Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan):

Afghanistan wishes to thank Her Excellency Foreign Minister Margot Wallström of the Kingdom of Sweden and her delegation for convening today's important debate, and we hope that this meeting will mark the start of a new phase in United Nations efforts to embed conflict prevention at the core of the Organization's peace and security architecture. We are also particularly grateful to Secretary-General António Guterres for his visionary and inspiring briefing earlier today.

Toda we witnessed yet another bloody day in my country. The Taliban committed multiple terrorist attacks in the Kabul, Kandahar and Helmand provinces of Afghanistan. Based on the most recent reports, approximately 135 people, mostly civilians, including women and children, were killed or wounded in the carnage. Among the wounded are our Governor of Kandahar province, the Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to Afghanistan and a number of other diplomatic colleagues. We pray for those who lost their lives and wish those who were injured a speedy recovery. Let me thank Ms. Wallström for extending her message of support this morning to the victims and to the Government and the people of Afghanistan.

Today's attacks in my country and the views expressed in this debate illustrate in clear terms that sustaining peace is a complex undertaking that requires consistency across multiple lines of effort. It also highlights that the United Nations is simultaneously preoccupied with an unprecedented number of security and humanitarian crises and that more focus is needed to overcome current conflicts and prevent those of tomorrow. A glimpse at the current international landscape reveals that violent extremism and terrorism feature dominantly in several conflict settings around the world. We believe that terrorism can be defeated only through a multidimensional approach that focuses on both its internal and its external drivers.

The United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism constitutes a key preventive tool for addressing some of the internal drivers of violent extremism at the societal level, above and beyond security and military measures. However, the United Nations must also pay greater attention to some of the external drivers of such phenomena. The cycle of violence and insecurity in Afghanistan and our part of the world is inextricably linked to the presence of sanctuaries and safe havens in the region, from which and in which extremist groups are sustained and enjoy an incessant flow of political, financial, material and logistical support for the continuation of their malicious activities.

In that light, the United Nations, and the Council in particular, should devise a viable approach to identify situations where elements in some State institutions facilitate violence and extremist activities by non-State proxies as a means to advance their foreign

policy agenda.

The sustaining peace agenda goes hand in hand with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and provides a key tool by helping to prevent conditions that may give rise to conflict and instability, such as poverty, lack of development and dire humanitarian conditions. Consistent with SDG Goal 16, the continued partnership of the international community with fragile States remains crucial for helping States to implement their national development goals.

National dialogue, mediation and reconciliation aimed at fostering understanding aimed at preventing conflicts, as well as resolving them through peaceful means, are other important components of the conflict prevention and sustaining peace agenda. In our case, the Government of National Unity is making every effort to ensure lasting peace for our peoples. In that effort, we are reaching out to reconcilable elements within Afghan armed groups who are willing to give up violence and embrace a new future as peaceful and law-abiding citizens.

We are pleased that our peace efforts enjoy broad support from regional and international partners, which is imperative for the success of our endeavours. Nevertheless, it is imperative, whether in our case or any other peace process, that the principles of national leadership and ownership be fully upheld, in accordance with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, including the principle of respect for the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. In that context, we have expressed strong reservations with regard to open declarations by some in our region about their contacts with armed opposition groups active in Afghanistan, conducted without the consent of the Afghan Government. Let me reassert that any kind of talks on the situation in my country has neither any value nor legitimacy without the participation and approval of our Government, which is the most democratically elected Administration in the history of our nation.

What are the additional steps required by the Security Council and within the United Nations system to bolster existing efforts and how can current preventive tools be better utilized to prevent conflict and sustain peace? The United Nations is well positioned to help address the trust deficit associated with harmful State rivalries, which often lead to conflict and wherein some actors go to all lengths, including the use of violent proxy forces, in the pursuit of political, security and economic objectives. That phenomenon is predominant in our region. The United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, can play an important role in addressing the root causes and structural drivers of conflict, and in furthering efforts to foster mutual trust and confidence for common gain at the national, regional and international levels.

Unity and consensus in the Council, along with efforts to ensure justice, are imperative for conflict prevention and sustaining peace. Far too often, a lack of consensus in the Council has blocked the effective action needed to avoid the exacerbation of a particular conflict and to create fertile ground for healthy dialogue on the peace and negotiations front. Moreover, strengthening the United Nations early-warning system requires greater coordination among the relevant United Nations offices to monitor fluid and conflict-prone settings in order to identify viable approaches to averting potential crises.

In conclusion, we hope that the year 2017 will mark the start of a new era of beneficial efforts by the United Nations to place prevention and the sustainability of peace at the forefront of its efforts to ensure a more peaceful and prosperous international landscape for humankind as a whole. We fully support the vision of the Secretary-General, presented today, on conflict prevention and sustaining peace and we look forward to working with him on its implementation.