



**Briefing to the United Nations Security Council  
by the Secretary-General's Special Deputy Representative for Afghanistan, Georgette Gagnon,  
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[As delivered]

Mr. President,

Over the past weeks, I have traveled across Afghanistan, to remote areas, northern provinces, and to eastern border areas. In these visits, I have heard a consistent message from Afghan people - returnees, business owners, earthquake and conflict-affected families, rural and urban communities, and from women and girls. All have highlighted the increasing pressures they face, whether humanitarian, economic, or on human rights.

On the surface, Afghanistan under the *de facto* authorities remains stable. Territorial and administrative control has been consolidated and there is no meaningful armed or political challenge to their rule. The *de facto* authorities themselves present their main achievement as having delivered nationwide peace and security.

The longer-term scenarios for Afghanistan, however, depend largely on internal dynamics within the *de facto* authorities' governing structure, in particular the tension between ideological policies that place severe burdens on the Afghan people and relatively pragmatic approaches that have helped sustain the system so far.

For now, what exists is increasing control by the *de facto* authorities without a clear end-state.

In this context of accumulating risk and uncertainty, I highlight five interlinked areas: political and economic dynamics; the situation of women and girls; broader human rights developments; regional dynamics; and the importance of sustained, unified international engagement.

Mr. President,

Macroeconomic indicators reflect elements of stabilization: economic growth has been positive in absolute terms, with some long term-investments in infrastructure, fiscal stability has been maintained, and revenue mobilization has improved, despite challenges such as sanctions, wider regional tensions, and closure of the eastern border since last October. Relative stability has also allowed for positive measures such as sustained near eradication of poppy cultivation.

Key risks remain, however, that underscore the fragility of current economic stabilization efforts with serious political impacts. The most significant is demographic. Large-scale returns from neighboring countries have led to a sudden population increase. Nearly 5.9 million people have returned since 2023, amounting to more than a ten percent increase in population.

Up to 2.8 million Afghans are projected to return this year, many with limited assets and few livelihood prospects. Afghans are returning to communities and an economy that cannot fully reintegrate them. As the World Bank has reported, in real terms Afghans are becoming poorer.

To help mitigate this stress, we reinforce the Secretary General's call on all countries returning Afghans to Afghanistan to uphold their international obligations on protection, including the

principle of non-refoulement, and ensure that returns are voluntary, safe, dignified and accompanied by sustained support for returnees' reintegration.

Afghanistan also remains one of the world's largest humanitarian crises. Some 21.9 million people - approximately 45 per cent of the population - require humanitarian assistance in 2026.

Mr. President,

Afghanistan's demographic profile is also central to understanding its trajectory. More than half the population is under the age of 25.

This generation is coming of age at a time of constrained opportunity - particularly for girls, but also increasingly for boys. Many are looking elsewhere for a future.

There are economic drivers: limited employment prospects, declining household incomes, and rising competition for scarce jobs, particularly in urban areas already under strain from returnee populations.

There are environmental pressures: Afghanistan continues to experience prolonged drought conditions, water scarcity, and ecosystem degradation. These factors are undermining agricultural livelihoods - the primary source of income for more than 70 percent of the population - and accelerating rural distress.

The convergence of these trends multiplies existing risks, creating conditions conducive to increased migration, social, political and economic alienation, rising insecurity and potential radicalization.

Mr. President,

On the situation of Afghan women and girls, it is important to be very clear. What we are witnessing are severe and growing restrictions - the imposition of systemic and institutionalized harm with long-term generational consequences for Afghan society as a whole.

An estimated 3.8 million girls between 7 and 18 years of age are not in school, including more than 2.6 million adolescent girls. Each year, approximately 250,000 more girls are permanently excluded from secondary education pathways, creating a lost generation of talent and potential.

This has implications far beyond education.

Recent UNICEF analysis makes clear that restrictions on women's education and labour participation are already costing the Afghan economy and undermining the country's longer-term economic development.

Sectors such as health and education are experiencing a decline in qualified female professionals, with projections indicating the loss of more than 25,000 skilled workers by 2030.

