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The situation in Afghanistan

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The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [68/11](#) and Security Council resolution [2678 \(2023\)](#), in which the Secretary-General was requested to report every three months on the situation in Afghanistan and the implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), including at the subnational level.

2. The report provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan, including political, humanitarian and human rights efforts, since the issuance of the previous report, dated 20 June 2023 ([A/77/914-S/2023/453](#)).

II. Relevant developments

3. Afghanistan continued to show significantly reduced levels of armed conflict and some macroeconomic progress compared with the previous reporting period. However, the curtailment of Afghans' fundamental rights and freedoms, especially for women and girls, continued unabated. UNAMA has received credible allegations of human rights violations and abuses, including against former government officials and security personnel. The de facto authorities took further steps to ensure the implementation of their leader's edicts and to expand religious education. Educational opportunities outside of madrasas remained almost entirely unavailable to girls and women beyond the sixth grade. The de facto authorities continued to impose severe restrictions on Afghan female personnel working for the United Nations, which constrained the work of the Organization. The number of attacks claimed by or attributed to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) decreased, as did armed clashes and detonations of improvised explosive devices. Significant humanitarian funding shortfalls further exacerbated an already grave humanitarian



situation with unprecedented levels of humanitarian needs. As of the time of writing, the country's revised humanitarian appeal remained funded at only 27 per cent.

A. Political developments

4. At two years in power, the Taliban de facto administration remained firmly in control of the country and focused on further building what it describes as an “Islamic system”. While edicts attributed to the Taliban leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada, continued to be issued from Kandahar, administrative decisions, especially regarding economic issues, were taken in Kabul, which is also the centre for diplomatic and security functions. On occasion, the de facto Cabinet or parts of it were summoned to Kandahar, where administrative decisions were reportedly reviewed by the Taliban leader. In meetings with UNAMA, the de facto authorities have maintained political unity behind a conservative agenda, irrespective of how the decisions are perceived within or outside Afghanistan.

5. The Taliban leader continued to make new appointments of senior de facto officials. At the national level, this included the appointment of former de facto Deputy Minister for Finance, Mohammad Nasir Akhund, as de facto Minister for Finance on 3 June, and the appointment of five de facto deputy ministers, including two in the Ministry of Finance and one each in the Ministries of Education, Interior and the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, during the reporting period. Subnational-level appointments included five de facto provincial governors, nine deputy provincial governors and three provincial capital mayors. The reshuffling of at least 60 individuals at the district level as well as within de facto ministries at the director level was also implemented. The Taliban leader appointed Abdul Rauf Al-Atmanan as Mufti of the de facto Supreme Court of Afghanistan on 19 June.

6. On 23 May and 11 July, the de facto Ministry of Justice published the third and fourth Official Gazettes since the Taliban takeover. The third contained 69 decrees, orders and instructions issued by the Taliban leader between 2016 and 2023, all in force before publication. The fourth Gazette contained five decrees, setting out the mandate of four de facto oversight entities and arrangements, including the High Directorate of Supervision and Prosecution of Decrees and Edicts, and established the membership of the de facto Independent Commission for Final Revision of Legislative Documents.

7. With regard to the creation of the de facto High Directorate of Supervision and Prosecution of Decrees and Edicts in March 2023, its terms of reference highlighted its independence and authority over other de facto institutions. The de facto Directorate, which reports directly to the Taliban leader, has more than 6,000 staff and complete supervisory authority over the implementation of decrees, orders in de facto courts and other issues, such as the negotiation of the transfer of prisoners from abroad.

8. On 17 July, the de facto Prime Minister, Mohammad Hassan Akhund, returned to Kabul and resumed his duties after spending about three months in Kandahar on medical leave. Since his return, he has not participated in any public meetings or ceremonies. While serving as acting Prime Minister and thereafter as Deputy Prime Minister, Abdul Kabir publicly conducted around 60 outreach activities with a wide range of community representatives and de facto officials.

9. On constitutional and legal reform matters, in an interview held on 15 August, de facto Deputy Prime Minister Kabir reportedly referred to a process of drafting a new constitution, which was also noted separately by the de facto Minister for Justice, Abdul Hakim Shar'i. On 17 August, the latter announced the abolishment of political

parties, as their existence was considered not compatible with the de facto authorities' interpretation of Islamic law.

10. Security-related appointments included 5 new de facto provincial police chiefs, 4 new army corps commanders and 12 new de facto district chiefs of police. The de facto Ministries of Interior and Defence created new positions to accommodate Taliban fighters wishing to join the de facto security forces. Registration of these fighters began in a number of provinces, starting with Jalalabad on 19 June. As at 18 August, a reported 1,070 new positions were created in the de facto Ministry of Interior.

11. The reporting period saw the abolition and reshaping of departments within the de facto Ministry of Education, including the abolition of teacher training centres, affecting around 4,000 academics. On 13 July, the de facto Ministry of Education announced that staff of the teacher training centres would be reassigned to other departments of the de facto Ministry. De facto officials increasingly spoke publicly of the importance of madrasas. On 2 July, de facto Deputy Prime Minister Kabir met with leaders of private madrasas in Kabul and reportedly advised that the de facto administration would allocate a specific budget to support them. On 4 June, the de facto Minister for Education, Habibullah Agha, and representatives of de facto education departments of all 34 provinces, met in Kandahar to discuss education. During engagements with UNAMA, senior interlocutors in the de facto administration continued their messaging on girls' education by urging patience while a solution was found and asserting that in their opinion the ban was justified. A consistent message to the international community has been that girls' education is an internal matter and will not be influenced by outsiders.

