while, on the other hand, they were openly supporting Taliban militia ... They alleged that in the countenance of Taliban, Pakistan had even sent its Army personnel to give armed support to their favourites in Afghanistan.”

Over the past three years, on various occasions, the Islamic State of Afghanistan, has amply painted a picture of the dangers stemming from Talibanism and the pursuit by Pakistan of a hegemonic agenda in South and Central Asia. The picture, fearful as it is, has persuaded much of the international community to further highlight its details in numerous joint declarations, statements and communiqués within as well as outside of the region, and also at the United Nations.

Being unequivocally in concurrence with the international community regarding the dire need for the Security Council to address the Pakistani aggression in Afghanistan and to adopt concrete measures against the ultra-intransigent, obstinate and rejectionist Taliban, the Islamic State of Afghanistan once again draws the attention of the Council to the implications of the Pakistani-Taliban agenda, which is neither restricted in time nor confined by geography. Otherwise, one cannot explain the birth of such a phenomenon on the verge of

the next millennium, nor can one rationalize the participation of extremist elements — from China, Burma, Bangladesh, Uzbekistan, Algeria, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, against the will of their Governments, as well as thousands from Pakistan organized by the Government of Pakistan — all ready and willing to die in what has abusively been labelled a jihad, or holy struggle, but is in fact directed against humanity and civilization.

In this context, I would like to very briefly elaborate on the legal foundations, evidence and facts regarding the need for the Security Council to adopt such measures. First, on the subject of major legal arguments: Article 2, paragraph 4, of the United Nations Charter requires that all Member States should refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State. The Pakistani intervention in Afghanistan runs counter to this transparent and unambiguous disposition of the United Nations Charter, an intervention the substantiation of which intervention I will address below.

Secondly, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, 24 October 1970, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration of Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States and made it clear that every State has the duty to refrain from involvement in civil strife and terrorist acts in another State. The Declaration also proclaimed that every State has the duty to refrain from organizing, instigating, assisting or participating in acts of civil strife or terrorist acts in another State, or condoning organized activities within its territory directed towards the commission of such acts. Pakistani involvement and activities in Afghanistan and South and Central Asia go against the disposition of this Declaration.

Thirdly, on 14 December 1974, the General Assembly adopted the Definition of Aggression. Paragraph (g) of article 3 of the Definition considered as aggression

“The sending by or on behalf of a State of armed bands, groups, irregulars or mercenaries, which carry out acts of armed force against another State”.

Pakistan has continuously committed such acts against the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan.

Fourthly, on 8 December 1998 the General Assembly adopted resolution 53/108, entitled “Measures to eliminate international terrorism”, operative paragraph 5 of which

calls upon States to refrain from financing, encouraging, providing training for or otherwise supporting terrorist activities. In an explicit violation of this disposition, Pakistan serves as a safe haven for extremists coming from all over the world, some of whom we have in our custody. The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan has organized the recruitment and training of these terrorists. Thus, it is logical and appropriate to name Pakistan as a State-sponsored terrorist country.

Fifthly, on 9 December 1998, the General Assembly, in resolution 53/135, “Use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination”, expressed the international community’s alarm and concern about the dangers that the activities of mercenaries pose to peace and security in developing countries. In open defiance of this resolution, the Pakistani ISI has been actively recruiting and training mercenaries from abroad, as well as internally, to achieve its hegemonic purposes in South and Central Asia.

For the sake of brevity, I will not elaborate further on the ample disposition of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and other regional and international decisions with regard to the maintenance of peace and security in Afghanistan and throughout the world, decisions which have irresponsibly been violated by Pakistan as a rogue State.

Allow me to highlight some facts and evidence about direct Pakistani military involvement in Afghanistan, as contained in United Nations documents and based on findings of the security services of the Islamic State of Afghanistan. With regard to the Pakistani agenda and evidence of its intervention in Afghanistan, the underlying Pakistani objective in Afghanistan is its use for strategic purposes, secured through a subservient ‘government’ which the Taliban would provide. Pakistan will eventually extend its influence, or so the military planners of Pakistan think, to petroleum and gas-rich Central Asia. The implementation of Pakistan’s hegemonic designs in Afghanistan continues to have the high price of systematic genocide, ethnic cleansing and scorched-earth policy in our country. However, Pakistan’s only miscalculation is the strength of Afghan nationalism. The ISI continuously fails to understand the potential of Afghan resistance against any hegemony. Today, ISI-backed clergymen may have invented a new call for jihad against other Muslims; yet soon they will face total humiliation.

