

**Security Council**

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**Letter dated 8 November 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council**

Pursuant to paragraph 1 of resolution [2679 \(2023\)](#), adopted by the Security Council on 16 March 2023, I have the honour to transmit the independent assessment, as outlined in paragraph 2 of that resolution (see annex).

I would be grateful if you could bring the present document to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

*(Signed)* António Guterres



## Annex

### Report of the independent assessment pursuant to Security Council resolution 2679 (2023)

#### I. Introduction

1. On 16 March 2023, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2679 (2023) requesting the Secretary-General to provide to the Council an independent assessment on Afghanistan, no later than 17 November 2023.

2. The Security Council requested that the independent assessment provide forward-looking recommendations for an integrated and coherent approach among relevant political, humanitarian and development actors, within and outside the United Nations system, in order to address the current challenges faced by Afghanistan. The overarching goal was to advance the objective of a secure, stable, prosperous and inclusive Afghanistan in line with the elements set out by the Council in previous resolutions.

3. As part of the consultations for the present assessment, the Special Coordinator, Feridun Sinirlioğlu, and his team spent extensive time in Afghanistan, travelling to all regions of the country, from the capital, Kabul, to remote districts. The Special Coordinator travelled to a number of Member State capitals, engaging with key regional and international stakeholders, as well as engaging with many Afghan stakeholders residing outside the country.

4. Both inside and outside the country, the team engaged with Afghan political actors and stakeholders, including representatives of the de facto authorities at the national and subnational levels, other political figures, Afghan women, men and youth from diverse backgrounds, civil society, businessmen and community and religious figures. The Special Coordinator also took note of United Nations reports on Afghanistan, as well as United Nations-verified data and statistics and other sources of research relevant to the scope of the assessment.

5. The consultations have underlined that the status quo of international engagement is not working. It does not serve the humanitarian, economic, political or social needs of the Afghan people, nor does it sufficiently address the leading priorities and concerns expressed by international stakeholders, including the neighbouring countries. A method of engagement is required that learns from previous efforts, focuses on the needs of the Afghan people and acknowledges the political realities in Afghanistan today.<sup>1</sup>

6. Since the political transition in August 2021, Afghan stakeholders in and outside the country, neighbouring countries, United Nations bodies and mechanisms and other international stakeholders have raised serious concerns about the state of governance and the protection of rights under the de facto

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<sup>1</sup> See attachment for a summary of the scope of the consultations.

authorities, as well as the potential threats to regional stability and security emanating from Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup>

7. All stakeholders expressed concerns regarding the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan and the broad implications this has for Afghanistan and for international peace and security. The restrictive bans on secondary and higher education for girls and on women's right to work, among other restrictions, are not consistent with the fundamental values embodied in the Charter of the United Nations or under international law, nor are they conducive to Afghanistan's political and economic stability.

8. For their part, the de facto authorities, having assumed full territorial control and many of the responsibilities of governing the state of Afghanistan, have appealed unsuccessfully for political and economic normalization. The current situation has led to an impasse, leaving much of the international community's relations with Afghanistan in a state of uncertainty, with serious repercussions for the Afghan people.

9. Donor countries' restrictions on development and technical assistance, largely in reaction to the curbing of the rights of women and girls by the de facto authorities, limit the degree to which international aid can sustainably meet the basic needs of Afghans and support their resilience as a society facing numerous social, economic, environmental and other needs. Formal and informal financial sanctions and a lack of confidence have crippled Afghan banking and the private sector. The economy has stabilized since the crisis situation of late 2021, however only at a very low equilibrium and it remains fragile. The likely impending reduction in donor funding, driven by competing global demands and the restraints on aid delivery in Afghanistan that largely derive from restrictive policies of the de facto authorities, could further destabilize the fragile economic and humanitarian situation.

10. The health, well-being, prosperity and security of Afghans is not only a matter of domestic interest. Historically, culturally and politically, Afghanistan and its diverse communities have deep ties with neighbouring and regional States. What affects the people of Afghanistan affects the entire region and beyond. Afghanistan has the potential to thrive as a regional hub for trade, connectivity and people-to-people contacts that enrich the region; but it also has the potential to generate destabilizing effects – as an origin country for illegal narcotics, as a base for transnational terrorism and extremist ideologies and as a potential source of mass migration and displacement.

11. Neither the international community nor the vast majority of Afghans wish to see renewed armed conflict in Afghanistan. This desire for local, national and regional stability is a fundamental common ground and a basis for future international engagement. A political pathway must be found through which the

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Security Council resolutions [2681 \(2023\)](#) and [2679 \(2023\)](#), the regular reports of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan, the report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan ([A/HRC/54/21](#), forthcoming) and the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls ([A/HRC/53/21](#), forthcoming).

interests of all sides – the Afghan people, the international community and the de facto authorities – can be fairly discussed and deliberated.

12. The end state of these discussions is the definition of a future where Afghanistan is fully reintegrated into the international system without passing through a further cycle of violence, while respecting all legal obligations.

13. In response to the mandate of the Security Council, and based on consultations with numerous stakeholders, the present report offers proposals for a way forward and an architecture for engagement to guide and bring more coherence to political, humanitarian and development activities, together with a substantive road map that will enable more effective negotiation and implementation of the priorities of Afghan and international stakeholders.

## **II. Key issues and priorities identified in the assessment**

14. The mandate for the present assessment was to consider the current challenges faced by Afghanistan, including, but not limited to, humanitarian, human rights and especially the rights of women and girls, religious and ethnic minorities, security and terrorism, narcotics, development, economic and social challenges, dialogue, governance and the rule of law.

15. The consultations yielded important findings across all of these areas. In particular, perspectives on both the challenges and potential next steps for addressing the key priorities were identified in the meeting of special envoys on Afghanistan, convened by the Secretary-General in May 2023. These included concerns about stability in Afghanistan and the region; the presence of terrorist organizations; inclusivity and human rights, specifically the rights of Afghan women and girls; and narcotics trafficking.<sup>3</sup>

16. Stakeholders consulted for the assessment largely reiterated these priorities. Many also called for greater means to improve the economic situation in Afghanistan, to better meet the basic and differentiated needs of all Afghans and to ensure a more stable situation for Afghanistan and the region.

