

**Briefing to the United Nations Security Council****by the Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan,****Mr. Markus Potzel**

29 August 2022

[As delivered]

Mr. President,

The focus of the request for this briefing has been on the humanitarian and economic situation and I fully endorse the comments that have been made by my colleague, Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Since the takeover by the Taliban one year ago, the United Nations has remained exceptionally focused on addressing humanitarian and human needs in Afghanistan. And, as Mr. Griffiths has stated, needs in Afghanistan continue to be significant.

I am scheduled to brief this same Council in only a few weeks on the overall situation in Afghanistan. In addition, the Security Council will soon receive a report from the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan. But given this opportunity I would like to provide a few thoughts on the current situation.

First, the current regime in Afghanistan has not been recognized by any member of the international community. The reasons for that are clear. The international community has norms regarding human rights, especially those of women and girls; representative governance; and international collective security. Afghanistan is part of this international system and the Taliban need to adhere to their international obligations, but instead request recognition based on the fact that they have secured territorial control.

Second, there is no question that the sanctions against the Taliban have affected the Afghan economy since the Taliban have taken control. This has been documented in previous reports of the Secretary-General. The Secretary-General has also called for measures to allow the Afghan economy to breathe. These include efforts to facilitate access to assets belonging to the Afghan central bank for the benefit of the Afghan people. In addition to international assistance that supports basic human needs – in other words interventions that go beyond merely providing humanitarian assistance but support the resilience of Afghan communities. Humanitarian aid is not a long-term solution. Poverty reduction as well as the delivery of basic goods and services must ultimately rely on sustained economic growth. Donors have repeatedly stated that the resumption of economic cooperation hinges primarily on Taliban action to reverse regressive policies.

Third, the Taliban de facto authorities are faced with a growing number of governance challenges. Discarding persistent rumours of internal differences, the Taliban continue to present themselves as a unified, cohesive governing entity. The Kabul-based cabinet meets regularly – with outcomes of meetings reported publicly by the de facto authorities. However, the relationship between the cabinet in Kabul and the Kandahar-based Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhundzada remains unclear. Practices to govern by decree and through policy decisions, declared to be in adherence with “Islam and Afghan



traditions,” have further curtailed fundamental human rights and freedoms, especially for women and girls, such as the 23 March announcement of the continued closure of secondary education for girls. Today, Afghanistan is the only country in the world that denies girls the full right to education.

Mr. President,

The last three weeks have seen the highest number of civilian casualties in a one-month period since 15 August 2021, in a series of improvised explosive device attacks in Kabul, most claimed by ISIL-K. Such attacks often target specific ethnic and religious groups. We are encouraged to hear that the de facto authorities are looking into what can be done to ensure greater security for these communities.

In July, UNAMA released its report “Human Rights in Afghanistan” covering the ten-month period since the Taliban takeover till 15 June this year. It reflects the human rights priorities set out in UNAMA’s mandate given by this Council. UNAMA documented human rights violations targeting specific groups such as former government officials and members of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, individuals accused of affiliation with ISIL-K and the National Resistance Front, civil society, media, and women, including those accused of so-called ‘moral’ crimes. UNAMA is particularly concerned about reports on action taken by de facto officials from the “promotion of virtue and prevention of vice” departments that result in the verbal harassment, ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests of people as they carry out their daily lives. Attacks against human rights defenders, journalists and media workers combined with the impact of broader policy measures taken by the de facto authorities have had a chilling effect on freedom of the media and civic activism. Last week’s inaugural meeting of the media violation commission is a welcome development, if it indeed works to prevent further restrictions of free media space.

Lastly, I would like to commend the regional response to the current situation. Afghanistan’s neighbours are the most immediately affected—and sometimes feel threatened—by what happens in Afghanistan. Afghanistan’s neighbours responded by convening meetings at foreign ministers’ level, first in Islamabad, then in Tehran followed by Beijing. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation also mobilized, holding a special meeting at the foreign ministers level in Islamabad late last year. Last month, an international conference on Afghanistan took place in Tashkent, with the participation of a high-level Taliban delegation. Discussions focused on the importance of counterterrorism and counternarcotic efforts, economic and infrastructure development, inclusive governance and respect for human and civic rights, especially the rights of women including girls’ education. It is important for the Taliban to understand that neighbours, regional partners, and the wider Islamic world want them to be part of the international community. Afghanistan is a land-locked country that depends on its neighbours for access to trade routes, but is also a country with tremendous potential resources that, if properly harnessed, could benefit Afghanistan and its region as well as the wider world.

Mr. President,

As I have mentioned, I will have more to tell to the Council a few weeks from now on the specific situation in the country. Afghanistan itself, I believe, has not recovered from serious geopolitical shocks and interventions by foreign powers. None of these interventions have achieved their designs. All of them have altered Afghanistan in ways that were unexpected and often unhelpful. Despite immense resources expended over the past decades, Afghanistan remains significantly underdeveloped, vulnerable, and in need of international assistance.

United Nations officials and UNAMA, including through its 11 field offices across the country, continue to engage with the de facto authorities, and facilitate engagements between the de facto authorities,



community leaders, religious groups, women and civil society, aimed to promote inclusive and participatory governance and the promotion of rights and freedoms.

The Taliban have been ambiguous as to the extent to which they would wish to engage, predicated on being in accordance with their interpretation of sharia law. It is vital to move beyond an exchange of hardened positions towards a sustained dialogue between the Taliban, other Afghan stakeholders, the wider region and the international community. Such dialogue must place the interests of all Afghans at its centre. The future stability of Afghanistan rests on meeting the needs of the Afghan people, preserving their rights, and reflecting the country's diversity in all governance structures.

Let us all look ahead and improve the situation together rather than dwell on the past.

Thank you.