Allow me here to present facts and evidence of Pakistani intervention in Afghanistan aimed at securing its agenda. In the first place, the admission of the presence of Pakistani nationals and terrorist training centres in Afghanistan was made by the former Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Mr. Paik, and by the former head of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UN SMA), Mr. Norbert Holl.

Secondly, paragraph 17 of the Secretary-General's report of 17 September 1997 (A/52/358), referring to the physical existence of foreign fighters in Afghanistan, states that a number of prisoners captured by the Armed Forces of the Islamic State of Afghanistan interviewed by UNSMA admitted that they came from various areas of Pakistan.

Paragraph 18 of the Secretary-General's report of 14 November 1997 (A/52/682) states that

“United Nations employees also reported an encounter with an unidentified foreign military training unit of several hundred persons near Kabul.”

These assertions authenticate the recent statement by Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Afghanistan, in which he confirmed the existence of thousands of Pakistanis fighting in Afghanistan.

Thirdly, the Pakistani Foreign Secretary, Mr. Shamshad Ahmad, made an indirect confession on 19 August by saying that

“Pakistan could not be responsible for any students from religious schools in Pakistan who might have entered Afghanistan to join the conflict.”

Up until 18 August, Pakistan was denying outright the existence of any armed Pakistanis in Afghanistan. At least half the truth was admitted.

Fourthly, while we remain appreciative of these affirmations, it is earnestly anticipated that an investigating team assigned by the Security Council to acquire detailed information including interviews with captured Pakistani as well as, lately, Chinese and Burmese prisoners, will upon its return report on the vast dimensions of the alarming situation in Afghanistan.

In fact, evidence obtained by the military authorities of the Islamic State of Afghanistan on the command and control of military campaigns, the extensive use of heavy

artillery and superior air power and the use of night vision equipment to advance in the dark clearly casts aside all doubts about the discernible direct and large-scale Pakistani involvement in Afghanistan and overt military assistance to the Taliban. Among the latest evidence of Pakistan's direct involvement are intercepted radio transmissions in the Punjabi language of Pakistani officers — communications from the combat zone command centre in the latest offensive in the Shomali plains. In addition, during the latest military offensive of 28 July, 19 Pakistani military officers died and many others were injured. A complete list of their names can be made available to the Secretariat or to any investigative team for inquiry.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan firmly believes that the above-mentioned facts represent blatant breaches of the United Nations Charter and numerous United Nations General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, including resolutions on terrorism and the use of mercenaries. The Security Council, we expect, will find it a duty to discharge its responsibilities for maintaining international peace and security in accordance with the Charter. Pakistan's aggression and State-sponsored terrorism and activities, which pose a threat to the peace and security of the region and hamper regional development and cooperation, should be determined, condemned and dealt with by taking appropriate measures.

I now turn to the intransigent attitude of the Taliban. The United Nations has already recognized the bellicose, obstinate and intransigent attitude of the Taliban. The report of the Secretary-General of 16 March 1997 (S/1997/240) stated that, judging both from their words and from their activities on the ground, the Taliban appeared determined to gain military and political control of Afghanistan and to establish their own version of an Islamic State. This war-mongering attitude of the Taliban continues without the slightest change. Last year, the Taliban unilaterally abandoned the Ashkabad peace talks on 14 March. Even when they attended the meeting of the “six plus two” group in Tashkent on 19 July of this year, they definitively refrained from any commitment to peace, a ceasefire or continuation of negotiations. Just nine days later, aided and accompanied by Pakistani consignments, they launched the much-prepared and all-out offensive on the Shomali plains, north of Kabul.

The international community can no longer afford to be beguiled by the words of the Taliban about the change in their attitude, behaviour, doctrine or policy. The last

four years proved every optimistic person or agency wrong about Taliban claims of policy change. On a few occasions many were unwarrantedly entrapped by Taliban rhetoric, later realizing that Taliban mouthpieces had launched a propaganda campaign to mislead the world. The Taliban search for *lebensraum* explains the latest genocide, ethnic cleansing and depopulation campaign by means of a scorched-earth policy in the Shomali plains.

As contained in paragraph 15 of resolution 1214 (1998), of 8 December 1998, the Islamic State of Afghanistan earnestly expects the Security Council to consider the imposition of immediate sanctions against both the Taliban and their Pakistani mentor in accordance with its responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations. Per se, can any one imagine what a halt in just the supply of fuel destined for Pakistani Taliban tanks, planes and vehicles could amount to in Afghanistan?