12. The de facto authorities have indicated to UNAMA their plans to significantly increase the number of madrasas. On 15 August, the de facto Minister for Education advised that there were currently around 15,000 madrasas in Afghanistan, all funded through the national budget and reportedly using curricula focused on religious subjects with a few courses on modern sciences. On 23 June, the de facto Minister announced that the Taliban leader had approved the recruitment of 100,000 madrasa teachers. Unlike public schools, girls are allowed to attend madrasas, including past grade six in most cases. Preliminary field reporting by UNAMA suggests that the enrolment of girls in madrasas has increased.

13. On 2 July, a letter dated 26 June from the de facto Ministry of the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice was published announcing the Taliban leader's edict banning women's beauty salons within a month. The edict affected some 60,000 employees at some 12,000 businesses. On 19 July in Kabul, de facto security forces used water cannons and fired shots into the air to disperse a peaceful protest by approximately 25 salon owners and employees. Four female protestors were reportedly arrested and released later that day. By 25 July, most beauty salons in Afghanistan had closed.

14. On 15 August, the de facto authorities organized various events marking the two-year anniversary of the Taliban takeover. The de facto authorities' speeches focused on sociopolitical messaging, including unity, service to the population and education, and called for continued engagement with the international community provided that internal affairs were respected. A military parade took place in Kandahar and celebrations were held in various provinces. On 19 August, several de facto officials attended an event marking the country's independence at the de facto Ministry of Defence in Kabul; most of their speeches called for greater international community engagement with the de facto administration, the preservation of the country's independence, and unity.

15. On 2 June, the Taliban spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid, confirmed the de facto Cabinet's approval of a national budget for the 1402 fiscal year from 21 March 2023 to 20 March 2024. No details have been disclosed to the public. On 22 July, de facto institutions began holding accountability sessions at which entities reported on their yearly achievements and priorities for the coming year. As at 17 August, 32 entities had participated. The de facto authorities continued to pay civil servant salaries, including those of female civil servants. Government retirees have reportedly not received any pension payments during the past two years.

16. Defence lawyers continue to encounter challenges in discharging their professional duties. On 20 May, the department for defence lawyers in the de facto Ministry of Justice closed the offices of six defence lawyers in Kabul for allegedly operating illegally.

17. From 25 May to 17 August, UNAMA facilitated a total of 34 outreach meetings in 18 provinces on governance-related issues, including on principles of human rights and service delivery, among local de facto authorities, religious leaders, civil society organizations, the media, youth and other community members. UNAMA also observed 101 meetings conducted by local de facto authorities with communities on issues including local needs and inter-tribal tensions. Civil society organizations voiced concerns over shrinking civic space and the intimidation of civil society organizations, the media and female workers.

B. Security

18. Between 20 May and 31 July, the United Nations recorded 1,259 security-related incidents, a slight increase from 1,255 incidents recorded during the same period in 2022. Available data indicated that armed clashes decreased by 67 per cent, from 104 to 34 incidents; suicide attacks increased from one to two; detonations from improvised explosive devices decreased by 81 per cent, from 59 to 11 incidents; arrests increased by 4.5 per cent, from 375 to 392; and assassinations decreased by 35 per cent, from 56 to 36. Criminality remained high, with robbery, theft and murder the most recorded incident types. Some 27 disputes were recorded over land, pastureland and water distribution. The north-eastern, western and northern regions accounted for 48 per cent of recorded incidents, with Kunduz, Herat and Takhar the most affected provinces.

19. Between 20 May and 31 July, the United Nations recorded 5 attacks by ISIL-K in three provinces, compared with 34 attacks in eight provinces during the same period in 2022. ISIL-K claimed a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device attack on 6 June which targeted and killed the de facto acting Provincial Governor of Badakhshan, Nisar Ahmad Ahmadi; and a suicide attack on 8 June during the subsequent funeral, killing 13 (9 of them civilians), including the former de facto Baghlan Provincial Chief of Police, Safiullah Samim, and wounding 52 (37 of them civilians). In July, the de facto security forces claimed to have carried out successful operations against ISIL-K in Kabul and Nimruz Provinces.

20. There were three border incidents between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and one incident along the Tajikistan border. Tensions with the Islamic Republic of Iran over Helmand river water-sharing rights continued with increased security posturing at the border. On 31 July, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran stated that a preliminary agreement on water use from the Helmand river was reached with the de facto authorities of Afghanistan, including a visit by an Iranian delegation to assess the water flow of the Helmand river on 13 August.

