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Afghanistan appeals for help with reconciliation talks

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The Afghan government on Monday appealed for international help to boost talks with the Taliban and other armed opposition groups.

At a UN Security Council debate on the war-torn country, Afghanistan's deputy foreign minister Jawed Ludin stressed the government's determination to pursue reconciliation efforts despite Taliban attacks and assassinations.

"We believe the process may benefit from the establishment of an office, within or outside Afghanistan, whereby formal talks between relevant Afghan authorities and representatives of arm opposition, including the Taliban, could be facilitated," Ludin told the council.

The Taliban recently opened an office in Qatar, which western diplomats said could help moves toward reconciliation talks.

The minister stressed the cooperation needed from Pakistan and other neighboring countries to overcome armed opposition groups.

UN peacekeeping chief Herve Ladsous said meanwhile that the UN mission in Afghanistan, UNAMA, will remain in the country long after the international military withdrawal scheduled for 2014.

Civil groups in Afghanistan and the international community have called for a "strengthened" UN presence in the country.

Ladsous said there had been a "relative" decline in security incidents in recent months though over the year so far there has been a 21 percent increase in incidents compared to 2010.

The number of attacks in September, October and November is down on last year, Ladsous said, without giving detailed figures.

It was hailed as "good news" but Ladsous added: "We mustn't deceive ourselves. We have witnessed large-scale attacks over the recent weeks. We must continue to exercise great caution and vigilance."

He said there had been nearly 800 civilians deaths in Afghanistan over the past three months.

A Security Council statement released at the end of the meeting welcomed plans for a decade of transformation for Afghanistan that a recent international conference in Bonn said would be launched after the military withdrawal in 2014.

But it stressed that the transition process "entails the assumption of the leadership of the leadership responsibility by the government of Afghanistan." President Hamid Karzai's government has been widely criticized for being corrupt and divided.