While appreciating the role of the United Nations and the Secretary-General, and the tireless efforts of Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi and the member States of the “six plus two” group — who are all in favour of the peace process in Afghanistan — the Islamic State of Afghanistan, mindful of the principle of a peaceful solution to the conflict, earnestly desires a broad-based, fully representative and multi-ethnic Government in Afghanistan. The Islamic State of Afghanistan is also keen to maintain good relations with all its neighbouring countries, without exception, on the basis of friendly cooperation and mutual respect.

Meanwhile, for Pakistan — as it is directly responsible for the crisis in our country — it can be stated that its search for strategic depth in Afghanistan will soon become a fall into a strategic ditch. It would be wise to stop throwing stones at others while sitting in a glass house.

The President: I thank the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic State of Afghanistan for his statement and kind words addressed to me.

Mr. Gatilov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to welcome Mr. Abdullah, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic State of Afghanistan, who is participating in today’s meeting.

The Russian Federation actively supported the idea of organizing today’s open debate in the Security Council, the purpose of which is to make public the views of the Council members and of a broad range of Member States of the United Nations on the present stage of the conflict in Afghanistan. We hope that this will help the Council to

determine more clearly what more can be done to assist in the settlement of this conflict, which is one of the longest-standing ones.

We are obliged to note, with profound regret and sympathy to the Afghan people, that the worst fears of many members of the international community came true when, nearly three years ago, the Taliban seized the capital of the Islamic State of Afghanistan. Having started with a brazen pretension to power and domination in that country that was accompanied by brutal reprisals against opponents, the Taliban movement showed in its subsequent policy and practice that it intended to continue to act in precisely that spirit, ignoring the frequently expressed will of the international community and aggravating the critical situation into which the internal armed conflict has driven Afghanistan and cast it into a political, economic and humanitarian catastrophe.

Russia strongly opposes the Taliban’s continuing escalation of the fighting in Afghanistan and condemns the Taliban leadership’s policy of using force to solve the Afghan problem. We note the particular cynicism displayed by the Taliban in carrying out a major offensive literally two days after the conclusion of the Tashkent meeting of the “Group of friends and neighbours of Afghanistan”.

We are seriously concerned by the increasing external interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. This can be seen in particular in the many reports of direct participation in the fighting, on the Taliban side, of thousands of Pakistanis and hundreds of fighters from other countries. We call on Pakistan to take immediate measures to prevent its territory from being used to provide military support to the Taliban. This would be in line with the commitments made by Pakistan, along with the other members of the “six plus two” group, in accordance with the Tashkent declaration.

We note with particular concern that yet another spiral of brutal armed resistance by the Taliban has led to increased suffering for the Afghan population. We cannot but sound the alarm regarding information on new gross violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law, including reports of mass shootings, arrests and forcible relocations of hundreds of thousands of peaceful inhabitants of Afghanistan. As a result of such actions by the Taliban in several regions of the country, including around Kabul and the Panjshir valley, where vast numbers of displaced persons have been

concentrated, there is a real threat of a humanitarian disaster.

We demand that the Taliban movement immediately put an end to this practice, and that it also ensure proper conditions for the provision of emergency humanitarian assistance by the international community to all who may need it.

We cannot accept the continuation of a situation in which the territory of Afghanistan that is controlled by the Taliban is used to support international terrorism and extremism of all stripes and also to encourage the illegal production of and trafficking in narcotics. It is no secret that over the last few years, as a result of these Taliban actions, Afghanistan has acquired a firm reputation as an international exporter of terrorism and narcotics. The negative consequences of this are already being felt far beyond the borders of that country, including in some regions of Russia and in the States of Central Asia.

In connection with such developments in the Afghan situation — developments that directly affect Russian security — we, jointly with our partners in the Commonwealth of Independent States, will continue to take all necessary measures.

The resolutions of the Security Council and of the General Assembly contain a condemnation of the actions of the Taliban and clear demands regarding the general principles and outline of an Afghan settlement. We fully share and support these positions. The cornerstone of these demands is the holding, under the aegis of the United Nations, of inter-Afghan talks aimed at creating a broadly representative government that would respect international law, including human rights and international humanitarian law, and would ensure respect for the rights of all Afghans.

We believe it is timely to recall that all of the resolutions of the Security Council on Afghanistan have been adopted unanimously, and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly have gained increasing support from Member States with each passing year. At the fifty-third session of the General Assembly nearly one third of the delegations sponsored the resolution on Afghanistan. These votes argue with great seriousness that those who ignore the decisions of the United Nations — and thus, in essence, openly defy the international community — should reflect on the possible consequences of their short-sighted policy.