### **A. Human rights, in particular the rights of women and girls**

17. Equal and full protection of human rights for all citizens represent fundamental obligations of Member States of the United Nations and are essential for long-term development, economic growth and stability. In the current context, restrictions and violations of Afghan citizens' rights, in particular those of women and girls, have significantly contributed to the current political impasse.

18. Afghanistan has committed to specific obligations as a party to key international conventions and human rights treaties.<sup>4</sup> Upholding these obligations

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<sup>3</sup> See the Secretary-General's opening remarks at the press encounter on Afghanistan, 2 May 2023.

<sup>4</sup> These key treaty obligations include the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the

requires not only refraining from violations but also the creation of an environment where human rights are respected, through establishing and maintaining institutions, laws and policies that ensure the rule of law and promote accountability.<sup>5</sup>

19. Since the takeover, the de facto authorities have taken measures to comply with some of these obligations. These include the establishment of a human rights office or ombudsmen posts in several ministries, the introduction of certain safeguards for detainees, the announcement of a general amnesty for former officials and security forces associated with the previous regime, and responsiveness to some international treaty bodies, international monitors and other accountability mechanisms where specific violations or reporting have been brought to their attention.<sup>6</sup>

20. The de facto authorities issued a decree in December 2021 that banned forced marriages and protected a widow's right to inheritance and a woman's right to choose her own husband. However, the protective provisions of this decree have been under-enforced and its overall effects have been undermined by the dismantling of legal rights and protection institutions available to women and girls.<sup>7</sup>

21. The situation of women and girls, and the restrictions on girls' education in particular, was the single most-common issue raised in consultations. It was highlighted not only by Afghan women and girls, but by every Afghan stakeholder group consulted: the business community, religious clerics, tribal elders, civil society, health and education professionals and former government officials, as well as by many representatives of the de facto authorities. Afghan stakeholders inside and outside the country underscored that the current restrictions were not representative of Afghan society, culture and traditions, and should be removed immediately.

22. The restrictions on women and girls instituted since September 2021 contravene Afghanistan's obligations under numerous international treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which the country ratified in 2003.

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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Related to its international humanitarian law commitments, Afghanistan is also a party to the four Geneva Conventions and their two additional protocols. It is also party to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and the Convention on Cluster Munitions, among other treaty commitments related to methods and means of warfare.

<sup>5</sup> [A/HRC/54/21](#), para. 5.

<sup>6</sup> [A/HRC/54/21](#), paras. 12–17.

<sup>7</sup> The Ministry of Women's Affairs and other institutions and infrastructures that were designed to ensure full protection of women's rights and participation in public life have been dismantled ([A/HRC/54/21](#), para. 24).

23. These restrictions include edicts and decrees restricting girls' education above grade six, women's right to work in certain professions or types of employment and women's freedom of movement and ability to participate in a range of public spaces.<sup>8</sup> The scope of the restrictions on women and girls is so significant that some international monitors and United Nations human rights mechanisms have called for international accountability measures.<sup>9</sup>

24. A range of international stakeholders, including neighbouring countries, Islamic countries and other Member States and United Nations institutions, assert that the basic rights of women and girls and their role and space in society must be respected. The de facto authorities have tried to justify these restrictions as being part of the Islamic faith and Afghan traditions. However, similar restrictions do not exist in any other member State of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and many Afghans reject the characterization of local traditions by the de facto authorities.

25. The basic rights of women and girls, including the right to education and to work and their representation in public and political life, are not only fundamental obligations of a State, but also critical to build State capacity for long-term development and economic growth and peace and security. Any formal reintegration of Afghanistan into global institutions and systems will require the participation and leadership of Afghan women.

26. The consultations have also underlined the existence of other patterns of unequal treatment and discrimination. Citizens from a number of ethnic or religious minority groups expressed a sense of marginalization and provided examples of discrimination and disparity of treatment when they tried to access government services, raise concerns or exercise their rights to religious, political or cultural expression.

27. Reports of extrajudicial killings and detentions continue, including reprisals against former government officials and security forces, notwithstanding the announcement of a general amnesty.<sup>10</sup> While some senior officials of the de facto authorities have made statements reinforcing the amnesty, there have been few public investigations of alleged violations of the amnesty policy and very few evident disciplinary or accountability measures. This has created an environment of impunity and fear.

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<sup>8</sup> To date, the de facto authorities have issued approximately 80 edicts, with 54 edicts focusing on women and girls in relation to schools, universities, travel, justice and employment, in the media, outside the home and in relation to recreational activities. For more detail, see [A/HRC/54/21](#), para. 31.

<sup>9</sup> The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls concluded that exclusion of and discrimination against women and girls is institutionalized and, as such, is a grave and systematic human rights violation that breaches the Charter of the United Nations ([A/HRC/53/21](#), para. 96).

<sup>10</sup> The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported that between 15 August 2021 and 30 June 2023, the de facto authorities were responsible for at least 218 extrajudicial killings and 424 arbitrary arrests and detentions. See UNAMA, "A barrier to securing peace: human rights violations against former government officials and former armed force members in Afghanistan: 15 August 2021–June 30 2023" (August 2023).

28. Civic space in Afghanistan has shrunk significantly, following increasing restrictions, surveillance and harassment of civil society and the media, extending to arbitrary detention of some individuals.<sup>11</sup> Journalistic reporting calling out such abuses has been effectively banned through vague media regulations.<sup>12</sup>

29. Rights protections and access to justice have been further undermined by the dismantling by the de facto authorities of key elements of the legal and judicial system. The Office of the Attorney General and the Afghanistan Independent Bar Association have been eliminated.<sup>13</sup> Due process has been effectively eliminated from judicial proceedings, with no standardized procedures or statutes for judges or lawyers to follow and no rules regarding fair trial.<sup>14</sup>

30. These human rights concerns were conveyed and shared by Afghan stakeholders in the consultations across the country, as practices that inhibit the daily lives of ordinary Afghans and contribute to the lack of legitimacy of the de facto authorities among large segments of the population.

## **B. Counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics and regional security**

31. As observed in the Secretary General's quarterly reports on Afghanistan since 15 August 2021, security conditions have improved inside Afghanistan, easing travel and transport. Economic predation by armed actors and some forms of corruption have sharply decreased.