21. The alleged presence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Afghanistan continued to cause tensions with Pakistan. De facto senior officials continued to

publicly deny the presence of terrorists in Afghanistan while TTP issued a statement that it did not need support from Afghanistan in its conflict with Pakistan. Following two separate attacks on 12 July in Balochistan, Pakistan, which resulted in the killing of 12 Pakistani army personnel, the Special Envoy for Afghanistan of Pakistan, Asif Durrani, visited Kabul from 19 to 21 July to discuss security concerns. On 2 August, the Foreign Office of Pakistan publicly condemned the use of Afghan soil by various terrorist groups to mount attacks in Pakistan, alleging that individuals from Kandahar were responsible for the attacks in Balochistan on 12 July. On 7 August, the Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan, General Syed Asim Munir, alleged that Afghan nationals had been involved in the 30 July attack at a political rally in the Bajaur District of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan. On 5 August, the de facto Minister for Defence of Afghanistan, Mohammad Yaqoub Omar, publicly announced that “jihad” outside Afghanistan was forbidden. On 8 August, the de facto Taliban spokesperson rejected accusations that Afghan soil was being used for attacks against Pakistan and called for common solutions, noting that Pakistan needed to manage its own security.

22. Armed opposition attacks against the de facto security forces continued during the reporting period, with 42 attacks in 12 provinces claimed by the National Resistance Front, the Afghanistan Liberation Movement and the Afghanistan Freedom Front. Notably, the National Resistance Front claimed it had killed four Taliban members after detonating a magnetic improvised explosive device in Taluqan, Takhar Province, on 15 August, and the Afghanistan Liberation Movement claimed a mortar attack on the airport in Faizabad, Badakhshan Province, on 8 August.

23. With regard to small arms and light weapons, UNAMA engaged with stakeholders on a multi-year plan and risk reduction framework from 13 to 15 June with the Terrorism Prevention Branch of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs of the United States Department of State and the National Counter-Terrorism Authority of Pakistan; in Kabul on 3 June with the de facto Ministry of Defence and the de facto mine action department; in Tashkent on 12 July with UNODC; and between 4 and 21 July with authorities from the Central Asian States.

24. The de facto authorities continued to report weapons seizures and the taking of steps to control weaponry. During the reporting period, UNAMA recorded 36 weapons seizures in 15 provinces, compared with 101 seizures across 30 provinces during the previous reporting period of 1 February to 20 May. On 22 July, the de facto Ministry of Interior issued an order requiring all firearms traders to obtain a licence to operate, all civilians owning automatic rifles to either obtain licences or surrender their firearms, and prohibited the importation of automatic rifles.

25. Between 20 May and 31 July, the United Nations documented 31 incidents directly affecting its personnel – a decrease from 41 incidents recorded during the same period in 2022. There were 15 cases of intimidation, 4 crime-related incidents, 4 arrests and 11 incidents affecting compounds, offices and property. On 13 June, in Kapisa and Panjshir Provinces, a United Nations road mission was stopped at two separate checkpoints where de facto security forces took photos of the staff members’ United Nations identification. On 18 July, in front of the United Nations Herat compound gate, armed guards from the de facto protection services stopped an attempt by two staff of the de facto Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice to search a United Nations vehicle for national female staff.

C. Regional cooperation

26. Regional and other countries and organizations continued bilateral and multilateral engagements on Afghanistan, with discussions concerning inclusive

governance, human rights, women's rights, counter-terrorism, border security, counter-narcotics and economic cooperation. On 25 and 26 May, the fourth meeting of European Union and Central Asia special envoys for Afghanistan took place in Ashgabat with the participation of representatives from Central Asian countries, the European Union and UNAMA. The envoys issued a joint statement urging the Taliban to lift all bans restricting Afghan girls' and women's rights to education, work and participation in public life, and to create an inclusive government. Neighbouring countries also raised concerns regarding the Qush Tepah canal, which the de facto authorities intend to use to divert water from the Amu Darya river.

27. On 4 July, the Government of India chaired the twenty-third Summit of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization online. The outcome declaration advocated for, among other things, the building of Afghanistan as an independent, neutral, united, democratic and peaceful State, free from terrorism, war and drugs, and supported the formation of an inclusive government. From 26 to 28 July, the Government of Kazakhstan hosted a "C5+1" meeting of special envoys for Afghanistan from Central Asian countries and the United States of America, in Astana, to discuss Afghan women's rights, inclusive government and further steps to engage with the de facto authorities. On 4 August, the Presidents of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan met in Ashgabat to discuss economic cooperation, regional security and improving coordination in response to regional challenges.

28. On 8 June, the Governments of Pakistan and Turkmenistan signed a joint implementation plan aimed at accelerating work on the Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India Pipeline. On 18 July, de facto authorities signed a tripartite agreement in Islamabad with officials from Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan for the trans-Afghan railroad project. On 19 July, the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council and of the Central Asia countries gathered for a joint summit where they discussed, among other topics, the construction of a trans-Afghan railway. On 13 June, liquefied petroleum gas exports from the Russian Federation reportedly reached Pakistan for the first time, traveling from the Russian Federation to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan by rail and through the Tor Kham crossing in Nangarhar Province in Afghanistan by truck.

29. On 24 June, de facto Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Ghani Baradar and the de facto Ministry of Commerce and Industry announced the approval by the national transit committee of a plan to transport gas and oil by way of shipments of liquified gas by truck from Turkmenistan to Pakistan through Afghanistan for a "trial period".