We are convinced that the United Nations, which plays a central role in coordinating international efforts in

the Afghan area, must take effective action to halt the bloodshed and lead the parties to a peaceful settlement.

We support the efforts of Ambassador Brahimi, undertaken on the basis of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, and also the activities of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan.

Russia is on the whole satisfied with the results of the meeting of the “six plus two” group, held in July in Tashkent, with the participation of high-level representatives of both Afghan sides. That meeting represented a very important step towards ensuring favourable conditions for unblocking the Afghan crisis. The meeting also bore witness to the viability of that group as a truly effective international mechanism for finding a way out of the conflict in Afghanistan. We feel that that group must increase its efforts aimed at achieving a political settlement to the conflict, and that the Security Council must support the group in every way possible.

In our view, one of the effective means for influencing the situation in this country, so as to shift the focus to negotiation, could be the consideration by the Council of the question of introducing effective measures aimed at achieving the full implementation of the resolutions it has adopted.

Russia confirms its readiness to continue constructive interaction and cooperation with all interested parties in order to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan on the basis of the resolutions of the General Assembly and of the Security Council.

Mr. Shen Guofang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): After a quiet winter, large-scale military conflict has broken out again on the battlefield in Afghanistan. The vicious circle of negotiating in the winter and fighting in the summer has been rolling on in that country for 20 years now. How to effectively push the peace process forward and put an early end to the war in Afghanistan is a pressing issue facing the international community, and that is why we are here today for this open debate in the Security Council.

The Afghan people themselves hold the key to the ultimate settlement of the issue of Afghanistan. To help bring this issue to a just and lasting resolution, the Chinese Government offers encouragement and support to the conflicting parties in Afghanistan so that they can put the interests of their nation and country above everything

else, disregard their ethnic, religious and political differences, stop fighting among themselves as soon as possible and establish a broad-based and stable government acceptable to all sides, on the basis of mutual respect and extensive consultations. The history and present reality of Afghanistan have testified to the truth that military means will not advance the achievement of a final settlement of the issue, and the only way to achieve such a settlement is for all the parties in Afghanistan to return to negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations.

The international community should strive to create a constructive, favourable and relaxed external environment for the peaceful settlement of the Afghan issue. To be specific, first, the international community, especially countries that have great influence with the various parties in Afghanistan, should work actively to persuade those parties to sit down and conduct dialogues and negotiations in a calm and reasonable manner. Secondly, countries, especially those bordering on Afghanistan, should immediately stop the provision of military assistance to the various factions in Afghanistan. The United Nations may want to consider imposing a stringent arms embargo on Afghanistan and formulating a specific monitoring mechanism. Thirdly, the international community should respect the final decision of the Afghan people as to their future.

For historical and practical reasons, we should be realistic about this issue and acknowledge that decades-old problems cannot be resolved by one or two meetings. China sincerely hopes that all parties will show their political will and work together towards the early achievement of the goals set out in the Tashkent Declaration.

The Chinese delegation appreciates the mediation efforts made by the Secretary-General's Special Envoy, Mr. Brahimi, and by the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan, and it supports the United Nations continuing to play the central and leading role in this issue. China is ready to continue to participate actively in and work closely with the peace-promoting efforts of the "six plus two" group. There are still quite a few difficulties and stumbling-blocks on the road to a comprehensive settlement of the Afghan issue, but that should not overshadow the fact that after years of turbulence and war, the Afghan people have a deep longing for peace and stability. Therefore, we believe that if the international community works together, peace will come to Afghanistan soon.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 27 August 1999 from the

Permanent Representative of Burkina Faso to the United Nations, which reads as follows:

"I have the honour, in my capacity as Chairman of the Islamic Group at the United Nations, to request that the Security Council extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to His Excellency Mr. Mokhtar Lamani, Permanent Observer of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to the United Nations, during the Council's discussion of the item, 'The situation in Afghanistan'".

That letter will be published as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/1999/916.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 to His Excellency Mr. Lamani.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

Mr. Petrella (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me at the outset to express my gratitude to Under-Secretary-General Prendergast for the information that he provided at the beginning of this debate.

The delegation of Argentina welcomes the initiative of addressing the Afghan crisis in an orientation debate open to all delegations. We believe that the renewed military escalation that began at the end of last month, as is the case every summer, is sufficient proof of the repetitive pattern of chronic fighting that is prolonging the political uncertainty and deepening the misery of the Afghan people by causing many casualties among the innocent population.

We deeply regret that this fresh military offensive on the part of the Taliban should be taking place in the wake of the high-level meeting in Tashkent, held under United Nations auspices in the framework of the "six plus two" group. The Tashkent Conference was an important event, because it marked the first time that the parties, represented at a high level, have come to the negotiating table in a context in which it was clear to all that the Afghan question has no military solution. This is a step in the right direction which should be emphasized.

