



Briefing to the United Nations Security Council  
by the Secretary-General's Special Deputy Representative for Afghanistan, Georgette Gagnon,  
New York, 9 March 2026

[As delivered]

Mr. President,

The Council's ambition for Afghanistan, affirmed in resolution 2721 of 2023, is a country at peace with itself and its neighbours, fully reintegrated into the international community and meeting international obligations - including on women's rights, human rights and counterterrorism.

This goal, and the preservation of stability in Afghanistan, is even more important in view of recent developments. The conflict with Pakistan has had punishing human and economic costs. We reiterate the Secretary-General's deep concern about the escalation and impact on civilian populations, his call for an immediate cessation of hostilities, and for the two countries to resolve any differences through diplomacy. We urge both sides to recommit to a ceasefire without delay and safeguard the protection of civilians. I also reiterate our request to ensure the free flow of humanitarian assistance into Afghanistan.

Currently, it is difficult to predict the outcome of the conflict in the Middle East, but it is already affecting Afghanistan. With the border closed between Afghanistan and Pakistan, Iran provided an alternative trade route that is now also increasingly uncertain due to the ongoing conflict. The prices of basic commodities in Afghanistan have begun to rise, stressing Afghanistan's already fragile economy. Instability in the region, on both of Afghanistan's longest borders, undermines Afghanistan's stability.

We stress, however, that Afghanistan's continued alienation from the international system remains the central issue. It prevents other issues, such as economic self-sufficiency, security cooperation, counter-terrorism commitments, human rights concerns, and the humanitarian crisis, from being fully addressed. If these issues are not dealt with, Afghanistan could again become a driver of regional and global instability, in the form of out-migration, terrorism, narcotics and more.

Mr. President,

Within this increasingly complex context, at the request of this Council and in accordance with the recommendations of the November 2023 Independent Assessment, UNAMA has sought to advance a political pathway to create the conditions to achieve the desired end state.

This engagement through the Doha process is one in which the interests and the concerns of all - the Afghan people, the international community, and the *de facto* authorities - can be fairly discussed. It balances necessary pragmatism and patience with adherence to the UN's core principles. It has maintained existing channels for constructive engagement and opened new ones, and has ensured that the rights, well-being and aspirations of the Afghan people remain front and center of our efforts.

This engagement process is also a recognition that the situation in Afghanistan remains a multilateral challenge that requires a multilateral solution. And it requires the full weight and engagement of this Council and the Member States of the UN.

Before outlining the country's multiple challenges, several positive developments speak to the value of this engagement and opportunities ahead.

One of the tasks mandated to UNAMA is to support Afghanistan's economic and social stability, and resilience.

Through the UN's coordination of international assistance, the Afghan people have been supported to better endure compounding crises - from successive droughts to frequent earthquakes, from food insecurity to the return of millions of refugees.

The *de facto* authorities' ban on opium poppy cultivation, a longstanding demand of the international community, has also been maintained for the past three years, despite the huge cost to rural livelihoods.

The latest UNODC survey results show the land given over to opium poppy cultivation in 2025 was just 10,200 hectares, 20 per cent lower than in 2024 and a minimal fraction of the pre-ban levels recorded in 2022. More support from the international community is needed to maintain the gains made on counternarcotics.

Despite sanctions and limited revenues, the *de facto* authorities have initiated large-scale infrastructure projects that could contribute to Afghanistan's economic development if they can be completed. The country has also absorbed five and a half million Afghans returning from neighbouring countries since September 2023, with declining international assistance and without evident social breakdown.

These developments have fed into constructive engagements in our political efforts. The Working Groups on counternarcotics and enabling the private sector, which complement the broader Doha process, have achieved results. We have seen more robust expert exchanges, greater transparency, and the unlocking of more resources to support the Afghan people. The private sector is also one of the few areas where there is some space for Afghan women to exercise their initiative and independence.