30. Bilateral engagements focused primarily on economic issues, including trade and connectivity. On 11 July, the Special Envoy for Afghanistan of Uzbekistan, Esmatullah Ergashev, met with the de facto Provincial Governor of Balkh, Yusuf Wafa, in Mazar-e Sharif to discuss economic relations. The de facto Minister for Commerce and Industry, Nooruddin Azizi, attended the fourteenth Russia-Islamic World Forum in the Russian Federation on 18 May and visited Kazakhstan for a three-day business fair and forum from 3 to 5 August. On 30 June, de facto Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi and the de facto Minister for Defence, Mohammad Yaqoub Omar, met with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammad bin Salman Al Saud, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

31. On 30 and 31 July, the de facto Minister for Foreign Affairs, Amir Khan Motaqi, met with a high-level United States delegation in Doha, including the Special Representative for Afghanistan, Thomas West, the Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls and Human Rights, Rina Amiri, and the Chargé d'affaires of the United States Mission to Afghanistan based in Doha, Karen Decker. In a statement, the United States noted the Taliban's continuing commitment not to allow the territory of Afghanistan to be used by anyone to threaten the United States and its allies, and that

the two sides discussed Taliban efforts to fulfil security commitments. The Taliban was urged to reverse policies responsible for the deteriorating human rights situation in Afghanistan, particularly for women and girls. While in Doha, the de facto Minister for Foreign Affairs also met with representatives of other countries' embassies located in Doha regarding issues related to Afghanistan.

III. Human rights

32. On 27 June, UNAMA released a report on the impact of improvised explosive devices on civilians in Afghanistan. It found that, despite a significant reduction in civilian casualties as a result of armed conflict since the Taliban takeover, civilians continued to suffer significantly from deliberate attacks employing improvised explosive devices. During the reporting period, UNAMA documented at least 154 civilian casualties (41 persons killed and 113 wounded), among them at least 65 children, that were predominantly a result of explosive remnants of war and targeted attacks using improvised explosive devices. Explosive remnants of war continue to cause significant harm to children, who often pick up unexploded ordnance to sell for scrap metal or to play with.

33. Between 1 April and 30 June, the Afghanistan country task force on monitoring and reporting on children and armed conflict documented 393 grave violations affecting 255 children, including 24 girls. The most prevalent violations included killing and maiming, the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict and the denial of humanitarian assistance, representing 92 per cent of all documented violations.

34. During the reporting period, UNAMA documented at least six extrajudicial killings of former government officials and members of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, at least 30 arbitrary arrests and detentions and at least 16 instances of torture and ill-treatment against such individuals. Human rights violations allegedly carried out by the de facto authorities against individuals accused of affiliation with armed resistance groups, primarily the National Resistance Front and ISIL-K, were documented during the period, among which were at least six extrajudicial killings and at least 45 arbitrary arrests and detentions. On 22 August, UNAMA released a report on human rights violations allegedly carried out by the de facto authorities against former government officials and former members of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. At least 218 extrajudicial killings, 424 arbitrary arrests and detentions, 144 instances of torture and ill-treatment and 14 instances of enforced disappearance were documented by the Human Rights Service between 15 August 2021 and 30 June 2023.

35. Regarding judicial corporal punishment, UNAMA recorded public floggings of at least 34 men, 8 women and 2 boys for a range of offences, including drug offences, gambling, running away, "immoral" behaviour and sodomy. On 20 June, the de facto Supreme Court announced on social media that the death penalty had been carried out publicly on a 35-year-old man in Laghman Province. This was the second recorded instance of the death penalty being carried out in accordance with a court decision since the Taliban takeover.

36. Freedom of expression remained constrained. On 1 June, in Kabul, Haseeb Ahrari, a poet and writer, was accused of and arrested for spreading propaganda against the de facto authorities; he was subsequently released on 24 July. On 12 July, in Nangarhar Province, a radio journalist, Irfanullah Bidar, was also arrested; he was released on 25 July. Since 6 August, the de facto General Directorate of Intelligence detained at least nine journalists across Afghanistan. In addition, Mortaza Behboudi, a French-Afghan journalist who was arrested by the de facto authorities on 7 January,

and Matiullah Wesa, head of the NGO Pen Path, arrested on 27 March, remain in custody. On 1 August, the de facto authorities stopped the operation of Hamisha Bahar Radio and Television in the city of Jalalabad, accusing it of running a mixed-gender journalism workshop. Two additional radio stations co-located with Hamisha Bahar were also closed. All three have since been permitted to resume operations.

37. On 17 July, the Taliban spokesperson announced that ceremonies observed by Shiite communities during the Ashura' period could take place; however, group movements and large gatherings were not permitted. In the cities of Kabul and Ghazni, de facto security personnel dispersed Ashura' mourners by force, resulting in four civilians killed in Ghazni.

38. The de facto Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice claimed to have made some efforts to improve staff discipline. On 24 May, the de facto Ministry publicly announced that one of its staff members had been dismissed after a video of the staff member slapping a bus driver was circulated on social media. Nonetheless, UNAMA documented at least 120 incidents of ill-treatment, arbitrary arrest and detention applied by Ministry personnel against individuals accused of failing to comply with instructions.

39. The curtailment of women and girls' basic rights and freedoms continued during the review period. On 21 June, the Kandahar de facto Department of Refugees and Returnees issued a letter ordering all female Afghan humanitarian workers to stop reporting to work in line with the Taliban leader's decree banning Afghan women from working with domestic and international NGOs.

