

**Brief records of the 48th seminar of GPAJ on
“The UN Role in Afghanistan since 2002”
by HE Ambassador Youssof Ghafoorzai and UN Special Representative
Tadamichi Yamamoto
on 31 October 2020**

The seminar was conducted by online zoom. Mr. Masakuni Tanimoto, Secretary General of Global Peacebuilding Association of Japan (GPAJ) opened the 48th Seminar. He then gave the floor to Mr. Kuroda, who briefly introduced Ambassador Ghafoorzai and Ambassador Yamamoto.

Ambassador Yamamoto started his presentation entitled "The Role of the United Nations in Afghanistan since 2002". His main focus was on his appointment as the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan from 2014 to 2020. Before further introduction, he shared with us the functions and goals of the United Nations in Afghanistan. The functions and goals represented the international community, the guidance of the international community, and the country, towards peace and security in Afghanistan, the domestic (political) stability, etc. Regardless of whether the United Nations is successful or not, we should remind ourselves that the UN works under the authority of the United Nations Security Council. This has taught us that we do not have the freedom to do what we want.

When it comes to the involvement of the United Nations, it is vital to move towards peace and security. Nevertheless, the United Nations approach is to cooperate with local people, neighbors, major powers, and Afghan political parties to solve local people's concerns and make the UN more successful. Ambassador Yamamoto further talked about peace talks. Apart from Afghanistan the United Nations has a unique relationship with regional countries. As a result of regional relations, the United Nations organized meetings that resulted in an appreciation of the United Nations work in the region.

Ambassador Yamamoto further shared that they assisted women who could participate in peace talks. For domestic political stability-highlighted the issue of presidential elections and as a result, the elections in the 1990s went particularly well. They established the International Community Office by assuring the Afghan people that the United Nations is there to support them in their efforts to stabilize the situation in order achieve peace. They made it sure that Afghani people will not feel abandoned. In the field of human dignity; human rights and the rule of law are very important.

In terms of anti-corruption, the United Nations released an annual report in which the Afghan people said that for the first time the United Nations worked for the people, not only for the government. Despite the influx of billions of dollars of the international community in Afghanistan, the United Nations have not made much progress in economic, social development, and humanitarian assistance. In humanitarian assistance, they have helped 6 million school children (30% of girls). The level of poverty is still relatively high.

Ambassador Yamamoto concluded his presentation that without the United Nations Afghanistan, it would not be as progressive as it is now. Nevertheless, the United Nations tasks depend on the support of UN member states, which is the key to the successful execution of the mission. The country we are committed to needs to bring more freedom to our region in order to achieve a prosperous future.

Ambassador Ghafoorzai opened his presentation entitled "The role of the United Nations in Afghanistan since 2002 and its impact on national stability." Before continuing Ambassador Ghafoorzai thanked Japan for becoming a close ally of Afghanistan. Japan's greatest contribution to peacekeeping is one of the largest donors. He expressed to Japan his deep gratitude. In 2016, Japan led the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan under the leadership of the then ambassador Kenzo Oshima and the Japanese presidium of the Security Council. The well-known doctor Tetsu Nakamura not only sacrificed his life for Afghani people but also proved Japan's determination to improve life in Afghanistan.

Regarding the involvement of the United Nations in Afghanistan, it is important to mention that it already existed as early as 2001. Security Council's Resolution 1383 signed in December 2001 approved the Bonn Agreement to establish a broad-based and representative government. The Resolution 1386 authorized the International Security Assistance Force. Resolution 1401 approved a new political mission in Afghanistan called United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. In the area of governance, the United Nations has played a key role in organizing successive presidential parliamentary elections. It is important to mention that Afghan youth plays a greater role in a better Afghanistan, especially women's participation in the leadership. Women's rights remain the government's top priority. Helping to advance regional cooperation is another goal of UNAMA.

Regarding peace and reconciliation, the United Nations has considered persuading the Taliban to participate in peace negotiations in the past few years. The current peace process is a long process between the Afghan Government and its people. Together, the international community and the United Nations have increased the demand for the peace process. In July 2011, the Security Council made a major decision to separate the Taliban sanctions regime from Al-Qaida. Ambassador Ghafoorzai made his concluded remarks by thanking the United States, Norway, Japan, Germany, Indonesia, Uzbekistan, and the United Nations for participating in the peace process.

First commentator Mr. Koji Sakane made his comments as follows: Afghanistan has suffered from domestic instability for long time. Refugees from Afghanistan evacuated as long as 40 years. Afghanistan refugees amount 2.7 million, third largest after Syria and Venezuela. Taliban becomes the deadliest terrorist group as IS becomes weak. Besides, Khorasan Chapter of IS gains the ground, as IS members move in from Syrian and Iraq.

Currently, Peace Negotiations started since last February between US and Taliban. There is a concern that this negotiation has started without the presence of Afghanistan government. Taliban is still very strong, and they have their own way of governing structures. It occupied at least 17% of the Afghan territories, and 70 % on the territory is occupied or under contested by Taliban. They have their financial mechanism by poppy cultivation, mines and taxation from trades/telecommunication and foreign funding.

Moving forward, the Peace Negotiations were conducted since September between Taliban and Afghanistan government, but it has not gone as expected. As Mr. Yamamoto explained the lack of the international attention is a big challenge. In this regard Japan has taken a leading role, such as organizing Afghanistan reconstruction conference headed by Mrs. Ogata in early 2000, and Mr. Yamamoto lead the UNAMA.

