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Written statement* submitted by Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Towards sustainable peace and security in Afghanistan

Even though war against terror in Afghanistan was launched over eighteen years ago, many basic freedoms – from insecurity, fear and poverty are yet to be achieved. The battle between the forces of democratisation and those of destabilisation in post-Taliban Afghanistan is at its peak. Reports of ambushes, killings and bomb explosions across Afghanistan have been coming almost daily. The threat to security in Afghanistan is from the attacks by the resurgent Taliban and of late by IS extremists. The 24th Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted recently to the UN Security Council (S/2019/570 dated 15 July 2019) stated that “Al-Qaida considers Afghanistan a continuing safe haven for its leadership relying on its long-standing and strong relationship with the Taliban leadership. Al-Qaida continues to cooperate with Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and the Haqqani network. Al-Qaida members continue to function routinely as military and religious instructors for the Taliban”. While both the US and Taliban claim to be making progress in the peace deal, there has been steep rise in attacks across Afghanistan, with over 1,500 people killed or injured in July 2019 alone.

The year 2018 witnessed an 11 per cent increase in civilian deaths as compared to that in 2017. As the UN report on human rights situation in Afghanistan (A/HRC/40/45 dated 28 January 2019) pointed out that “The year 2018 began with two major attacks in Kabul alone in Jalalabad resulting in 143 civilian deaths and 265 injured between 20 and 27 January 2018.” On 20 January 2018 Taliban attacked Kabul’s Intercontinental Hotel killing more than 20 persons including 14 foreigners. On 27 January 2018 Taliban struck again blowing up an explosive laden ambulance in a busy Kabul street killing over 100 people. On 28 January 2018, 11 Afghan soldiers were killed and 16 others wounded by the IS attack near a military academy in Kabul. On 12 February 2018, 16 Afghan forces were killed by the Taliban in Helmand. On 19 February 2018, bodies of 9 civilians abducted by militants in early 2017 were found in the eastern province of Nangarhar. In April 2018 the Taliban launched what it calls *Al Khandaq* jihadi offensive targeting Afghan national forces in Afghanistan. Burqa clad suicide bombers struck a Shia mosque in eastern Afghanistan on Friday, 3rd August 2018, as it was crowded with worshippers for their weekly prayers, killing 29 people and injuring over 80 persons. On 21 January 2019 the Taliban killed over 100 Afghan security forces inside the training centre in Maidan Shahr, 30 kms south-west of Kabul. On 5 February 2019 the Taliban attacked an army base in Kunduz, northerern Afghanistan killing 26 Afghan security forces.

The Taliban are desperately working to undermine the state and create chaos and instability in Afghanistan. While the negotiations between the US and Taliban are continuing, the Taliban have actually escalated the conflict by carrying out several deadly attacks killing hundreds of civilians and security personnel. The Taliban targeted schools and mosques during the election period to disrupt and undermine the electoral process. ISIL-Khorasan targeted the Shia Hazara Muslim minority, causing over 1,800 civilian casualties (including over 500 deaths), nearly double the number of casualties claimed by ISIL in 2017. According to February 2019 report of UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 10,993 civilian casualties (3,804 people including 927 children killed and 7,189 injured) were documented in the year 2018, caused by suicide attacks, IED blasts etc. Another report of UNAMA titled *Increasing Harm to Afghan civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate use of Improved Explosive Devices* documents a sharp increase in 2018 in the killings and maiming of Afghan civilians by suicide bombers and IEDs. It reports that “bombs were designed and placed to detonate among crowds of civilians to kill and maim Afghan men, women and children, destroy livelihoods, disrupt lives and create terror among the survivors”. The report identifies the victims as students, players and spectators at cricket and wrestling matches, worshippers at mosques, humanitarian aid workers, journalists, medical personnel, education and civil government staff, civilians, election workers, men and women. Over 400 schools for both boys and girls have closed in the Taliban dominated areas of Afghanistan, due to attacks by the Taliban and threats to teachers, students and their families jeopardising the fate of over 4 million girls enrolled in schools and universities. While the US and Taliban negotiators were meeting in Qatar, the Taliban assault and car bombing killed at least 40 people in Kabul on 1 July 2019,