It is important also to note that in Tashkent the members of the "six plus two" group undertook not to render military assistance to the parties to the conflict and to prevent the use of their territories for military purposes.

Unfortunately, all indications are that this latest offensive received external support, which is hard to overlook.

Tashkent was a necessary step that taught us that we should be wary of expecting overly encouraging results and that perhaps the time has come to try other kinds of strategies.

The Argentine delegation has never ceased, and will not cease, to urge the parties involved to return to diplomatic channels and to desist from seeking a military solution which, after many years of fighting and many innocent victims, has proved to be futile. Likewise, we have requested that priority attention be given to respect for the human rights of the civilian population, in particular those of women and children, and that the security of United Nations and humanitarian personnel should be safeguarded. The Argentine delegation would voice its recognition of those men and women who are doing humanitarian work and making tremendous sacrifices to extend their solidarity to people in need. We wish once again to emphasize these points in the light of what we heard from Under-Secretary-General Prendergast today.

We condemn the fresh military escalation and the fact that shelter has been given to international terrorism. We deplore the external interference that is merely protracting the conflict, adding to the humanitarian disaster and causing even greater suffering.

We are grateful for the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, and of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan. It is our hope that today's debate will help us to formulate an appropriate strategy for the resolution of this crisis. It is high time to send the international community a clear signal that the Security Council is ready to consider suitable options so as to help to resolve the Afghan crisis.

Mr. Buallay (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, I should like first of all to convey my gratitude to your delegation and to express to you our appreciation for having convened this plenary meeting to discuss the situation in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan will be dealing for a long time with the consequences of the war and of the conflicts that continue unceasingly to break out. Though the factions are still resorting to war to resolve their differences, I believe that there is hope on the horizon that this conflict will be settled in a peaceful manner.

The continuation of the conflict in Afghanistan compels us to consider the deeper reasons for the conflict, for which the factions are in part responsible. The other part of the responsibility must be shouldered by the international community. The factions must be convinced that there is no military solution and that the only solution is the cessation of hostilities. A cessation of hostilities must begin in order to achieve national reconciliation, and a lasting solution must be found. States must redouble their efforts to ensure a cessation of hostilities by the factions. Thus, weapon supplies to military factions must be halted. In that regard, we hail the efforts made by the "six plus two" group to bring the factions in the Afghan conflict together at the negotiating table. We hope that at the next session of the General Assembly there will be an opportunity for the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the members of that group to consider the Afghan conflict.

Among the direct consequences of the Afghan conflict is the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, as seen in the increased number of refugees and displaced persons and the increased number of landmines and unexploded ordnance, which are obstacles to rehabilitation and development in Afghanistan and to the return of refugees to their homes. All these consequences of the Afghan problem underline the need for the United Nations and the specialized agencies to continue their presence and to provide humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people. We commend the role being played by the United Nations in this field. We also ask the donor community to increase its assistance to the Afghan people.

In conclusion, I would like to pay a tribute to Mr. Brahimi, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in Afghanistan, for his efforts and to the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan.

Finally, we ask the Afghan factions to put an end to their disputes and to find ways to achieve reconciliation for the sake of economic and social well-being and development of Afghanistan. Afghanistan has a long history, and its religion and traditions require that poverty, ignorance and illness be fought. For that reason we demand that the Afghan factions come together in order to lay down their weapons, stop confrontation and take up the cause of economic and social development. This will guarantee that Afghanistan can resume its place in the international community, which is particularly necessary given its strategic position.

Mr. Fowler (Canada) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, allow me to express my appreciation to you for convening this orientation debate on Afghanistan. Afghanistan has experienced 20 years of war, the flight of millions of refugees to neighbouring countries, the destruction of its basic social infrastructure and severe and widespread human rights abuses. While the human rights situation has been of serious concern for some years, recent activities by the Taliban have further demonstrated their lack of respect for the rights of Afghan citizens.

Canada is deeply concerned by reports of the forced displacement of Afghan civilians by Taliban fighters towards Kabul, in particular civilians from the Shomali Valley, and deeply deplores the tactics being used to prevent these civilians from returning to their homes, including the use of a scorched earth policy. We are also disturbed by reports we have received, and that Sir Kieran has just confirmed, that the Taliban have sought to separate displaced women and children from their male family members. The forced displacement of civilians and destruction of civilian property represents a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and an abuse of human rights. Canada condemns such actions and calls on the Taliban authorities to cease them immediately.