40. Incidents of violence against women and girls, including murder, honour killings, forced marriages and beatings causing injuries or disabilities, as well as reports of women and girls dying by suicide, were also reported. In July, as part of quarterly consultations, UNAMA, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reached out to 529 Afghan women across 22 provinces. These women reiterated the cumulative impact of de facto authorities' decrees on their lives and mental health. Some 71 per cent reported that their feelings of anxiety, isolation and depression had become significantly worse over the past three months – an increase from 57 per cent in the preceding quarterly survey. Some 61 per cent reported that the decrees had been enforced with increasing severity and without exceptions in their local areas. Despite these restrictions, women continue to actively contribute to their communities, with 78 per cent of respondents stating they assisted persons outside their household whenever they had an income. Those consulted urged the international community to continue their efforts to remove barriers to education and improve economic and income-generating opportunities for women. Respondents emphasized women's legal protection in term of participation in politics, and their empowerment at the household level, were essential. They requested that the international community increase its engagement with the de facto authorities on gender equality and women's rights. Some 49 per cent of respondents warned that recognition of the de facto authorities by the United Nations should only occur under specific conditions related to women's rights, and 47 per cent argued that recognition should not be granted under any circumstances.

IV. Economic development, coordination and aid effectiveness

41. According to the 31 July edition of the World Bank's publication entitled "Afghanistan economic monitor", which is issued monthly, macroeconomic performance remained relatively robust during the reporting period. Unofficial customs data indicated that revenue collection for the first four months of the 1402

fiscal year (starting on 21 March) amounted to Af 63 billion (\$739 million), a 16 per cent increase compared with the same period in the previous fiscal year. This was primarily driven by border taxes, which represented approximately 60 per cent of total revenue. Inland revenue collection also improved, with a 7 per cent increase compared with the same period last year, reflecting primarily passport fees and mining royalties. While revenues have increased owing to intensified tax collection efforts by the de facto authorities, in 2022, gross domestic product (GDP) contracted by 3.6 per cent based on UNDP estimates, following a 20.7 per cent decline in 2021. The contraction was attributed largely to the severe decline in humanitarian funding in 2023. In 2022, \$3.7 billion in international assistance was provided to Afghanistan. UNDP has estimated that if a reduction of 30 per cent occurred against that same amount of international assistance in 2023, GDP would contract by 0.5 per cent compared with a growth rate of 1.4 per cent if aid were not cut.

42. The de facto authorities focused on increasing domestic production for the national and export markets by supporting both private and State-owned companies. On 3 August, the de facto Ministry of Finance met with sectoral chambers of commerce to discuss the guidelines of a previously established joint committee to address the problems of the private sector. The Abu Hanifa private sector exhibition, held in Kabul from 16 to 22 July, was attended by approximately 700 businesses, including 250 women-owned businesses. On 21 and 23 July, the de facto Ministry announced the reactivation of 12 of 44 State-owned enterprises since August 2021 and the establishment of a commission to evaluate the status of all State-owned companies.

43. According to the 31 July edition of the “Afghanistan economic monitor”, the World Bank attributed the year-on-year overall inflation of negative 2.83 per cent, as of May 2023, as having been driven primarily by a year-on-year decline of 5.85 per cent in food inflation. This was attributed to the base effect (high inflation in the first half of 2022) as well as decreasing commodity prices and the impact of a strong Afghan currency. Although essential food and non-food commodities remained widely available in main markets, the “Afghanistan economic monitor” revealed that over half of Afghan families continued to face significant challenges in maintaining their livelihoods and increasingly relied on international assistance and remittances.

44. According to the World Bank’s “Afghanistan economic monitor”, exports from Afghanistan reached \$0.73 billion between January and May 2023, a 9 per cent increase compared with the same period in 2022, primarily reflecting the contribution of coal exports. Imports were \$3.1 billion, a 36 per cent growth compared with the same period in the previous year. As a result, the trade deficit widened to \$2.4 billion.

45. Repair works on the Salang and Kandahar-Kabul highways were launched on 12 and 15 July, respectively. On 25 July, the de facto Cabinet instructed the de facto Economic Commission to prioritize energy projects in cooperation with the interministerial commission established for this purpose. De facto authorities announced on 1 August that 85 per cent of the first phase of the Qush Tepah canal had been completed. While work on the water intake structure was expected to continue into 2025, stakeholders repeatedly raised concerns with UNAMA over the canal’s potential downstream implications in the context of the Amu Darya river and Aral Sea basin for which there are no transboundary water allocation agreements that include Afghanistan. On 7 August, four large-scale iron mines in Herat and one zinc and lead mine in Ghor were contracted to joint ventures with international partners. On 5 August, the de facto Economic Commission announced a plan to establish a national economic advisory board made up of university professors, experts in economic affairs and representatives of trade and industry. On 20 August, the de facto Economic Commission endorsed an interministerial committee for the finalization of a national development strategy.

46. The Board of Trustees of the Switzerland-based Fund for the Afghan People, which preserves \$3.5 billion in reserves for Afghanistan that were formerly held in the United States, met for the third time, virtually, on 26 June. The Fund has reportedly accumulated a total of \$128 million in interest. In a statement, the Board indicated its decision to allocate a small portion of the Fund's interest earnings towards essential operating costs while seeking other sources of funding, and to form an advisory committee made up of Afghan citizens and international members.