damaging a school and injuring over 105 persons including 51 students. In yet another attack on 27 July 2019 a powerful explosion hit central Kabul wounding Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's running mate Amrullah Saleh on the very first day of campaigning for the presidential elections. This attack demonstrated Taliban's desperation to thwart the forthcoming presidential election. Again on 7 August 2019 the Taliban suicide car bomb attack in Kabul killed 14 people and wounded 145 others. The Taliban and ISIS have increased their attacks, the former pushing for the withdrawal of US forces and the latter exterminating the ethnic-religious minorities. The IS claimed responsibility for a suicide blast at a wedding reception in a minority Shia neighbourhood on 18 August 2019, which killed 63 people and injured over 180 persons. The IS brazenly stated that "its bomber had been able to infiltrate the reception and detonate his explosives in the crowd of infidels".

While the negotiations between the US and Taliban are continuing, the conflict has actually escalated with recurrent deadly attacks killing hundreds of civilians and security personnel. International community needs to shed its ambivalence and evolve a concerted strategy to curb terrorism and extremism in and around Afghanistan by stopping their sources of funds, arms, logistics and training and ideological motivation. Indian policy has been to help in rebuilding the physical infrastructure in Afghanistan, training and scholarships for human resource and skill development and capacity building, building better connectivity for Afghanistan and enhancing trade and investment linkages with Afghanistan. The reconstruction of collapsed social and economic infrastructure and development of Afghanistan as the transit hub of regional trade and traffic, will help in putting the social and economic situation in Afghanistan back on tracks, though the process is cumbersome and long drawn. Intra-Afghan peace and consensus among various Afghan groups/stake holders is the sine qua non for lasting peace and stability.

Any attempts at peace and reconciliation should not be rushed and should preserve the constitutional process and other gains of the last 18 years. It should also ensure independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan. Such process should be based on principles of shunning violence and severing ties with international terror networks; accepting the Afghan Constitution; and honoring the rights of weaker sections of Afghan society, ethnic-religious minorities, women and children. In the current environment we have a situation where while a dialogue process between the US and the Taliban is underway, the latter has launched fresh offensives. While the peace process should be aimed at engaging and bringing together all the Afghan groups, it should isolate the extremist and terrorist networks which are bent upon recreating the Caliphate/Emirate in Afghanistan. During their talks with the Afghan politicians including former president Hamid Karzai at Moscow in February 2019, the head of the Taliban delegation Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai emphatically rejected the Kabul government constitution as invalid and demanded an Islamic constitution to be drafted by Islamic scholars.

So ensuring sustainable security and peace in Afghanistan is a great challenge facing the international community. International community needs to shed its ambivalence and evolve a concerted strategy to curb terrorism and extremism in and around Afghanistan by stopping their sources of funds, arms, logistics and training and ideological motivation. The reconstruction of collapsed social and economic infrastructure and development of Afghanistan as the transit hub of regional trade and traffic, will help in putting the social and economic situation in Afghanistan back on tracks, though the process is cumbersome and long drawn. International agencies like United Nations, World Bank, European Union etc. need to implement the reconstruction programmes employing professional and committed cadres in coordination with the local agencies/personnel. The future of Afghanistan with guarantees of peace, security and well being of its people hinges upon the success of reconciliation between rival ethnic/regional Afghan political groups and commanders, emergence of a balanced and broad-based stable government representing diverse ethnic, regional and minority interests, the setting up and effective functioning of law enforcement agencies, strengthening the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces by having a robust vetting process in place to prevent members of armed groups involved in crimes from being recruited by security or government institutions, on the speedy implementation of reconstruction of social, economic and education infrastructure, and on elimination of drugs and arms trafficking from Afghanistan.