(*spoke in English*)

We are dismayed by persistent reports of atrocities and by the systemic discrimination against women and girls which prevails in Afghanistan. The rights of Afghan citizens are protected under the Covenants on political and civil, economic, social and cultural rights, the Geneva Conventions and other international instruments to which Afghanistan is a party, and they must be respected.

Canada urges both sides in this conflict to ensure that the needs of displaced and other war-affected populations are fully met. We are concerned by reports of the use of child soldiers in the current campaign, including those under the age of 15. We urge all parties to refrain from the use of child soldiers and to guarantee the safety, security and unimpeded access of humanitarian workers to populations in need.

Canada calls on Pakistan to use its good offices to encourage the Taliban to halt the forced displacement of civilians and to return to talks with the Northern Alliance. The Afghan crisis should be resolved through peaceful means and, to this effect, all countries should refrain from providing financial or material support to the warring factions in Afghanistan.

Canada continues to support the work of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy and to endorse the peaceful settlement of the Afghan civil war on the basis of the principles contained in Security Council resolution 1214 (1998). We urge the members of the "six plus two" group to honour the commitments they have made and redouble their efforts to breathe new life into the Afghan peace process.

I was distressed to hear Sir Kieran, at the conclusion of his excellent update, mention that Lakhdar Brahimi had been hospitalized. Ambassador Brahimi is, in our opinion, one of this Organization's most eminent and effective representatives, and I hope, Mr. President, that you will convey to him our very best wishes for a speedy recovery.

Ms. Soderberg (United States of America): The Security Council's first open meeting on the Afghanistan conflict comes at a critical moment for that nation. The people of Afghanistan have been subjected to yet another round of fighting and human suffering. The latest crisis began with the Taliban's 28 July offensive against opposition forces of the United Front, and followed by mere days the signing of the "six plus two" group Tashkent declaration, which urged that the conflict in Afghanistan be settled by peaceful political negotiation.

The humanitarian impact of this offensive has been appalling. In the last month, hundreds of Afghans have become casualties, and tens of thousands have been driven from their homes. We are gravely concerned about continuing reports from Afghanistan that the Taliban have adopted what amounts to a scorched earth policy in those areas where recent fighting has taken place. There are reliable reports that the Taliban have intentionally burned houses; there are also claims that the Taliban have burned villages, destroyed crops and forcibly separated adult males from families trying to flee the violence.

This most recent Taliban offensive — and the subsequent Taliban retreat — has again demonstrated the futility of any side's attempt to impose a military solution in Afghanistan. Only by the formation of a broad-based government that represents the interests of all Afghans can we achieve a lasting resolution of the conflict. We support the continuing efforts of United Nations Special Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi and the group of "six plus two" to help shape this outcome through a ceasefire, the exchange of prisoners and the resumption of negotiations.

On behalf of my delegation I certainly wish to join Ambassador Fowler's wishes for a speedy recovery to one who is really one of the world's treasures: United Nations Special Envoy Brahimi.

To end the cycle of violence, support to the warring factions by some neighbouring countries must stop. The Secretary-General has noted that, in addition to liberal quantities of arms, ammunition and other war-making materials that have been supplied to the warring factions by their respective supporters, there are now thousands of non-Afghans engaged in the fighting. It is essential that the political process move forward, and we urge the factions to return to the negotiating table.

External interference in Afghanistan is also eroding the human rights of the Afghan people. Mr. Kamal Hossain, United Nations Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, has noted that the Afghan people are becoming hostages in their own land or refugees while externally armed forces seek to rule Afghanistan without the effective participation or consent of its people. Other human rights abuses, including the Taliban's deplorable practices towards women and girls, must also end. The denial of basic human rights in Afghanistan is simply unacceptable. If the leaders of the Taliban, or any faction in Afghanistan, want international recognition, they must respect the rights of their people.

Equally vital to restoring Afghanistan's place in the international community is ending its support for terrorism. We are deeply concerned by the continuing use of Afghan territory, particularly that under Taliban control, for the sheltering and training of terrorists and the planning of terrorist acts. Last month, by executive order, my Government imposed economic sanctions on the Taliban until they extradite or expel Osama bin Laden to a place where he can be brought to justice. The Security Council has on many occasions expressed its grave concern over the continued Afghan conflict, including the Taliban's harbouring of international terrorists. Last December, in resolution 1214 (1998), the Council expressed its readiness to consider the imposition of measures with the aim of achieving full implementation of its resolutions. If, in defiance of Security Council resolutions, the Taliban fail to end their protection of terrorists, the international community should bring increasing and certain pressure to bear on them.

