



BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL

**Briefing to the United Nations Security Council
by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan,
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Kabul, 16 September 2026

[As delivered]

Mr. President,

Last month, the *de facto* authorities marked the fifth year of their return to power.

They projected confidence, highlighting nationwide control, improved security, infrastructure development, and economic stabilization efforts as evidence of their success. They also launched an initiative to improve institutional openness and accountability.

These developments are encouraging.

They are occurring, however, in a context of no progress on issues that are of profound concern to the Afghan people and the international community: the severe restrictions on women and girls, exclusionary governance, a human rights crisis, and the continued presence of terrorist groups that threaten Afghanistan, the region, and international peace and security.

In line with my last briefing to this Council, we assess that the *de facto* authorities face no significant armed or political threat. However, key risks to the country's stability are accumulating and mainly stem from the *de facto* authorities' own policies.

Recent events in Badakhshan province illustrate these risks. While the armed clashes, as detailed in the Secretary-General's report, did not threaten *de facto* authority control, they show what can happen when local communities are excluded from decision-making, resource-sharing, and economic opportunity.

During my recent visit to Badakhshan, people told me they seek opportunities, basic services, education, and a future for their children, not exclusion.

Over the past three months, events in Herat province remained similarly concerning. UNAMA documented arrests of women and girls related to strict enforcement of the *de facto* authorities' dress code. Subsequent protests were met with the excessive use of force. The *de facto* authorities continue to carry out arrests of women, including over the past week, for alleged violation of the dress code.

Across the country, UNAMA also documented mounting pressure on minority communities, media outlet closures, and arrests and intimidation of journalists.

These incidents are part of the broader trend of coercive social regulation that is alienating many communities. UNAMA is engaging with the *de facto* authorities on these critical concerns in Kabul and through our field offices.

Mr. President,

This month UNAMA released a report on the experiences of victims of Afghanistan's decades-long conflict. Ninety-five per cent of people we interviewed in Afghanistan reported continued psychological and emotional harm, including depression, anxiety, trauma, and flashbacks. Many are still living with disability, chronic pain and loss of livelihoods.

The findings remind us that peace is not only the absence of armed conflict. Sustainable peace requires dignity, inclusion, opportunity, and hope.

Many Afghans tell us that the last five years of relative stability have provided a welcome breathing space. Yet they also tell us they are suffering under the rigid social policies of the *de facto* authorities and from Afghanistan's fragile economic and humanitarian situation.

While Afghanistan has maintained a degree of macroeconomic stability, this does not equate to recovery.

Economic growth has not kept pace with a rising population or made up for declining aid. Per capita income has dropped by 5.6 per cent, and exports are down. Afghanistan remains heavily dependent on imports, with border disruptions and wider regional instability contributing to weakened household purchasing power.

Food insecurity and malnutrition present a serious concern. UNICEF reports that some 3.7 million children are suffering from deficient malnutrition, including some one million children experiencing severe acute malnutrition.

The 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan is only 30 per cent funded. Humanitarian organizations are being forced to make hard choices on where they operate, whom they can reach and which services they can maintain.

Health facilities, nutrition centers, women's protection services and other essential programmes have closed or scaled back due to funding cuts.

At the same time, Afghanistan continues to experience an extreme demographic and socioeconomic shock.

This year alone, nearly 1.2 million Afghans have returned from Pakistan and Iran, with total returns reaching 6.5 million since 2023.

Without sustained support for returnees and host communities, competition over scarce resources risks fueling grievances, increasing displacement, and promoting instability.

The *de facto* authorities' ban on opium poppy cultivation has been a positive measure with huge decreases in cultivation but risks bouncing back because of the economic pressures.

Greater support for alternative livelihoods is crucial as is sustained and principled humanitarian and development assistance for the Afghan people.

Mr. President,

No discussion of Afghanistan can ignore the continued exclusion of women and girls.

The words of an Afghan woman we met in Kandahar represents their experience, and I quote:

"If we follow one rule, another one comes next; women wearing hijab are instructed to wear a mask; those wearing masks are told to wear a burqa; those wearing a burqa are questioned about the absence of a mahram; and those accompanied by a mahram are questioned about their relationship with him."

By denying women access to education, professions, and public life, the *de facto* authorities are not safeguarding Afghanistan's future; they are constraining the talent and productivity needed for post-conflict recovery. This is at odds with their stated vision of a prosperous, self-reliant, and sovereign Afghanistan that can attract international investment.

This month marks one year since restrictions preventing Afghan women from accessing UN premises, including national female UN personnel, were enforced.

This is a violation of UN principles and a serious operational constraint. Humanitarian actors report difficulty reaching women and girls. Male-only delivery models cannot replace the participation of Afghan women staff, and organizations cannot consult women, assess risks, or verify that assistance reaches those who need it most.

Funding cuts are compounding the problem. Nearly three-quarters of Afghan women-led organizations have seen reduced funding over the past year, while more than eighty per cent

report increasing needs among women and girls. At a moment when Afghan women face unprecedented restrictions, international support mechanisms for them are decreasing.

Across Afghanistan, Afghan women tell us that engagement, assistance and support from the international community represent what they call “points of hope”. We urge international partners to prioritize support for Afghan women and girls.

Above all, we again call on the *de facto* authorities to end all restrictions on women and girls.

Mr. President,

Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan remain another matter of serious concern.

The effects of sporadic hostilities and the almost year-long border closure are taking an increasing toll on civilians, communities and businesses.

UNAMA continues to encourage de-escalation and dialogue to resolve differences, including on the presence of terrorist groups in Afghanistan, as reported by the Sanctions Monitoring Team. We welcome ongoing regional mediation efforts.

Mr. President,

As the High Commissioner for Refugees and the UNDP Administrator cautioned during their joint visit to Afghanistan in July, developments in Afghanistan do not necessarily stay in Afghanistan. Instability, increased displacement and out-migration, radicalization, and growing insecurity have regional and international consequences.

Sustained international engagement, including through the Doha Process, remains essential. Currently, the Doha Process is the multilateral framework through which such engagement is occurring aimed at Afghanistan’s reintegration into the international community based on compliance with international obligations and commitments.

This structured engagement among the *de facto* authorities, the international community and a wide range of Afghan stakeholders has identified key issues and positions, expanded dialogue and, in some areas, built confidence.

The main obstacle to progress is the *de facto* authorities’ preference for bilateral approaches over multilateral engagement, which they view as undermining their claims of sovereignty. They continue, however, to participate in Working Groups on counternarcotics and the private sector and engage on some key political issues.

What is now needed is a clear indication from the *de facto* authorities’ of their willingness to address the wider concerns of the international community. To this end, the *de facto* authorities can take steps toward inclusive governance and lifting of restrictions on women and girls, and show they are meeting their counterterrorism commitments.

Member States can reinforce that Afghanistan’s reintegration into the international system is possible through concrete, balanced, cooperative steps that begin to address the key issues preventing reintegration.

Mr. President,

We remain confident in the value of principled and pragmatic engagement. It sustains dialogue on the key issues and concerns, maintains influence, reduces risks, creates opportunities for progress, and, critically, supports the needs and aspirations of the Afghan people.

Thank you.

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