This directly affects service delivery. It reduces access to healthcare for Afghan people, particularly women and children, and worsens maternal and child health outcomes.

These costs, both human and financial, will only worsen and compound overtime. The solution requires the *de facto* authorities to end restrictions on education and employment for women and girls, to the benefit of all Afghans - and to support opening a new chapter in Afghanistan's relations with the international community.

In this context, the continued exclusion of UN female national staff from UN premises reminds us every day of the harmful impact of restrictions on Afghan women across the country.

We again urge the *de facto* authorities to lift all restrictions on women and girls including those affecting access of UN national female staff to our premises, a violation of the UN Charter.

We are also observing broader trends in the erosion of human rights that warrant increased attention.

Recent decree number 18 on separation of spouses violates core principles of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women as well as children's rights. It is among the most recent of several decrees and actions that serve to institutionalize a system that is increasingly divergent from Afghanistan's international human rights obligations, and these include recent reports of the detention of some 30 women in Herat by *de facto* representatives of the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice and police for allegedly not meeting the Taliban dress code.

Recent arrests of journalists and closing of some media outlets highlight declining freedom of expression and the continued narrowing of civic space.

Mr. President,

Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan remain strained, with continued border closures, security incidents, and military signaling.

The impacts are immediate as outlined in the Secretary-General's report: Border closures disrupt trade flows, reduce access to markets, and increase the cost of goods.

They also impede humanitarian operations and restrict access to vulnerable populations.

Civilian casualties associated with cross-border incidents, as documented in the Secretary-General's report and UNAMA's reporting, underscore the human impacts of this conflict. On both sides of the border civilians bear the cost of political differences that must be resolved diplomatically.

UNAMA reiterates its call for sustained efforts towards de-escalation and a durable ceasefire, agreement on reopening of border crossings particularly for humanitarian assistance, and peaceful dialogue to resolve differences including on the continued presence of terrorist groups on Afghan soil as reported by the Sanctions Monitoring Team.

We welcome the ongoing efforts of Member States to reduce tensions and open channels for dialogue between Pakistan and Afghanistan's *de facto* authorities.

Mr. President,

On UNAMA's efforts to guide a political process leading to the end state defined in Security Council resolution 2721 of 2023, I reiterate that engagement is not endorsement of the current regime. It is necessary for situational awareness, to facilitate dialogue and to better support the Afghan people. It contributes to the ability to monitor, contain, address and mitigate risks to the international community.

Across Afghanistan, at its headquarters and eight field offices around the country, UNAMA and the United Nations system continues to operate as an active presence — engaging daily with communities and Afghan people, supporting humanitarian and basic needs assistance, and

monitoring and reporting and taking action on real-time political and human rights developments on the ground.

UNAMA also engages constantly with the *de facto* authorities across the country. While significant differences exist, the channels for dialogue are open and frank.

The Doha Process is the current format in which dialogue on key political issues takes place: a multilateral framework that brings together international and regional actors for structured engagement with the *de facto* authorities towards the Security Council affirmed end state - Afghanistan at peace with itself and its neighbors, fully reintegrated into the international community, and meeting its international obligations for the Afghan peoples' benefit.

Three years after the first meeting of the Special Envoys on Afghanistan, there has been some progress on a comprehensive approach that serves the Afghan people and supports the international community's objectives. More is needed, however, as highlighted in the Secretary General's report. We reinforce the Secretary General's call on the Doha Process participants to sustain engagement in this comprehensive approach that supports Afghanistan's eventual reintegration.

The *de facto* authorities are encouraged to establish a structured mechanism for further engagement with UNAMA on this approach. Member States, in their interactions with the *de facto* authorities, should continue to make clear that reintegration remains possible through concrete, balanced, cooperative steps that build confidence and aim to resolve the underlying issues preventing Afghanistan's reintegration into the international system, including the imperative to meet international obligations.

UNAMA remains invested in achieving this Council's affirmed end state for Afghanistan. Ongoing and constant dialogue is essential, together with principled and pragmatic engagement, even where progress towards the end state is incremental. With strategic patience, coherent and coordinated diplomacy, and open dialogue, progress can be made in full support of the Afghan people.

Thank you.

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