



United Nations

Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

SRSB BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL

**Briefing to the United Nations Security Council
by the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Roza Otunbayeva
New York, 10 March 2025**

[As delivered]

Madame President,

The Independent Assessment of November 2023, noted positively by this Council in Resolution 2721, calls for a political pathway through which the interests of all sides—the Afghan people, the international community, and the de facto authorities—can be fairly discussed so that Afghanistan can be fully reintegrated into the international system while respecting its international legal obligations. The establishment of this political pathway has been our fundamental task over the past months.

Challenges remain. It is the responsibility of the de facto authorities to indicate whether they want Afghanistan to be reintegrated into the international system and, if so, whether they are willing to take the necessary steps. The de facto authorities have so far treated the Afghan state's international obligations selectively, rejecting some on the basis they allegedly impinge on the country's sovereignty or violate their traditions. But to be very clear, these international obligations affect not only the possibility of progress along the political pathway but, most crucially, the well-being of Afghanistan's entire population, whose voices must be included in the political pathway.

Madame President,

UNAMA and the UN family have constant contact across the country with Afghans from all walks of life. More and more Afghans are approaching UNAMA to express their concerns, and they deserve to be elevated to this Council. Afghans increasingly resent the intrusions on their private lives by the de facto authorities. They fear Afghanistan's further isolation from the rest of the world. After three and a half years under Taliban rule, they have indeed welcomed an absence of conflict, and greater stability and freedom of movement, at least for the male population. But this is not a peace in which they can live in dignity with their human rights respected and with confidence in a stable future.

Afghans continue to face a severe humanitarian crisis defined by decades of conflict, entrenched poverty, climate-induced shocks, large population growth and increasing protection risks, especially for women and girls. In 2025, more than 50 percent of the population — some 23 million people — require humanitarian assistance. But this assistance is rapidly decreasing.

The defunding of assistance is already having and will continue to have a significant impact on the Afghan people. In the past month, more than 200 health facilities have closed, impacting some 1.8 million people, essential malnutrition services for children have been limited and implementing partners have significantly reduced their footprint and coordination capacity. Lives and livelihoods will be lost and development gains further eroded. Given this dire situation I want

to thank the World Bank for its decision last week to provide an additional US\$240 million to support the health sector until November 2026.

Despite the enormous challenges Afghan women face, they have continued to meaningfully and comprehensively participate in the humanitarian response. Humanitarian partners remain committed to upholding the principle of women's participation.

Last year, in anticipation of funding cuts and aware of the need for greater efficiencies, the UN system in Afghanistan and its partners adopted a joined-up approach to strengthen the nexus between humanitarian and basic human needs assistance. This fed into and complemented efforts on the political track, including the UN-convened Meetings of Special Envoys on Afghanistan in Doha and the subsequently established Working Groups on counter-narcotics and the private sector.

Donors responded by increasing contributions to basic human needs aid, which reached almost US\$1.6 billion in 2024, equaling the funding levels of humanitarian aid. Our field visits and interactions with Afghans in all provinces provide ample evidence of the positive impact of this joined-up approach. This includes the ability of Afghans to access basic services, to build their livelihoods and to promote participation and inclusion. If this assistance stops, the fragile progress of the last three years would collapse and many Afghans would revert to historical coping mechanisms such as out-migration. While there have been some instances of interference in aid delivery, de facto authority representatives in Kabul and in the provinces have generally cooperated with the UN and partners to enable provision of assistance and resolve cases of interference.

The Afghan economy grew around 2.7 percent in 2024. Investments, especially in infrastructure, supported by regional countries, are taking place. But in the short and medium term current levels of growth cannot compensate for the drop in foreign aid and the growing population. In the longer term, the de facto authorities' positive vision of economic self-sufficiency cannot reach its full potential unless ongoing obstacles to its reintegration into the international system are resolved. Here we return to the question of Afghanistan's international obligations.

