



**SRSB BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL**

**Briefing to the United Nations Security Council  
by the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Roza Otunbayeva  
New York, 18 September 2024**

[As delivered]

Madame Foreign Minister, [Tanja Fajon]

I am grateful for your personal presence at today's important debate on the question of Afghanistan during an increasingly complicated context.

Three years after the Taliban seizure of power, millions of people across Afghanistan have cause for mixed feelings. On the one hand, the end of armed conflict has delivered a period of stability not seen in decades.

It has put an end to the worst abuses associated with decades of war and created an opportunity for a positive peace. A number of positive steps have been taken in the fields of economy, infrastructure, and foreign relations to seize this opportunity and begin to address the many negative legacies of war. I have growing concerns, however, that this opportunity is being missed. The Afghan population faces a serious humanitarian and development crisis as international funding drops. The *de facto* authorities are exacerbating this crisis by policies that focus insufficiently on the real needs of its people and undermine its economic potential. And the ongoing mismatch of expectations and distrust between the *de facto* authorities and important parts of international community is depriving the diplomatic engagement effort of the momentum it needs if we are to implement the recommendations of the Independent Assessment.

I am greatly concerned that the 2024 Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan is only 30 percent funded, with around 900 million dollars received of the three billion dollars required. There are no indications that significant additional resources will be provided as we approach the final quarter

of the year. Unlike last year, there is no pipeline of residual funding to draw on. Real support on the ground has noticeably reduced.

For example:

- 260 static and mobile health facilities providing primary healthcare services have been discontinued, impacting 2.9 million people. An additional 171 health facilities are expected to be closed in the coming months.
- Nearly 900,000 children requiring severe wasting treatment will not be reached, leaving these children twelve times more likely to die than healthy children.
- Food rations had to be reduced from 75 to 50 per cent in communities already experiencing emergency levels of hunger. This impacts especially women and children, who comprise 80 per cent of beneficiaries of general food assistance.
- Six mine clearance projects had to be reduced to two. Only two donors support humanitarian mine action programs in Afghanistan, while four million people live within 1 kilometer of unexploded ordnance contamination. Children make up 86 per cent of casualties from explosive ordnance.
- Over 160,000 people affected by last year's multiple earthquakes in the western region are left living in precarious conditions. Women, children, people with disabilities and the elderly live in damaged homes that are structurally unsafe, leaving them exposed to further natural disasters.
- Up to 74 per cent of rural communities experienced drought in the past twelve months, including almost 5 million women and children, live in areas without access to safe water.

The approach of winter and the possible return of additional hundreds of thousands of undocumented Afghans from neighbouring countries and elsewhere will compound these immediate problems. The humanitarian crisis will soon become a development crisis given Afghanistan's quickly growing youth population, an economy that is unable to absorb them, and international donors who are reluctant to provide development aid due in large part to restrictions on the movement and activities of half the population.

Madame President,

The *de facto* authorities would not need so much international charity if they unlocked the resourcefulness of their entire population. I recently visited several provinces in the south of Afghanistan. A woman I met who had just learned to read told me that one of the greatest benefits was that she now knew that she had mistakenly been giving her children expired medication. At the same time, the most basic human needs are not being met. People lack water for crops, especially following the ban on opium cultivation. I have witnessed these miseries with my own eyes and spoken to the people, farmers in many places. We will continue to strenuously advocate for the rights of all Afghans but just as strenuously call for the assistance required to ensure mere existence.

We are at the same time trying to address the political legacy of Afghanistan's long conflict. In the current situation, Afghanistan is ruptured from the international community. Individual Taliban, many of whom are *de facto* ministers, are under sanctions and cannot travel without permission from this Council. Afghanistan's Central Bank assets are frozen, limiting the development potential of the private sector. And the *de facto* authorities have no representation in multilateral institutions.

The United Nations invited representatives of the *de facto* authorities to the third meeting in the Doha format last July. This meeting provided an opportunity for member States and international organizations to engage directly with the *de facto* authorities on a range of concerns. During the meeting, all major issues, including human rights, were raised. The delegation from Kabul heard loud and clear the concerns of the international community and were given a chance to respond.

Like many of the Special Envoys in Doha, I was encouraged by the constructive participation of all parties. The Doha format also provided an opportunity for Special Envoys to engage with civil society members from Afghanistan, including women.

We hoped that this would signal a good start to a new chapter in a more meaningful dialogue in accordance with the recommendations of the Independent Assessment. But the adoption of the moral oversight law shortly after the Doha meeting has undermined this process. Whether intended or not, by entrenching some of the most onerous restrictions on the Afghan population that the international community has previously condemned, this law sends a negative political

signal regarding genuine engagement – a signal that we cannot ignore. I have conveyed this clearly to my interlocutors in Afghanistan.

The law was drafted among a small group of religious scholars and with no consultation with the population that it regulates. Its provisions codify existing restrictions on women and adds new ones on women and other segments of the population. It gives extensive and discretionary powers of enforcement to the *de facto* Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. In its implementation, it has already begun to generate significant anxiety among the Afghan population. My colleague, Sima Bahous, Executive Director of UN Women, will provide more details on the effects of this law. Let me just say that it is likely to have a disproportionate impact on women. UNAMA has already received reports of women being prevented from going to work at radio stations, drivers refusing to provide transport to women not accompanied by a male family member and of stricter enforcement of segregation and dress codes in the workplace. UNAMA will continue to follow closely its implementation and enforcement.

The fact that these provisions have been put beyond the realm of discussion is particularly problematic. It means that one of the major obstacles to Afghanistan's full reintegration into the international community cannot be part of a necessary dialogue.

I am grateful to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for its ongoing engagement with the *de facto* authorities. I note the declaration from the recent Foreign Ministers' summit in Yaoundé, Cameroon says underlined the importance of ensuring the "full respect for the human rights of all Afghans, including women, children and people belonging to ethnic, religious and other cultural minorities."

Madame President,

I am often criticized in my discussions with *de facto* authorities for providing what they say are misleading and negative reports on the situation in Afghanistan. Every country has problems, and no government solves them by ignoring them. I have urged the *de facto* authorities to receive our observations in the good faith in which they are offered, and for the sake of the Afghan people and their concerns about their future.

Similarly, the international community has valid concerns about terrorism emanating from Afghanistan, despite denials by the *de facto* authorities. The most recent sanctions Monitoring Team report underscores concerns over the presence of terrorist groups on Afghan soil, including those that pose a direct threat to Afghanistan's neighbours. The recent attack outside the *de facto* Directorate for the Implementation of Decrees, killing at least seven individuals and wounding more than 20 others, is a reminder that the terrorist threat inside Afghanistan has not been removed. Last Thursday in central Afghanistan, ISKP carried out an attack which killed at least 14 members of the Hazara Shia community. We must find an appropriate mechanism to address this common concern.

In many ways, the *de facto* authorities are correct that their achievements have been underappreciated and that ongoing international restrictions on Afghanistan have made governance more difficult. But unnecessarily harsh policies and allocation of resources that appear heavily skewed towards security concerns rather than the needs of the people undermine these achievements and the well-being of the Afghan people.

We are nonetheless committed to moving forward on the agenda agreed upon in Doha III and UNAMA's mandate implementation, which includes deepening the international consensus on Afghanistan, establishing agreed upon working groups, maintaining all channels of engagement, advocating that Afghanistan fulfils its international obligations, and providing all possible support to the Afghan people.

Thank you, Madame President.

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