32. Many international stakeholders have acknowledged efforts by the de facto authorities related to global counter-terrorism interests, especially against terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan.

33. However, a number of Member States attest to the persistent presence of terrorist groups and individuals inside Afghanistan, including members of Al-Qaida.<sup>15</sup> According to these reports, significant numbers of fighters for the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan appear to have free movement and shelter in Afghanistan and are carrying out an intensifying campaign of violence inside Pakistan.<sup>16</sup> United

<sup>11</sup> [A/HRC/54/21](#), paras. 33–36. See also UNAMA, “Human rights situation in Afghanistan: 15 August 2021–15 June 2022” (July 2022). For example, in March 2023, girls’ education activist Matiullah Wesa was arrested without cause and remains in detention. UNAMA, “Human rights situation in Afghanistan: May–June 2023 update” (July 2023), p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> UNAMA, “Human rights situation in Afghanistan: May–June 2023 update”, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> [A/HRC/54/21](#), paras. 12–17.

<sup>14</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “UN experts: legal professionals in Afghanistan face extreme risks, need urgent international support”, media statement by the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Margaret Satterthwaite, and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, 20 January 2023.

<sup>15</sup> See [S/2023/370](#).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* Other regional stakeholders expressed concerns on various United Nations sanctioned armed groups, including the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement and the Turkistan Islamic Party, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

Nations reporting has indicated that some of these groups have relationships with elements of the de facto authorities.

34. The de facto authorities have demonstrated limited responsiveness to international engagement on the presence and treatment of such groups. They have shown willingness to enforce certain containment or control measures, but according to the consultations, these measures do not satisfy the concerns of the Member States that face the most immediate risks of destabilizing violence.

35. Stakeholders noted that robust border management and security controls are essential for containing and mitigating a host of threats and concerns. They report that engagements between Afghanistan and its neighbours on border security controls have become more professional over the past two years, including the establishment of bilateral inter-agency working groups at several international borders. The de facto authorities and neighbouring States emphasize that this requires further cooperation and improvement, including technical assistance from regional and international stakeholders.

36. The de facto authorities have demonstrated significant progress in their announced campaign to reduce and eventually eliminate the cultivation, processing and trafficking of narcotics.<sup>17</sup> Many stakeholders expressed interest in exploring greater international cooperation in this area, in particular on alternative crops and livelihoods for the hundreds of thousands of Afghans that have relied on the production and trade of narcotics for income.

37. There is both a need for and interest in further engagement on these regional, border and security dynamics. The common interests of the de facto authorities and the international community offer the potential for cooperation in a number of areas, although further exchanges of views to address both Afghan and international concerns are needed.

### **C. Economic, humanitarian and development issues**

38. Stakeholders across the spectrum urged that any strategy for international engagement must give attention to the combined humanitarian, development and economic challenges facing Afghanistan. Neighbouring countries stressed that a robust and healthy Afghan economy was crucial for regional trade and reduced economic risks to their countries, as well as the potential for uncontrolled migration. Many Afghans consulted by the team requested urgent relief, but also an ability to fully invest in and pursue freely their own economic futures and livelihood opportunities.

39. Prior to August 2021, aid flows amounting to 40 to 45 per cent of gross domestic product financed around 75 per cent of public spending, including approximately half of the government budget. That assistance halted abruptly in August 2021, and access to the international banking system and offshore foreign exchange reserves was frozen under certain sanctions regimes. This triggered a

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<sup>17</sup> This has been noted repeatedly in United Nations reporting, including in the briefing of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan to the Security Council on 26 September 2023 (see [S/PV.9423](#)).



complex economic crisis. Basic services were disrupted, including in health and education, while private sector activity collapsed and macroeconomic stability was threatened. According to the latest reporting by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 29.2 million Afghans are in need of humanitarian assistance, of which 15.3 million face acute food insecurity.<sup>18</sup>

40. While the economy has since stabilized at a new, very low equilibrium at the macro level, at the household level, welfare conditions remain severe.<sup>19</sup> Existing levels of aid are insufficient to provide for all the Afghans who require assistance. More reductions are widely anticipated, which could destabilize the economic and humanitarian situation.

41. The banking system is still not functioning normally and international financial flows are constrained.<sup>20</sup> Trade and other payments occur almost entirely through informal channels. Remittances from overseas, which have long been a critical source of resilience for Afghan households, have also been impeded. Banks are dependent on current forbearance measures and the intermediation function of the banking sector is not being fulfilled, with almost no private sector lending.

42. The chilling effect on the banking sector and the lack of confidence in Afghanistan's economy since August 2021 has also been the result of policy choices by the de facto authorities. Failure to institute measures of fiscal transparency, abrogation of the judicial system and basic legal guarantees, and the lack of equal economic participation among all sectors of society have all contributed to continued low confidence among international donors and investors. A number of ministries lack sufficient technical capacity, due in part to the flight of professionals, but also to the exclusionary policies of the de facto authorities vis-à-vis those who served under the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, including technical professionals and female civil servants.

43. Although Afghanistan's economy has stabilized temporarily, it remains fragile and the economy faces major downside risks, in addition to the already reduced level of gross domestic product.

44. International aid flows and regular cash shipments required for the provision of humanitarian assistance have, as a secondary effect, contributed to macroeconomic stability. However, both international and Afghan stakeholders raised concerns over these cash shipments, and they are not sustainable in their current form.

<sup>18</sup> Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Asia Pacific Humanitarian Update: situation report", accessed September 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Afghanistan: revised humanitarian response plan (June–December 2023)" (June 2023); World Food Programme, [www.wfp.org/countries/Afghanistan](http://www.wfp.org/countries/Afghanistan); and World Bank, Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey: round 3 (October 2023), p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Correspondent banks are reluctant to conduct transactions with the Afghan financial system given the inadequacy of financial sector governance arrangements and associated risks of sanctions under the international anti-money-laundering and countering the financing of terrorism regime. Erica Moret, *Barriers to Afghanistan's Critical Private Sector Recovery* (Norwegian Refugee Council, March 2023), pp. 17–20, and World Bank, *Afghanistan Development Update: Uncertainty after Fleeting Stability* (October 2023), pp. 39–42.