47. The cash import facility established by the United Nations to support humanitarian operations transferred \$2.9 billion between 1 December 2021 and 30 July 2023. During that time, 19 United Nations entities, funds or programmes, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and 49 approved international NGOs accessed the facility. Imported bank notes allowed United Nations agencies to finance their humanitarian efforts and provided a transparent, low-cost channel for approved NGOs to receive international funding, while also helping stabilize the Afghan currency.

48. UNAMA intensified its engagement with the country's Central Bank. On 19 July, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Roza Otunbayeva, met with the de facto Governor of the Central Bank of Afghanistan, Hidayatullah Badri, to discuss the organization of an event on microfinance to highlight areas of opportunity, challenges and solutions to support Afghans in need, and for which a steering committee has been constituted, under the leadership of the Special Representative. The steering committee had its first meeting on 31 July. Subsequently, the Central Bank and the United Nations created respective technical working groups to improve coordination on banking and financial sector issues. The groups have met twice, on 24 July and 10 August, to discuss matters related to microfinance, challenges in the international transfer of funds, the health of banks, Central Bank capacity, Islamic banking and informal money markets.

49. On 27 June, meetings of the Afghanistan Coordination Group and European Union senior officials were held in Brussels; these meetings recognized the efforts of the United Nations and its partners to deliver principled assistance in Afghanistan and included discussions of options for the continued provision of international assistance. Despite the restrictions on Afghan women working for the United Nations and NGOs, the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan was able to continue providing support for basic human needs in the northern, southern and eastern regions, in accordance with United Nations humanitarian principles. The revised terms of reference of the Special Trust Fund were approved at its Steering Committee session on 26 June, making the Special Trust Fund the primary pooled funding instrument to support the United Nations country team's joint programming activities in Afghanistan. The Special Trust Fund aligns with the Strategic Framework for Afghanistan for the period 2023–2025, which was launched on 3 July. The Framework focuses on three complementary priorities: sustained essential services; economic opportunities and resilient livelihoods; and social cohesion, inclusion, gender equality, human rights and the rule of law.

50. On 5 June, an Afghan civil society organization hosted a round table discussion marking World Environment Day. Participants highlighted the lack of action by all stakeholders on climate change and environmental issues since August 2021 and the continued suspension of most climate financing to Afghanistan. The multi-year drought continues to have a negative impact on humanitarian needs, livelihoods and migration dynamics, and introduces additional pressures on transboundary river basin dynamics. The de facto authorities recently began implementing regulations on groundwater usage amid increasing water scarcity, implemented some restrictions on deforestation and announced on 6 August the ongoing drafting of a five-year plan on climate resilience. Some representatives of Afghan civil society raised with UNAMA

the non-representation of Afghanistan at the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as a serious concern.

51. The United Nations made progress in preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse. On 5 July, the in-country coordinator for protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment reported that a network for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, comprising 125 entities from the United Nations, NGOs, civil society organizations and donors, had been formed, while work continued on developing centralized and accessible spaces for risk identification and mitigation, reporting mechanisms and capacity-building.

V. Humanitarian assistance

52. Afghanistan continued to face unprecedented levels of humanitarian need with more than two thirds of its population in need of assistance in 2023. The mid-year trend showed a worsening protection environment, a marginal respite in food insecurity and a minimal decline in the number of people projected to be newly affected by natural disasters and the number of undocumented returnees from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan for the remainder of the year. The worsening protection situation led to an increased estimated number of people in need, increasing from 28.3 million to 29.2 million since the start of 2023. Emerging threats such as the Moroccan locust outbreak and other plant pests and animal diseases will affect the already fragile food security and livelihood situation. The effects of two consecutive preceding years of drought continued to drive acute food, livelihood and water insecurity.

53. Following the ban on Afghan women working for NGOs in December 2022 and the severe restrictions subsequently extended to the United Nations in April 2023, the latest rapid surveys by the Gender and Humanitarian Access Working Groups found that 28 per cent of 150 responding organizations reported that female staff were still working from home, 15 per cent of women-led organizations had ceased to function and 67 per cent had not received funding to continue operations. Since early July, women's organizations had reportedly been receiving formal letters from the de facto Ministry of Economy requiring the groups to replace their heads and board members with men. Sector-specific impacts of the ban are monitored by the humanitarian country team, and include female participation across all domains (needs assessments, distributions and monitoring), albeit with ongoing challenges and regional variations. While the overall reach remained comparatively similar to the first four months of 2022, with 17.3 million people assisted between January and April 2023, some humanitarian cluster responses showed significant declines. Funding shortfalls and bureaucratic impediments by the de facto authorities are significant contributing factors. The humanitarian community continues negotiations to reinforce and expand local agreements on exemptions of the ban with the de facto authorities.

54. Despite challenges, the humanitarian community is responding to the dire needs of Afghanistan through increased risk mitigation measures and the use of common tools to ensure minimum standards for quality programming. As a result of the changing operating environment, the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2023 was revised in May to take into account the prevailing operating environment, including the ban on the employment of women, and now requires a total of \$3.23 billion. Partners intend to reach 21.3 million people with the revised budget. However, the Plan remains severely underfunded, with only 27 per cent of the total requirement as at 12 September.

55. Between January and June, 21.5 million people were provided humanitarian assistance – although not in the full quantities planned, owing to funding constraints.