Madame President,

On human rights, there has been no easing of the significant restrictions on women, despite global appeals and appeals by many Afghans. These includes laudable efforts by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which recently sent a delegation to Kabul to promote the Jeddah Declaration on Women's Rights in Islam, and the January summit in Islamabad on girls' education in Muslim communities, hosted by the World Muslim League and government of Pakistan. These and other events make clear the Taliban's restrictions, including its ban on girls' education – soon to enter its fourth tragic year – have no basis in Islam. The anniversary of the education ban is a particularly sad landmark as we celebrate International Women's Day. Unfortunately, on 2 December last year, the de facto Ministry of Public Health ordered medical institutes to be closed for women and girls, shutting down one of the last avenues for women to attain professional education. This new restriction deepens a long-term gap in the country's capacity to protect the health of women and indeed all Afghans. This will further worsen maternal and infant mortality in Afghanistan, already one of the highest in the world.

UNAMA has been closely observing the Taliban's enforcement of its Law on the Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue since it was promulgated in August last year, including its negative economic effects and impacts on Afghans' human rights and private lives. The law demonstrates the de facto authorities' prioritization of ideology over international obligations. It remains a major impediment to implementing the political pathway needed to reintegrate Afghanistan into the international community.

Turning to the security situation, the de facto authorities continue to exert full control over the country, with a few exceptions. ISIL-KP claimed a suicide attack on de facto authorities' security personnel who were queuing to receive salaries in Kunduz on 11 February, killing four civilians and 14 de facto security personnel, with an unknown number of wounded. Two days later there was another ISIL-KP-claimed suicide attack on one of the de facto Deputy Ministers of Urban Development and Housing in Kabul, who was injured, with three de facto authority personnel killed and ten wounded.

The continued activities of the TTP against Pakistan, and the presence of other terrorist groups in Afghanistan, as documented in the recent 1267 sanctions monitoring team report, demonstrate that the international community continues to have legitimate questions about the de facto authorities' ability or commitment to uphold their own guarantees that Afghanistan will not become a threat to other countries.

Madame President,

The space for engagement is narrowing. There is a growing frustration on the part of some key international stakeholders that political engagement is not working and may actually be encouraging hardliners within the de facto authority. At the same time, funding decreases are putting additional pressure on the Afghan people as I have described.

How do we move forward given these negative trends? The mechanisms to address the issues that prevent Afghanistan's reintegration with the international community are today in place. The working groups on counternarcotics and the private sector are meeting and provide a framework for engagement and potential confidence-building. On counternarcotics, Afghan experts, including women, with the de facto authorities, UN and member state representatives, produced a joint action and investment plan on alternative livelihoods for poppy farmers to support the DFA's opium cultivation ban. Work on a sustainable private sector includes defining a comprehensive support strategy that integrates access to finance, business enablers, and market access with regulatory frameworks and a focus on women-led businesses. These meetings have helped to build confidence among the main stakeholders as well as provide concrete plans to improve the lives of Afghans. The UN-proposed Comprehensive Approach shared or now with the Doha format participants and the de facto authorities, for the first time proposes a framework to address the difficult issues blocking Afghanistan's reintegration into the international community. But the United Nations cannot move faster than the Member States who are participating in the Doha process and other stakeholders who must lead this process.

The trend of world events, including competing international priorities, budgetary constraints, and a growing tendency of governments to focus on internal issues, all risk leaving Afghanistan poorer, more vulnerable, and more isolated. This is an avoidable outcome but only if all stakeholders recognize the risk and seek actively to avoid it, in particular the de facto authorities. The most helpful development would be a clear signal from the de facto authorities they are

committed to the reintegration of Afghanistan with the international community with all that it implies. This is a moment for realism.

I am grateful, Madam President, for the expressions of support to UNAMA from this Council. We look forward to an expected renewal of our mandate next week. UNAMA along with all UN agencies, funds and programmes remain fully committed to the goal articulated at the beginning of this briefing: an Afghanistan fully reintegrated into the international system and respecting its international legal obligations for the benefit of the Afghan people. We remain committed to improving the lives of the Afghan people whose concerns and aspirations must be addressed for real peace and stability in Afghanistan.

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