45. The recent ban by the de facto authorities on opium production, while a positive measure in terms of the global fight against illicit drugs, is likely to have severe negative impacts on Afghanistan's rural economy, household welfare and macroeconomic stability, unless coupled with comprehensive support from donors for alternative livelihoods.

46. Existing restrictions by most donors on the provision of development assistance and on the way that assistance can be provided, for example preventing any sort of technical assistance, limits the degree to which international aid can respond to basic needs in a sustainable and cost-effective way. Because of political sensitivities, aid is deliberately bypassing government systems and being delivered through an overlapping network of United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations, often with high costs and with insufficient coordination, and not at a scale needed across the country. Most assistance since the collapse of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has been in the form of short-term humanitarian assistance.

47. The current limitations on technical assistance and cooperation curb progress in key sectors, including in agriculture and water management, as well as in other livelihood support areas and in demining and public health campaigns. Many noted Afghanistan's de facto isolation from global climate discussions and from most climate adaptation and resilience funding, despite the fact that it ranks among the top 10 most vulnerable countries to climate change.<sup>21</sup> Consultations with Afghan stakeholders repeatedly emphasized concern about the future of water management.

48. Stakeholders suggested a number of avenues for improving aid effectiveness, ameliorating humanitarian conditions or placing Afghanistan on a more stable and sustainable economic recovery pathway. However, the triggers that have led to the current situation are as much political as economic, and economic recovery will depend significantly on a political decision, by donors in particular, to promote the development of the economy for the benefit of the Afghan people.

#### **D. Inclusive governance and rule of law**

49. An inclusive form of governance that serves and engages all Afghans is a key demand of many Afghan stakeholders and of the international community. Afghanistan is a diverse, multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian, multi-linguistic and multicultural society. The inclusion of all Afghan communities in the nation's governance structures is central to the social and political stability of Afghanistan.

50. Many Afghans expressed perceptions of exclusion and discriminatory practices on the basis of ethnicity, language and gender under the de facto authorities. Part of the perceived lack of inclusion relates to the disenfranchisement of most Afghans from the full ability to participate in political life. Many have observed a marked decline in the space for political engagement

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<sup>21</sup> In the last published version of the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-Gain) index, for 2021, Afghanistan ranked 179 out of 185 countries. The index ranks countries according to vulnerability to climate change, combined with readiness.

and greater limitations on citizens' ability to raise concerns or provide input to policymaking.<sup>22</sup> This especially affects women, who had played prominent political and governance roles under the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, as well as in earlier periods of modern Afghan history.

51. Member States, multilateral institutions and the Security Council have called for the de facto authorities to establish an inclusive system of governance.<sup>23</sup> Many neighbouring countries and near-neighbours view inclusion and the establishment of a balanced, broad-based, inclusive, accountable and responsible government as both a reflection of fundamental rights and as a key ingredient for peace, stability and harmony within the country and in the region.

52. The de facto authorities have interpreted this call as a demand for power-sharing, and specifically for a return to government of some former political leaders. They also maintain that their own government is inclusive in that it represents Afghanistan's various ethnic groups and because they have retained much of the civil service. This is, however, considered insufficient by both Afghan and international stakeholders.

53. There are many ways to enable the meaningful participation of all Afghans in public affairs, including mechanisms that are well grounded in Afghan traditions of consultation and dialogue.

54. The de facto authorities have established some forms of political consultation, usually at a subnational level, as well as mechanisms in various ministries for the population to report and raise issues with them. While welcome, these forms are still limited, in particular for Afghan women, and lack transparency and consistency.

55. Afghan stakeholders outside of the de facto authorities have also taken their own steps towards inclusivity, through continued efforts at dialogue and at participation in public life. Despite the challenges, resource limitations and the constraints that have been imposed, many Afghan civil society actors have continued to build bridges and create spaces for dialogue among themselves and with the de facto authorities on an informal basis.

56. These existing pathways could be built upon and be complemented by a national dialogue to establish more regular means of consultation and participation from Afghans of all backgrounds and ways of life. Re-establishing a justice and rule of law system that protects equal participation and the fulfilment of rights would advance inclusive governance, while also contributing to economic growth and stability.

## **E. Political representation and implications for regional and international priorities**

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, UNAMA, "Human rights situation in Afghanistan: 15 August 2021–15 June 2022" (July 2022), and UNAMA, "Human rights situation in Afghanistan: May–June 2023 update".

<sup>23</sup> Security Council resolutions [2513 \(2020\)](#) and [2681 \(2023\)](#), Kazan Declaration of the Moscow format consultations on Afghanistan of 29 September 2023 ([A/78/517-S/2023/741](#)), and Council of the European Union, "Council conclusions on Afghanistan" (15 September 2021).

57. The de facto authorities have called for their political recognition and diplomatic representation both bilaterally and in the United Nations. They have asserted that they meet the requirements for occupying Afghanistan's seat at the General Assembly. In 2021 and 2022, the Credentials Committee postponed its consideration of the credentials pertaining to the representatives of Afghanistan. The de facto authorities and some stakeholders have expressed dissatisfaction with the provisional participation of the previously credentialled representatives of Afghanistan at the United Nations.

58. In consultations, international stakeholders remained aligned behind the position expressed at the meeting of special envoys on Afghanistan convened by the Secretary-General in May 2023, which supported engagement with Afghanistan and the development of a common international approach, but acknowledged that the de facto authorities should not be recognized at this stage.

59. The lack of determining Afghanistan's representation in international organizations, including the United Nations, ultimately disadvantages the Afghan people and limits the country's ability to address many regional and international priorities. These include, for example, restrictions and practical challenges to Afghans' ability to access identification and travel documents and visas, both inside and outside the country.

60. The political impasse has also had a negative impact on regional interests and concerns, including on trade, connectivity and transboundary resource management, by limiting the avenues in which to discuss and resolve these issues.

### **III. Recommendations**

#### **A. Status quo of engagement and the way forward**

61. There has been a high degree of engagement between the international community and the de facto authorities over the past two years on issues such as humanitarian access, human rights violations, regional economic cooperation and trade, cooperation in counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism.

62. There is overall consensus that the current political impasse and approach to international engagement, which is largely ad hoc and at the initiative of individual Member States and actors and reactive to crises, have dire consequences for the Afghan people and the entire region.