Some 20.1 million people were provided with food and livelihood support; 8.4 million people with health care; 3.1 million children and nursing mothers with support to prevent and address acute malnutrition; 6.2 million people with water, sanitation and hygiene assistance; 1.3 million children with access to education; 406,000 people with emergency shelter and household items; and 1.6 million people with at least one form of protection assistance. A new distribution route using the Chabahar port in the Islamic Republic of Iran was opened to deliver humanitarian aid to Afghanistan; on 4 July, 10,000 metric tons of wheat reached Herat, where it was milled for further distribution to people in need across Afghanistan.

56. Between 1 April and 30 June, 2.7 million people benefited from support to household food security, including 143,000 with quality agricultural inputs, such as fertilizers and seeds, and training; 1.1 million with livestock protection support; 63,000 with backyard poultry production; 678,000 with home gardening vegetable production packages; 248,000 with small farm equipment; 67,000 with cash for work to rehabilitate critical community infrastructure; and 427,000 elderly persons, people with disabilities and women or children who are heads of households with unconditional or multipurpose cash. Some 2.3 million cattle were vaccinated against lumpy skin disease across 414 districts, supporting 1.6 million households. Locust control operations were implemented, covering 40,464 hectares of land across eight provinces.

57. Between 1 January and 22 July, there were 18,000 suspected measles cases (71 per cent of them children under 5 years of age), compared with 63,654 suspected cases (78 per cent of them children under 5 years of age) reported during the same period in 2022. In the first seven months of 2023 the United Nations vaccinated around 1.4 million children against measles across all districts. Between 1 January and 22 July, 106,000 cases of acute watery diarrhoea with dehydration (57 per cent of them children under 5 years of age) were reported, compared with 19,050 cases (17 per cent of them children under 5 years of age) from May to July 2022. In 2023, five cases of wild poliovirus type 1 were recorded compared with one case in 2022.

58. The number of conflict-related trauma consultations decreased by 52 per cent between 21 May and 30 June compared with the same period in 2022, with 784 people having received conflict-related trauma care, compared with 1,648 in the previous period. Since the beginning of 2023, 214,000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition have been admitted and treated in 3,346 inpatient and outpatient medical facilities. More than 450 mobile health and nutrition teams reached populations in remote areas, providing around 400,000 consultations every month.

59. Between 1 May and 21 July, a total of 1.2 million people were recorded as having entered Afghanistan. Some 249,000 returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran and 958,000 from Pakistan. Between 1 May and 21 June, more than 205,800 undocumented returning Afghan migrants passed through the four IOM reception centres in Herat, Nimruz, Nangarhar and Kandahar. IOM reported that more than 87,000 of those trying to return to Afghanistan had been pushed back from its borders, and over 118,000 had made spontaneous returns. Between 11 May and 25 July, some 5,277 Afghan refugees, from Pakistan (5,102), the Islamic Republic of Iran (130) and other countries (45), returned to Afghanistan under the United Nations voluntary repatriation programme. The pace of refugee returns in 2023 is almost six times higher than the same period in 2022. The United Nations supported nearly 223,000 internally displaced persons, refugee returnees and host community members in 80 priority areas of return and reintegration throughout Afghanistan in 2023. Since 2021, the United Nations has recorded the return of 1.39 million internally displaced persons.

60. The number of incidents involving interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities remained high, with 191 incidents reported between 21 May and 26 July, compared with 115 during the same period in 2022. During the reporting period, 15 incidents of violence and threats against humanitarian personnel, assets and facilities were recorded, a decrease from 45 incidents documented in the same period in 2022. In addition, 55 gender-related incidents were recorded, with some 99 per cent attributed to the de facto authorities and involving, inter alia, interference with programming (22 incidents) and restrictions on female participation in humanitarian action (22 incidents).

61. The Mine Action Service conducted a survey covering 2.0 km² and enabled the clearance of over 10.5 km² of contaminated land, safely removing 18,664 explosive devices, including improvised explosive devices. A total of 90,904 people, including 44,359 women and girls, received explosive ordnance risk education in communities and areas of return.

VI. Counter-narcotics

62. Preliminary indications suggest a decrease in opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan following a de facto authority ban on narcotics cultivation promulgated in April 2022. Initial assessments indicate that most farmers are growing wheat instead of cultivating opium. Average national prices for dry and fresh opium at farms remained relatively stable for the past five months at \$327 and \$196 per kg, respectively. This is almost five times the price in July 2021. According to UNODC, opium trafficking continues. While there are reports of opium seizures by de facto authorities, these are usually linked to seizures of other controlled substances. The lack of licit economic opportunities that provide comparable remuneration to the cultivation of illicit crops or access to markets are among the main drivers of illicit crop cultivation.

63. During the reporting period, the UNODC alternative development programme reached more than 5,015 vulnerable households, of which 30 per cent were headed by women, for a total of 35,105 beneficiaries. This included providing improved seeds for licit crop cultivation, fertilizers, capacity-building training sessions and extension services to 3,568 households, including 1,139 households headed by women. In addition, the programme supplied deworming medicine for 25,557 animals owned by 1,447 herders, including 360 women.