Afghanistan people are pro-Japanese. Dr. Tetsu Nakamura was killed last December, but just 2 days after his death, Kam Air, Afghanistan Airline drew his portrait on the tail of their flight. It shows the extent he was loved and appreciated by Afghani people. Mr. Sakane concluded his remarks that Japan should take a leading role on Afghanistan peace process and its reconstruction.

The following commentator Mr. Keiichi Tanabe, Associate Professor at Tokai University, shared his views based on his experiences in United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) at sub-national level in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, space for United Nations was limited, mainly due to massive presence of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) led by NATO. ISAF was not only playing a key role in maintaining security, but also its Commanders Emergency Response Programmes (CERP) had huge budget for “peace dividend” projects, by which construction of roads, bridges, school buildings, etc. that were funded. Naturally, it was observed that Provincial Government was more interested in dealing with ISAF, although UNAMA had close relations with Provincial Government.

Besides, UNAMA defines its function as supporting role to the Afghan government for the transition process, and it is difficult to create tangible impact without concrete deliverables. Accordingly, it is challenging to evaluate the achievements of UNAMA. Having said that, comparative advantage of United Nations is its long-term commitment. For example, long-term commitment of United Nations enables Afghan stakeholders to be exposed to international norms such as democratic values step by step. As an example, at sub-national level, UNAMA’s engagement with Provincial Council (PC) is considered meaningful. Afghanistan is made up of 34 provinces, and PC is elected by local population in each province since 2005, and in Afghanistan, many politicians start their political career from PC. At the initial stage of their political career, UN’s long-term commitment facilitates steady interaction with future political elites, and it is an effective involvement of exposing them to international norms gradually.

In addition, United Nations role in advocacy, especially empowerment of women, should not be underestimated. Long-term commitment of United Nations has been fostering empowerment of women little by little under challenging circumstances. The momentum culminated in 2011 when Development Conference on Empowerment of Women in central highlands region was organized under the concept of “One United Nations” framework. This initiative also attracted strong attention from Afghan government in line with its National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA).

Thus, long-term commitment of United Nations has been making steady contributions to promoting democratic values and to creating an inclusive society in Afghanistan. Regarding the peace process, media coverage mostly focuses on the high-level negotiations between the government and Taliban delegates. However, it’s important to pay more attention to the local perception of peace process. This is because peace process will not be sustainable without Afghan people’s support. Not only top-down political will but also bottom-up support is the key to the success of the peace process. Mr. Tanabe concluded his comments that in terms of inclusivity, there are 4 women out of 21 government negotiation team members. On the other hand, there no female out of 21 Taliban negotiation team members. From this concrete example for the moment, we cannot be optimistic about Taliban’s perception of inclusivity. For reference he shared with us that women’s share Afghanistan’s Parliament is 27.4%, whereas it is 13.7% in Japan (UNDP Human Development Report 2019). In this point, Japan has a lot to do in this aspect.

Mr. Ken Inoue addressed a question to Ambassador Yamamoto of how he prioritized mandates in Afghanistan, and why? Mr. Inoue also asked Ambassador Ghaforzai about the meaning of elections when the population is divided into a majority tribe and minority tribes.

Dr. Ai Kihara-Hunt questioned the perception that the UN delivers the consensus of the international community, as the diversity of understanding on supposedly global values seems to be large in some areas, for example in transitional justice and accountability. She then asked if there was any issue about negotiating with the Taliban, taking into consideration various States' different policies.

Mr. Kubota asked the speakers a question on the UN sanctions against Afghanistan. Given that the sanctions were enforced against the Taliban government of Afghanistan between 1999 and 2015, he questioned whether and how much they were effective to impact terrorist activities in the country. He also asked if there was any repercussion on civilian economic activities that should be closely related to those of state and nonstate actors, including insurgent/terrorist groups.

Ms. Aleksandra Babovic addressed two questions: Bringing the role of the US into the discussion, as one of the principals and most influential actors in Afghanistan, whose involvement was heavily criticized as ill-informed, short-sighted, and ignorant to international law governing the use of force. Its reliance on and use of hard power tools has heavily damaged its reputation in the region.

To what extent has the UN ground work, which builds on the use of soft power tools, been obstructed by the US influence and specific goals? 2. Given that every country has an institutional history that oftentimes slows down its responsiveness to structural changes (path-dependency), what would be the exact criteria for success that the UN has set for Afghanistan when it comes to agreement implementation?

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Sukehiro Hasegawa, President of the Global Peacebuilding Association of Japan (GPAJ) stated that the presentations and discussions revealed signs of both optimism and realism for sustaining peace in Afghanistan. He then identified four issues raised during the discussion session. On the positive side, he pointed out two developments. One was the emergence of independent media that signified the existence of freedom of press, and secondly, the growth of national ownership in the decision-making process. Third point, he noted, was more controversial one raised by Mr. Inoue about the legitimacy of elections. Fourthly, he referred to the point made by Mr. Sakane about the uncertainty surrounding the intention of the Taliban to change their values and attitudes. He thought it both interesting and encouraging that the two ambassadors agreed that the Taliban had become receptive to the concern expressed by the international community about human rights. Finally, Dr. Hasegawa thanked both Ambassador Youssof Ghaforzai and Tadamichi Yamamoto for their insightful presentations and explanations.

Report by
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