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Despite these developments, decisions of the *de facto* authorities' and resulting alienation of Afghanistan from the international community undermines their declared efforts to achieve economic self-sufficiency. The policies the *de facto* authorities have imposed on the Afghan people, particularly on education for girls and women, have the effect of depleting the country's substantial human capital over the medium and long term. It remains an extraordinary act of harm against not only Afghan women and girls, but all Afghan people.

The humanitarian situation is taxing the resilience of Afghan communities. Since 2021, international partners have responded generously to address urgent humanitarian needs. This year, however, the humanitarian crisis is worsened by significant funding cuts, growing needs – including due to large-scale return of refugees – and policies of the *de facto* authorities that prioritize ideological rigidity over the well-being of the Afghan people. Restrictions on women working in the humanitarian sector is one clear example.

Major urban centres are stretched far beyond their capacity. Years of economic deterioration and recurrent climate shocks have left families with less ability to cope and are driving new outmigration and secondary displacement.

In 2026, humanitarian partners plan to reach 17.5 million Afghans through a humanitarian appeal of US \$1.71 billion. This places Afghanistan second globally in terms of people targeted, and sixth globally on total funding requirements. This appeal is only 10 per cent funded at present.

The United Nations' ability to deliver assistance and reach Afghan women is impeded by a now-six-month ban on UN female national personnel being able to report for duty at their places of work. Their absence deprives the UN of their skills and experience and reduces our ability to provide vital support to Afghan women and the wider community. The restrictions are a breach of international rules on the privileges and immunities of UN personnel, and a violation of the UN Charter.

We again urge the de facto authorities to lift these restrictions and allow our UN national female staff to return to their offices.

The de facto authorities continue to be selective in their acceptance of the Afghan state's international obligations and display unwillingness to address key areas of concern. The unacceptable situation for Afghan women and girls continues. They are now entering their fifth year of almost total exclusion from public life and from education past grade 6.

On girls' education, there are ways forward, and we urge the de facto authorities to resolve this issue. Their own decree suspending girls' education states that it is temporary until conditions permit. The international community is prepared to help create permissible conditions. This is a bridge that can be crossed. It would be hugely beneficial to Afghan society, to Afghan women and girls, now and into the future. It would send a positive signal to the world.

Similarly, the recent decree number 12 on criminal rules of courts further distances the Afghan people from realization of their human rights and the country's international obligations, and undermines hopes for a system that is responsive to peoples' needs and more inclusive of Afghanistan's diversity, with women and men treated as equals. The decree is discriminatory against women and religious minorities. Its vague wording opens the potential for misinterpretation and abuse. The decree, like the ban on girls' education, is another distressing sign that Afghanistan's leadership is indifferent to the concerns of the international community and the Afghan people.

The de facto authorities also have a way to go to convince the world they are serious about meeting their counter-terrorism commitments. While de facto authorities have been generally effective in combatting ISIL-K, Afghanistan's neighbours continue to express concerns about extremism emanating from Afghanistan, in particular from groups affiliated with the de facto authorities as detailed in the reports of the Sanctions Monitoring Team. The unresolved issue between Afghanistan and Pakistan regarding the TTP has now led to an active conflict on the border between the two countries, which has included airstrikes in Afghan cities. More broadly the potential threat of terrorism coming from Afghanistan remains a critical issue that concerns, and unites, the international community.

Mr. President,

We are grateful for the expressions of support to UNAMA from this Council.

Even more valuable and necessary is the continued attention and consensus of this Council, and its active engagement on Afghanistan. The United Nations is the convener of the Doha process, but it is the Member States that can best demonstrate and provide the incentives for reintegration. And it is the de facto authorities that must do more, through their actions, to show they are ready and interested in achieving this end state.

We look forward to renewal of our mandate next week. At a time marked by instability across the wider region, the continued backing of the Council is vital to reinforce avenues for principled and pragmatic engagement, considering Afghanistan's key role in regional and global stability.

UNAMA with all UN agencies, funds and programmes, remains fully committed to advancing our shared objective articulated at the beginning of this briefing: an Afghanistan at peace with itself and its neighbours, reintegrated into the international system, and meeting its international obligations for the benefit of the Afghan people.

Thank you.

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