63. As a result, many stakeholders would support increased international engagement, but in a more coherent, coordinated and structured manner and with a clear understanding of the outcomes and commitments from all sides. This will be necessary to address Afghan needs, to open space for dialogue between Afghans and to relieve the burden on humanitarian actors currently at the forefront of engagement.

64. A key component missing from current engagement is intra-Afghan dialogue. Addressing this gap could build towards national reconciliation and the establishment of domestic legitimacy, rule of law and constitutional order, all of

which would be critical factors in the acceptance of a Government of Afghanistan as a full-fledged member of the international system.

65. There are some measures that could be taken immediately to create more sustainable and effective responses to the current economic and humanitarian challenges and to better address the needs of the Afghan people and the interests of the region and the international community.

66. In order to move forward on political issues, there is a need for a more structured process, with clear conditions and expectations for all sides, and mechanisms of coordination that will ensure greater coherence in engagement going forward.

67. The objective of this process should be a clear end state of an Afghanistan at peace with itself and its neighbours and fully reintegrated into the international community. Several recommendations are proposed:

(a) A series of measures that can be taken immediately and are aimed at addressing the basic needs of the Afghan people and strengthening trust through a more structured engagement;

(b) A call for international attention to and cooperation on issues that have an impact on regional and global security and stability;

(c) A proposed road map for political engagement designed to reintegrate Afghanistan fully into the international community, in line with Afghanistan's international commitments and obligations, and with a degree of domestic input and inclusivity conducive to future peace and stability;

(d) A set of mechanisms and formats to ensure the coordination and implementation of recommendations (a) to (c) above.

## **B. Building confidence by addressing the immediate needs of Afghans**

68. The urgent needs of the population require a general shift away from politically driven aid approaches towards increased and more sustainable assistance, especially in key sectors such as food security, livelihoods and health.

69. It will be necessary to pivot from short-term, stopgap efforts to more sustainable aid modalities that avoid problems of aid coordination and fragmentation. Ensuring greater unity among and employing trust funds, such as the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan and the Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund, would facilitate coordination, allow for planning for scale and reach and offer third-party monitoring arrangements to help protect against aid diversion and other risks.

70. Throughout, adherence to principles of non-discrimination and inclusion, respect for women's rights and efforts towards their meaningful participation and respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of all Afghans should be ensured and advanced.

71. Greater engagement, including through cooperation on these priorities, can contribute towards better relations, improve mutual understanding through active

communication and build confidence between international and Afghan stakeholders, and among Afghans themselves.

72. Priority areas could include:

(a) **Expanding international assistance that contributes to the basic needs of the Afghan people**, including:

(i) Providing technical assistance to improve the capacities of relevant Afghan institutions to deliver services to Afghan people more effectively;

(ii) Supporting food security and agricultural livelihoods, including the ongoing counter-narcotics campaign by the de facto authorities; environmental security and water management; the health sector, including support to people with disabilities and those affected by the war, as well as treatment for drug users; and demining, prioritizing assistance for the most vulnerable groups and women and girls;

(iii) Finalization of some near-finished infrastructure projects that were started before August 2021, in particular those with a direct impact on the well-being of Afghans and those that, if left unfinished, pose severe environmental, security or humanitarian risks;

(b) **Establishing economic dialogue and reforms to begin to resolve the many barriers to economic recovery**. This could include:

(i) Identifying ways to reduce the effects that the existing sanctions regime has had on the banking sector, supporting financial reforms and enabling economic dialogue and eventual coordination with the financial bodies of the de facto authorities;

(ii) International stakeholders should support the rehabilitation of Afghanistan's central bank, upon steps by the de facto authorities to demonstrate transparent and accountable fiscal governance and greater conformity with a range of international financial regulations;

(iii) Economic dialogue may have a positive impact on blockages to private investment and banking transactions, but will not fully resolve the informal chilling effects of sanctions on the Afghan economy, which are based on concerns about the unpredictability and risks of the current governance system and reputational issues due to restrictions on women and girls, and are therefore only likely to ease after significant policy changes taken by the de facto authorities;

(iv) Progress in dialogue and in reforms on economic issues should prompt the Switzerland-based Fund for the Afghan People to disperse funds in line with its statutes, including for foreign exchange rate and price stabilization objectives, and might also enable alternatives to and a gradual transition from the current assistance using cash shipments;

(c) **Enable partial restoration of regular transit, trade and other means of connectivity between Afghans and the world**. This could include:

- (i) Measures to improve airport safety and capacity for the limited number of carriers currently operating in Afghanistan, and to reduce barriers to normal air carrier operations at Kabul International Airport;
- (ii) Regular administrative processes for Afghans in the country and abroad should be restored, and could require support to ensure the continued issuance of passports and visas, which depend in part on international printing and other facilitation and coordination measures;
- (d) **Encouraging and assisting activities that help Afghans to realize their political, economic, cultural and social rights.** This should include support for media and civil society, measures that protect and expand civic and political space, support to initiatives related to cultural preservation and measures to support victim-centred approaches to justice and reconciliation. This could include:
  - (i) Specific support for women and girls, such as support for educational opportunities, including for online learning, employment, microfinance, preventing gender-based violence and providing psychosocial support;
  - (ii) Continuing to offer sustainable assistance to women and girls and vulnerable Afghan groups and individuals who have sought protection and refuge outside Afghanistan;
  - (iii) Continued dialogue with the de facto authorities on human rights obligations, including on cases of reported violations, raising awareness of human rights standards and facilitating engagement with relevant treaty bodies.

### C. Continuing cooperation on key security, regional and political issues

73. International stakeholders and United Nations bodies have universally expressed an expectation that Afghanistan should manage, mitigate and prevent threats to regional and global stability. Identified concerns include the use of Afghan soil to threaten or attack another country, the planning and financing of terrorist acts and the production and sale of and trafficking in illegal narcotics.<sup>24</sup>

74. Afghanistan and the de facto authorities have entered into multilateral and bilateral commitments to prevent the use of Afghan territory to threaten the security of other countries, as well as commitments related to counter-narcotics, and on other regional issues.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> See Security Council resolutions [2513 \(2020\)](#), [2593 \(2021\)](#) and [2615 \(2021\)](#).