64. During the reporting period, UNDP provided assistance to over 10,500 smallholder farmers in six provinces affected by opium poppy cultivation. The aim was to encourage the production and marketing of high-value crops as a viable alternative to opium production. In addition, the participation of Afghan agribusiness traders, including women entrepreneurs, in two international trade exhibits was facilitated, and potential agreements worth over \$6.6 million for fruits, seeds and nuts were generated. UNDP and UNODC collaborated on a joint effort to map drug prevention and treatment services across all 34 provinces in Afghanistan. This involved conducting a comprehensive nationwide survey on drug use, which identified a total of 72 facilities dedicated to drug prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and harm-reduction services for individuals struggling with substance abuse.

65. UNODC and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in collaboration with Afghan women's chambers of commerce and industry, jointly inaugurated the establishment of a women's integrated services and facilities centre in Kabul. The centre will target recovering drug users, internally displaced persons and returnees with the intention of integrating them into society and boosting economic growth. UNODC has coordinated donations of essential supplies, including

through 24 drug treatment centres in 11 provinces (Balkh, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, Jowzjan, Badghis, Zabul, Laghman, Nuristan, Daykundi and Ghor). This included the provision of 68 tons of wheat flour donated by the Islamic Organization for Food Security which was distributed to four rehabilitation centres in Kabul, Herat and Kandahar Provinces from 25 to 26 June. A total of 12,750 clients benefited from this support.

VII. Mission support

66. As at 30 June, vacancy rates in UNAMA were 11 per cent for international staff, 8 per cent for United Nations Volunteers, 14 per cent for National Professional Officers and 11 per cent for national staff, compared with approved rates of 9 per cent, 10 per cent, 4 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively. The proportion of female staff was 33 per cent for international staff, 38 per cent for United Nations Volunteers, 10 per cent for National Professional Officers and 8 per cent for national staff. The national United Nations Volunteers programme remains a critical pipeline for young Afghan women wishing to join the United Nations workforce. As the severe restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities on United Nations female staff from reporting to work continue, the Mission has taken measures to mitigate additional hardship faced by national female personnel who are telecommuting, in coordination with decisions taken by the United Nations country team.

VIII. Observations

67. The United Nations continues its engagement with all national, regional and international actors to bridge the considerable divide between the policies of the Taliban de facto authorities and the international normative framework. This divide is most greatly felt in Taliban policies that severely circumscribe the rights of women and girls, as well as in the lack of an inclusive system of governance. While the Taliban have enacted severe edicts against women in many sectors, they have permitted the development of some women's activities in the private sector – although the ban on women-run beauty salons is a worrying indicator that even this exception to its policies against women may be in jeopardy. The formalization of the ban on political parties on the grounds that their existence is incompatible with Islamic law is a further indicator of the Taliban's approach to governance.

68. While the Taliban report progress towards their goal of economic self-reliance, its realization will require building trust with the international community, in particular to address the fundamental challenges posed by the need for humanitarian aid, the lack of alternative livelihoods, including for former opium farmers and communities, the proliferation of unexploded remnants of war, the shrinking social and economic space for women and the effects of climate change.

69. Afghanistan is among the countries most vulnerable to climate change, contending with escalating temperatures, recurrent droughts and desertification. It is also among the least able to address the impacts of climate change, including the degradation of livelihoods and the strain on economic recovery. The livelihoods and food production of around 60 per cent of its population, which relies heavily on rain-fed agriculture, are at risk due to shifting precipitation patterns and ongoing drought.

70. The United Nations continued to deliver humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable, albeit at reduced levels reflecting the diminished levels of donor funding. The challenges of poverty, food insecurity and the impending harsh winter continue to strain Afghan resilience. Following the Taliban's ban on Afghan women aid workers working for national and international NGOs, and the imposition of severe

restrictions on Afghan women working with the United Nations, the United Nations continued to engage with the Taliban, emphasizing the importance of the active involvement of women in the provision of aid and continuously monitoring the conditions under which aid was being provided. The United Nations and its implementing partners have had to be innovative to continue the involvement of women in the provision of aid and to ensure assistance is provided to women. I reiterate my call upon the de facto authorities to reverse their ban on Afghan women aid workers working for national and international NGOs and to lift the severe restrictions on Afghan women working with the United Nations. I urgently call upon donors to renew their support and scale up the life-saving response activities before winter arrives.

71. Reports of ongoing extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions and the torture and ill-treatment of former government officials and members of the former Afghan National Defence and Security Forces are deeply disturbing. I call upon the de facto authorities to uphold the commitment made in their general amnesty and their obligations under international human rights law. I further urge the de facto authorities to establish a moratorium on further executions, with a view to prohibiting the use of the death penalty.

72. I note that continued efforts have been made by the Taliban to ensure security. Today, the population of Afghanistan faces fewer security incidents than in recent years. However, the continued presence and activities of terrorist elements remain a concern beyond Afghanistan. Without respect for human rights, sufficient growth in the economy and resilience to natural disasters, the risk of further radicalization, especially among the youth who represent a significant proportion of the population, remains. I reiterate my call upon the de facto authorities to engage in dialogue and cooperate with regional countries and the international community to counter such security threats.

73. In our engagement with the Taliban to promote human rights and inclusive governance, and to counter terrorism, narcotics and illicit activities, we must continue to speak with a common voice and act collectively. I extend my deep appreciation to all United Nations personnel in Afghanistan under the leadership of my Special Representative, Roza Otunbayeva, and her team, and to non-governmental organization partners for their continued dedication and perseverance in what remains an extremely challenging context.