The United States condemns all acts of terrorism regardless of motive or target, and we deplore the recent truck-bomb attack on Mullah Omar's compound and offer

our condolences to the victims. The perpetrators of this cowardly act must be brought to justice.

Our goal for Afghanistan remains a broad-based, multi-ethnic, representative government that accepts international norms of behaviour on issues such as terrorism, narcotics and human rights, including the rights of women, girls and minorities. We believe that only this kind of government can bring to Afghanistan the peace it so dearly needs.

We welcome this opportunity to discuss the measures that we can take collectively to end this ongoing tragedy and appreciate the scheduling of this important meeting.

Mr. Doutriaux (France) (*interpretation from French*): I wish first of all to thank you, Mr. President, for this excellent initiative. Much is said among the Members of the United Nations on the lack of transparency in the work of the Security Council. I think that today you have taken an excellent initiative towards transparency, and we particularly appreciate the opportunity to hear an oral report from Sir Kieran Prendergast on a crisis situation, the situation in Afghanistan, in the formal meeting Chamber of the Security Council with the presence of the Member States who wished to be present. This marks an important step towards greater transparency in the work of the Security Council. Thank you again, Sir.

I also wish to ask you to convey our wishes for a rapid recovery to Ambassador Brahimi. We very much regret his absence here today.

I also wish to thank the Under-Secretary-General, Sir Kieran Prendergast, for the presentation he made regarding the most recent events in the situation in Afghanistan. We are pleased to have the presence of the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, and we thank him for the information he gave us on the situation in his country.

The internal situation in Afghanistan has achieved no positive progress; on the contrary, it has undergone a clear deterioration over the last few weeks following the new offensive waged in the north.

France is particularly concerned by these developments, which are once again blocking a settlement of the conflict by peaceful means, are flouting the

Tashkent Declaration of 19 July and are exacerbating the terrible situation of the civilian population.

We once again condemn the resumption of hostilities and deeply deplore the failure of the various attempts at reconciliation among the parties. We note that the refusal of the Taliban to engage in constructive dialogue with the United Front is a major obstacle to the implementation of a peaceful solution.

We are concerned by the additional suffering caused by the resumption of fighting for the civilian population, whose humanitarian situation is deteriorating in an alarming manner. We condemn the continuation of measures that violate human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular those of women and young girls. We particularly condemn the operations carried out against certain ethnic or religious groups in Afghanistan, and we are deeply troubled by the deportations of civilians organized during the last few weeks in the Shomali plains.

France supports the efforts being made by the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan and by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, for the re-establishment of peace and the sovereignty and integrity of Afghanistan.

We reaffirm our dedication to the fundamental principles of a settlement to the Afghan conflict laid down by the Security Council in resolution 1214 (1998). We also reaffirm that the United Nations must play a central role in the establishment of a process for a settlement of the Afghan conflict. We support all of the attempts designed to promote a peaceful solution.

We must demand once again from the various Afghan factions to cease sheltering of and training terrorist organizations and to halt the production of and trade in illegal drugs.

We urgently demand that the various Afghan factions, and in particular the Taliban, immediately cease their repeated violations of the principles laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and by international humanitarian law.

We urgently demand an immediate cessation to all foreign interference in the Afghan conflict, and in particular the sending of arms and volunteers to the factions.

The French delegation calls for the continuation by the United Nations of all initiatives conducive to restoring peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Sir Kieran wondered about the future of the initiatives of the “six plus two” group. We second his appeal and his question, and my country, for its part, is open to any ideas along these lines.

Mr. Richmond (United Kingdom): The events of the last few weeks are further proof, if any more were needed, that there is no military solution to the problems of Afghanistan. Despite a month of bitter fighting, neither side has gained any decisive advantage over the other.

As this war drags on, it is the people of Afghanistan who suffer most. They are tired of conflict and poverty. As Under-Secretary-General Sir Kieran Prendergast pointed out, the latest clashes have served only to add to their misery. We are disturbed at accounts of how the Taliban have behaved in areas they have captured. Tens of thousands of people are reported to have been displaced, many of them forcibly, by the Taliban. The Taliban have admitted to burning houses and crops. The separation of men of fighting age from their families is particularly worrying. Beyond Afghanistan, the region and the wider world are affected by the prospect of instability spreading from this conflict and the threat from terrorism and drugs.

We must hope that the failure of the key objective of this latest offensive — to deliver a knock-out blow to the Northern Alliance — will have finally brought home to the Taliban and their supporters that further fighting is futile. They, and the Northern Alliance, must put the interests of the Afghan people first. The only way forward is to resume negotiations.