<sup>25</sup> On terrorism, see the joint statement from the fifth China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue, held in Islamabad on 6 May 2023. In 2020, the Taliban committed to similar guarantees to prevent the use of Afghan soil for supporting terrorist activities in its bilateral Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the United States of America and the Taliban. Afghanistan has also entered into commitments regarding counter-narcotics policies and bilateral agreements with neighbouring Member States regarding water rights and other regional issues. These include the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 as amended by the 1972 Protocol, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971, the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988 and the Afghan-Iranian Helmand River-Water Treaty of 1973.

75. Addressing these challenges effectively will require coordination and cooperation between the de facto authorities and international stakeholders on a bilateral and multilateral basis. International stakeholders should reciprocate cooperative action on the part of the de facto authorities with assistance and support, in full accordance with international human rights law, treaties and conditions.

76. There are also a number of other regional and global interests, many with the potential to affect stability and security, that could be better advanced through more coherent and focused attention and engagement. Priority areas could include:

(a) **Supporting bilateral and multilateral security cooperation**, including provision of assistance related to addressing key security and regional stability issues. Addressing threats to other countries by groups and individuals based or operating in Afghanistan will require significant capacity and resources, and action from multiple stakeholders;

(b) **Cooperating with international counter-narcotics efforts**, in policy and law, including further steps to maintain the current trajectory of the eradication of illegal narcotics;

(c) **Strengthening international borders, including through effective border controls** and controls on issuance of identity papers and travel documents, as emphasized by the Security Council in resolutions [1624 \(2005\)](#) and [2178 \(2014\)](#), to combat terrorism and human and narcotics trafficking;

(d) **Expanding international cooperation and assistance in areas that advance regional and global priorities**, including in the fields of climate adaptation and response and transboundary natural resource management, counter-narcotics, advancing global health security and other areas of transnational interest and regulation;

(e) **Reviewing and updating relevant provisions of the sanctions list** established pursuant to Security Council resolution [1988 \(2011\)](#), in accordance with past United Nations recommendations.<sup>26</sup> An update would facilitate better compliance and processing of travel exemptions and make the sanctions regime more relevant to current realities;

(f) **Gradually resuming diplomatic engagement inside Afghanistan** to facilitate more continuous dialogue with all Afghan stakeholders, to more effectively implement and support aid delivery and development assistance and to enable a better understanding by international stakeholders of the threats, challenges and ground realities.

#### **D. Road map for the reintegration of Afghanistan into the international system**

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<sup>26</sup> See the fourteenth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution [2665 \(2022\)](#) (S/2023/370).



77. Concurrently with the steps described above, the international community and Afghan stakeholders should begin a more coherent political engagement process. More integrated and coherent international engagement should be pursued through a performance-based road map.

78. The outline of this road map presented below sets out international obligations of Afghanistan with suggested benchmarks to indicate progress in meeting them (sect. 1), and a call for an intra-Afghan political process that will build towards inclusive constitution-making (sect. 2). Progress in both of these components will build towards an end state of the international community's normalization of relations with Afghanistan (sect. 3).

## 1. Obligations of Afghanistan

79. The founding principles of the Charter of the United Nations, as set out in its preamble, are to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained.<sup>27</sup>

80. The de facto authorities have asked to be recognized as the governing authority for Afghanistan. Doing so comes with acceptance of their obligations and commitments in international conventions and good faith measures to comply with these through policy and legislation and in practice. These international obligations, along with other commitments and expectations for Afghanistan, are part of assuming the mantle of State responsibility and of being accorded legitimacy as such, and apply to all States in the international community.

81. Afghanistan has committed to multiple treaties, including equal treatment of all citizens, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, identity or political opinion; equal opportunities for political participation, expression, employment and education; equality of access in health care and other basic services; freedom from torture and bodily harm; and freedom of political expression, assembly and religious practices. These treaty obligations also protect citizens' freedom of movement, including freedom to travel outside the country.

82. Considering the specific policies on women and girls in place since August 2021, it is important to emphasize the commitments and obligations of Afghanistan as a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and as a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Obligations under those and other instruments include ensuring that women and girls enjoy equal rights with men to education at all levels, employment and occupation, and to participate in government policymaking and other forms of public life.<sup>28</sup> Other key obligations

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<sup>27</sup> These principles were further expanded upon in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the General Assembly in December 1948 as resolution 217 (III). Many of its provisions are considered part of customary international law and replicated in other binding treaty commitments.

<sup>28</sup> Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women articles 7, 8, 10 and

reference women's right to work in international organizations and to participate in non-governmental organizations and associations.<sup>29</sup>

83. These treaty commitments require the protection of these rights in law and policy and the establishment of institutions and regular rule of law practices that enable their enforcement. Measures should be taken to uphold these universal treaty commitments, prevent human rights violations and hold perpetrators to account.<sup>30</sup>

84. A demonstration that the de facto authorities recognize and are able to carry out Afghanistan's treaty obligations and commitments under international law is a key step within this road map and would be necessary for any forward progress on normalization and recognition. Progress would be indicated by measurable steps to implement the following key benchmarks:

(a) Fulfilling Afghanistan's treaty obligations and other commitments under international law by immediately removing restrictions on the rights of women and girls to secondary school and higher education, on their employment opportunities and occupation choice, including working for the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, and on unconditional freedom of movement and access to public spaces and essential facilities;

(b) Taking meaningful steps to improve Afghanistan's compliance with its treaty obligations, notably with regard to equal treatment and access. Steps along these lines would include:

(i) Review of current laws and policies to ensure they are in line with the key standards mandated under Afghanistan's treaty obligations;

(ii) Ensuring legal protections for key rights are embedded within the law and that regular, codified rule of law processes exist for enforcing and protecting those rights;

(iii) Ensuring that institutions and mechanisms that allow for investigation of rights violations exist across all ministries and that they are linked to appropriate accountability measures, with means of redress that are accessible to all Afghans;

(c) Reinforcing and establishing inclusive forms of governance that are accessible and serve all sections of the population, across the country, including Afghan women, men and youth, and that promote participatory decision-making processes, non-discrimination and predictability in governance.

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11. Article 10 specifies that there should be the same conditions for women and men to have access to studies, including in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training, and access to the same curricula and examinations. These principles are also supported in articles 3, 7 and 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, articles 3 and 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, among other international law provisions.

<sup>29</sup> Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, arts. 7–8.

<sup>30</sup> [A/HRC/54/21](#), para. 5.

## 2. Pursuing intra-Afghan dialogue to achieve more inclusive governance

85. In addition to progress on the commitments of Afghanistan, there is a need to take steps towards an Afghan national dialogue that would establish inclusive governance and ensure sustainable peace and social, cultural and economic development after 45 years of armed conflict. This has been called for by Afghan stakeholders, the Security Council, regional and international formats and Member States, and is what the Taliban has also committed to in the past.<sup>31</sup>

86. A national political dialogue that reflects the views and participation of all Afghans should lead to the establishment of predictable governance based on the rule of law and an inclusive constitutional order that enshrines the rights of citizens in law and creates a predictable legal landscape.

87. Several steps would be required to prepare for such a process. Traditional Afghan institutions and mechanisms could be drawn upon to frame and guide the process. Specific strategies should be considered to ensure the meaningful participation of Afghan women in the process throughout.

88. Afghan stakeholders, including the de facto authorities, should commit to engaging in and exploring avenues for a dialogue about the future of the country. Preparatory meetings, inside and outside Afghanistan, could help to prepare the ground and determine the process. The international community should support Afghan stakeholders to ensure inclusive and representative participation in such a dialogue.

89. The dialogue should seek to determine the parameters of an inclusive constitution-making process. The composition of all bodies involved in the process, such as the formation of a constitutional *jirga* (assembly), should reflect and represent the whole of Afghan society.

90. A national political dialogue would also assist in a process of how the nation and its citizens, all of whom are victims of conflict after decades of war, can reconcile with each other and achieve common goals for a more secure, stable, prosperous and inclusive Afghanistan.

91. Given the current political climate among Afghans both in the country and abroad, it is likely that the recommended steps would require significant support

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<sup>31</sup> The Security Council in its resolution [2681 \(2023\)](#) expressed its support for the principle of a comprehensive and inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned determination of the country's political future and development path. The Taliban also committed to intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations in the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the United States of America and the Taliban. These were not specified as negotiations with the former regime – the agreement stipulated dialogue with Afghan sides to determine the formation of the new post-settlement Afghan Islamic government. The Security Council reflected this bilateral commitment in its resolution [2593 \(2021\)](#) in which the Council encouraged all parties to seek an inclusive, negotiated political settlement, with the full, equal and meaningful participation of women, and in adherence to the rule of law. Most recently, in the Kazan Declaration, the Moscow format consultations on Afghanistan urged the authorities to establish a practical, outcome-oriented dialogue with the representatives of alternative ethno-political groups with a view to completing the process of peaceful settlement and forging a balanced, broad-based, inclusive, accountable and responsible government in Afghanistan ([A/78/517-S/2023/741](#), annex).

from international stakeholders, but such a process would only succeed with the political will, commitment and independence of Afghan stakeholders.

### **3. Normalization and representation of Afghanistan**

92. Significant and measurable progress on upholding the obligations of Afghanistan as set out above, and on inclusive governance and intra-Afghan dialogue, would permit movement towards the end state of full normalization and integration of Afghanistan within the international system.

93. Afghanistan's full integration into international institutions would include membership in key financial institutions and fully accredited representation of Afghanistan in the General Assembly and other associated forums.<sup>32</sup>

94. Normalization would allow for expansion of international assistance towards more regular levels and types of development aid, including as relating to infrastructure, and technical dialogue and cooperation. With a demonstration of the de facto authorities' ability to maintain Afghanistan's commitments and to govern inclusively, the international community should move swiftly to identify a solution to the current dilemma of Afghanistan's frozen assets, revisit the various sanctions regimes and move towards more permanent economic solutions, such as the recapitalization of the Da Afghanistan Bank.

### **E. Mechanisms to support engagement**

95. Advancing the recommendations presented in the present report will require dedicated capacities and platforms for coordination and cooperation to aid and facilitate a more structured engagement and address obstacles along the way.

96. During the stakeholder consultations, strong support was outlined for the United Nations to play a coordinating role and to spearhead the more structured and coherent engagement processes set out above. The mechanisms proposed here would be coordinated by the United Nations, but would also rely on the strong support and active contribution of Member States and other international organizations.

97. These mechanisms would operate alongside and work closely with existing regional formats and international coordination platforms that are playing a vital role in addressing the challenges facing Afghanistan.

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<sup>32</sup> Where there have been competing claims to represent a Member State in the General Assembly, or when a transition period has left in question the legitimacy of a transitional government, the question has usually been settled by an affirmative statement on the issue by either the General Assembly or the Security Council, or both. For past practice concerning the cases of the Congo (1960), Kampuchea (1979), Afghanistan (1996) and others, see *United Nations Juridical Yearbook 1997* (United Nations Publications, Sales No. E.02.V.1), chap. VI, sect. A.17. See also General Assembly resolution [63/301](#), entitled "Situation in Honduras: democracy breakdown", and United Nations press release, "After much wrangling, General Assembly seats National Transitional Council of Libya as country's representative for sixty-sixth session," 16 September 2011. In this case, given that both the General Assembly and the Security Council have previously issued statements declining recognition of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, affirmative reversal would likely be necessary (see Security Council resolution [2513 \(2020\)](#) and General Assembly resolution [75/90](#)).

98. These mechanisms should support the implementation of the measures to address the immediate needs of the Afghan people, advance and facilitate the preparations for a broad-based, intra-Afghan political dialogue and identify ways to further deepen engagement towards an end state of Afghanistan's full reintegration into the international system.

99. For each of these mechanisms, steps should be taken to ensure consultation, input and participation with the full range of Afghan stakeholders. It is imperative that Afghan women participate in all forums that have an impact on Afghanistan's future and that options for Afghan women's meaningful and consistent participation are actively developed and implemented.

100. UNAMA, through its mandate to monitor, report and engage on a range of topics at the national and subnational levels, has played an important role as a bridge between the international community and Afghans. It should continue its work in support of deepening engagement.