Afghanistan's neighbours must face these facts and commit themselves wholeheartedly to a negotiated settlement. The first step should be an immediate end to military support. The Taliban should not have been given the means to launch their latest offensive. All those with influence over the parties must do everything possible to encourage them to resume negotiations. Pakistan, with its unique influence over the Taliban, has a particularly important role to play.

Not long before the offensive was launched, Tashkent gave us a glimmer of hope that a negotiated settlement was possible. At Tashkent the Taliban and the Northern Alliance at last acknowledged the “six plus two”

group as a valid mechanism which could help bring progress. Ambassador Brahimi should be congratulated for his efforts there and since. In the next few months, all concerned must find a way to build on Tashkent and lock the parties into a genuine negotiation.

Mr. van Walsum (Netherlands): The Netherlands has noted with great concern that the most recent “six plus two” meeting in Tashkent has not led to a resumption of the inter-Afghan dialogue. It is disconcerting that, even as the Tashkent talks were taking place, the Taliban were already preparing for another major offensive.

In our view the Tashkent Declaration constitutes a good basis for a solution to the conflict in Afghanistan and may well be the best prospect for peace available. There is no military solution to the Afghan conflict. We therefore call upon the parties to lay down their arms and to resume without delay the negotiating process under United Nations auspices. The aim should be the creation of a multi-ethnic, broad-based and representative government.

It is essential that the neighbouring countries, too, commit themselves to the outcome of the Tashkent meeting. All peace initiatives should be taken explicitly within the framework of the “six plus two” process. Any foreign military support to the Afghan factions is to be condemned. It is of the utmost importance that the neighbouring countries, including Pakistan, strictly observe the commitment contained in the Tashkent Declaration not to provide military support to either Afghan party and to prevent the use of their territories for such purposes.

Another matter of great concern is the support within Afghanistan for international terrorists such as Osama bin Laden and international terrorist organizations. We call upon the Afghan factions, especially the Taliban, to halt their support for these terrorists immediately and to cooperate with the efforts to bring them to justice.

The latest Taliban offensive has resulted in thousands of victims, especially among the civilian population. There are credible reports about serious human rights violations, such as the use of child soldiers, arbitrary detention, deportation and forced relocation of civilians, the forcible separation of menfolk from their families, the murder of innocent civilians and the burning of houses and crops.

The Netherlands condemns these acts in the strongest possible terms. We call upon the warring factions to respect human rights in general and to show special consideration

for the rights of ethnic minorities and women and girls, as well as for those of civilians in armed conflict.

We welcome the start of the United Nations investigation into the mass murders committed in 1997 and 1998 in Mazar-e-Sharif and northern Afghanistan. We strongly insist that the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Mr. Kamal Hossain, should be enabled to investigate and monitor the overall human rights situation in the country and report back to the Security Council on this issue.

The resumed fighting has led to large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons. There are very few facilities for these people. The situation in the Panjshir Valley, a remote and inaccessible area with insufficient means of subsistence, is especially alarming. The well-being of refugees and displaced persons is first and foremost a responsibility of those who cause these forced relocations. The parties should recognize their responsibility and do everything they can to alleviate human suffering.

We have welcomed the voluntary return of large numbers of refugees to Afghanistan in the past few years. We are seriously concerned, however, at the cases of forced repatriation of Afghan refugees in recent months. While we understand the burden refugees can put on the available resources in a country of refuge, we appeal to the Governments of countries with substantial numbers of Afghan refugees to respect international refugee law.

The Netherlands would like to stress that the resumption of the fighting in Afghanistan and the lack of will to work towards a real process of reconciliation seriously undermine the capability of the international community to provide humanitarian assistance. The needs of the Afghan population certainly justify continuation of this assistance. We therefore strongly urge the warring factions and the neighbouring countries to facilitate the distribution of humanitarian aid.

The Netherlands is concerned at the production and trade of narcotics and illicit drugs in both Taliban and United Front areas.

I would like to conclude by expressing my delegation's appreciation and continued support for the untiring efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, and the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan to reach a peaceful solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. We

appeal to them to continue their efforts in order to bring an early end to the fighting and to promote the negotiating process in this country which has been ravaged by war for far too long.

Finally, I would like to state that the Netherlands concurs fully with the statement that will be delivered later in this debate by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

The President: There are a number of speakers remaining on my list for the meeting. In view of the lateness of the hour, and with the concurrence of the members of the Council, I shall suspend the meeting now.

The meeting was suspended at 1 p.m.