#### **United Nations-convened large group format**

101. The most broad-based platform that currently exists, the meetings of special envoys convened by the Secretary-General initiated in May 2023 (hereafter the large group format) should continue to meet in a regular manner, to sustain international unity and improve cooperation in engagement. It could meet at the level of special envoys or, as appropriate, ministers for foreign affairs.

102. As a first step to advancing the recommendations, the United Nations should initiate consultations with all stakeholders to convene, in a timely manner, another meeting of the large group format where the conclusions and recommendations from the present assessment can be discussed, in particular in relation to the large group format and the contact group proposed below.

#### **International contact group**

103. A smaller contact group should be formed, selected from and linked to the large group format. This contact group would coordinate action and approaches among international stakeholders, sustain and deepen engagement and could take a more frontal role in active and continuous political engagement with Afghan stakeholders, including the de facto authorities.

104. It would be important for the contact group to be able to act with the support of all international stakeholders. The group's effectiveness would be enhanced by an affirmation of support from the Security Council.

#### **United Nations special envoy**

105. A United Nations special envoy should be appointed to ensure sufficient and dedicated resources to facilitate engagement among international and Afghan stakeholders, spearhead coordination and connect with the proposed and existing platforms. The special envoy should represent the United Nations in the aforementioned international contact group and support its functions and regular convening.

106. The special envoy's mandate should focus on diplomacy between Afghanistan and international stakeholders, as well as on advancing intra-Afghan dialogue. It should be complementary to that of the United Nations in Afghanistan.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

107. It is my hope that the present assessment and its recommendations will offer ideas and guidance to Afghan and international stakeholders, Member States, the United Nations and international organizations, and that it provides the much-needed impetus to shift from the current status quo.

108. I extend my sincere appreciation to all who contributed to the independent assessment. In particular, I continue to be inspired by the courage and determination shown by Afghan women and girls.

109. It is clear from my consultations that we are universally united in our vision of an Afghanistan that is at peace with its people, its neighbours and the international community. All stakeholders have a role to play in building a more peaceful, prosperous and predictable future for Afghanistan to the benefit of all Afghans. Afghanistan should feel like home to all Afghans, by working together to create space for all voices; this is possible.

Istanbul  
26 October 2023

## Attachment

### Scope of the consultations

1. The Security Council requested that the independent assessment provide forward-looking recommendations for an integrated and coherent approach among relevant political, humanitarian and development actors, within and outside the United Nations system, in order to address the current challenges faced by Afghanistan, including, but not limited to, humanitarian, human rights and especially the rights of women and girls, religious and ethnic minorities, security and terrorism, narcotics, development, economic and social challenges, dialogue, governance and the rule of law; and to advance the objective of a secure, stable, prosperous and inclusive Afghanistan in line with the elements set out by the Council in previous resolutions.

2. The Security Council requested that consultations take place with all relevant Afghan political actors and stakeholders, including relevant authorities, Afghan women and civil society, as well as the region and the wider international community, as part of the assessment process. Given this mandate, the independent assessment team took particular care to ensure sufficient coverage and balance in consulting with Member States and regional organizations, in particular those in the region or with long-standing interests and engagement in Afghanistan; Afghanistan's de facto authorities; Afghan civil society and other Afghan stakeholders, including notably women and girls; thematic and regional subject-matter experts; and those working within the United Nations system.

3. The purpose of these consultations, as well as other information-gathering, was to assess the challenges that exist in Afghanistan and the approaches that have been taken to respond so far, identify feasible pathways for the international community to respond to these challenges in the future and develop recommendations for a more integrated and coherent approach among relevant political, humanitarian and development actors, within and outside the United Nations system.

4. As part of these consultations, the Special Coordinator travelled to 15 Member States and to Afghanistan. He also consulted with senior representatives of an additional 14 Member States and regional organizations. A total of 117 representatives of Member States (other than Afghanistan) were consulted.

5. The Special Coordinator visited Afghanistan twice for in-person consultations, where he met with the de facto authorities at the ministerial level, Afghan political, civil society and business leaders, journalists, youth, students and other stakeholders. He consulted with ambassadors, special envoys and chargés d'affaires present in Afghanistan. He also consulted with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the Deputy Special Representatives, and the United Nations country team heads of agencies, funds and programmes.

6. In addition, the Special Coordinator's assessment team conducted in-person consultations across seven provinces of Afghanistan, consulting with individuals from 17 different provinces of Afghanistan who represented a wide range of Afghan

and international stakeholders. These included consultations with representatives of the de facto authorities at the ministerial, provincial and district levels, and with Afghan men and women working in public health and education, humanitarian and development assistance, women business owners, and in the civil service. The consultations also included a large share of civil society actors, journalists, students and other individuals negatively affected by events since August 2021, including those subject to rights violations.

7. Recognizing the extraordinary circumstances that displaced and dispersed Afghans during and after the events of August 2021, the Special Coordinator and his team also took steps to solicit views from Afghans currently located outside Afghanistan, both during visits to other Member States and through online consultations. These included one large, open-call, virtual consultation organized through the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service, and several smaller, non-public, focus-group discussions with particular groups of stakeholders or focused on particular sub-themes of the assessment.

8. In total, the assessment team consulted with 768 individuals, of which 365 (48 per cent) were women and 389 (51 per cent) were men;<sup>1</sup> 67 per cent of those consulted were Afghan and 32 per cent were of other nationalities.

9. In addition to consulting extensively with United Nations field staff during consultations inside Afghanistan, the independent assessment engaged with representatives from a wide range of United Nations entities based in New York, Geneva and elsewhere. In total, the assessment team consulted with and benefited from the expertise of 124 United Nations staff or staff representing other United Nations agencies, funds and programmes.

10. The assessment team also consulted with Afghan and international experts on the key themes of the report, including those specializing in humanitarian aid, human rights and especially the rights of women and girls, religious and ethnic minorities, security and terrorism, narcotics, development, economic and social challenges, dialogue, governance and the rule of law. This included consulting with a wide range of humanitarian actors engaged in service delivery in Afghanistan. Specifically on gender, the Special Coordinator had access to full-time gender expertise in his team and updated United Nations-verified data, statistics and analyses from within the United Nations system and from external sources.

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<sup>1</sup> This breakdown of the gender of participants does not include consultation with 14 individuals during one focus group discussion on LGBTQI+ rights, who preferred that their gender not be viewed in binary terms.