



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
Kabul, 12 December 2024**

[As delivered]

Madam President,

As we move well into the fourth year of Taliban de facto authority rule over Afghanistan, we are facing an important test of our engagement efforts.

The Security Council has mandated UNAMA to support Afghanistan's social and economic stabilization. We have sought to help create the necessary space for millions of women, men, girls and boys to receive life-saving humanitarian and basic human needs assistance. With the generosity of donors, the UN in Afghanistan has been able to provide assistance to 15.3 million people this year. The de facto authorities' restrictions on Afghan women working for national and international non-governmental organizations and the United Nations has been an obstacle, requiring strong advocacy and coordinating mitigating actions. At the same time, the de facto authorities have continued to allow humanitarian access to all parts of the country. My OCHA colleague, USG Fletcher, will provide more information on this effort in his briefing today, including details on impediments to the provision of aid and how they are being addressed.

Through our principled and steadfast engagement, including with the de facto authorities, we have sought to build a platform for constructive dialogue in support of Afghanistan's peace and stability, while also adhering to the international principles we are mandated to uphold. The objective is an Afghanistan reintegrated into the international community and upholding its international obligations.

There are areas in which our engagement and assistance have had a meaningful impact on the lives of Afghan people and strengthened their resilience, mitigating the risks of outmigration and a deterioration of security. It has also opened new opportunities, and I will expand on this later. But there are also clear limits to our influence and the international community's leverage and where further cooperation of the de facto authorities is essential.

Madam President,

Since my last briefing to you in September, the de facto authorities have continued to resolutely pursue their vision of an Islamic system and their interpretation of Afghan culture, and one which continues to be characterized by unprecedented restrictions on women and girls.

It is now approaching nearly twelve-hundred days without girls having access to formal education beyond sixth grade, with women and girls facing a progressive erasure from almost all walks of life. In early December, the de facto authorities announced that female students would be barred from attending medical institutes and classes of higher education. If fully implemented, this

would have deadly implications for women and girls in particular, but also for men and boys, entire communities and the country as a whole – by denying Afghans a functioning healthcare system that is open to all. I have strongly urged the de facto authorities to reconsider.

Our recent reporting on the implementation of the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice law has highlighted constant infringements on the rights of all Afghans. Its enforcement is evident across the country, with PVPV inspectors at checkpoints and monitoring NGO offices, mosques, bazaars, educational institutions and weddings, and more generally occupying the public space. With the expansion of general monitoring activities by PVPV inspectors, many Afghans choose to self-regulate rather than risk punishment.

The enforcement of the PVPV Law has impacted women's already constrained freedom of movement and access to public services, with de facto PVPV inspectors limiting women who are unaccompanied by a mahram from travelling in vehicles even for short distances from their homes and from accessing healthcare facilities. There has been a notable expansion of de facto PVPV inspectors' enforcement of the requirements regarding men's beards and Western-style haircuts through visits to mosques and other public places to advise on the requirements of the law, arrests of barbers and men identified as having shaved their beards and forcing barbershops to close. Stricter segregation of women in business activities have further constrained their livelihoods and mental health with serious consequences for their families, particularly children.

In a report released on 26 November, we documented a widening pattern of restrictions on the media, which undermine journalists' and media workers' ability to serve as a cornerstone of a well-informed, inclusive, vibrant and developing society. The space for public debate, including on key issues such as the rights of women and girls, continues to shrink given restrictions on political parties and civil society activities.

Political decision-making by the de facto authorities is increasingly opaque, and they continue to deal with their internal dynamics. And, as was demonstrated by this week's suicide attack on the de facto Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, in which the de facto minister and others lost their lives, there are continued threats to Afghanistan's security and stability.

This is the complex and challenging context in which we work. However, we have been consistent in our approach, which is to demonstrate the advantages to the Afghan people of their country's re-integration into the international community. This is something that UNAMA and other parts of the United Nations system in Afghanistan have been pursuing to do through our engagement and through the UN-convened Meetings of Special Envoys.

Madam President,

There has been some progress in finding avenues for constructive discussions.

Last month, we convened an inaugural working group meeting on counter-narcotics as a follow-up to the third Meeting of Special Envoys, bringing together Member States and the de facto authorities. Several participants acknowledged that the de facto authorities have significantly reduced opium poppy cultivation, a longstanding demand of the international community, which has impacted rural livelihoods. During this meeting, I was encouraged by broad international participation, as well as the constructive approach of the de facto authorities. This is the beginning of a process intended to build confidence and produce results. The first meeting of the private sector working group, also a follow-up to the third Meeting of Special Envoys, is planned for early next year.

Our human rights team has held constructive discussions with the de facto authorities on the broader issues of human rights norms and standards, as well as specific issues of detainee access.

On climate and environmental issues, I have been encouraged by constructive expert discussions and a seriousness in tackling an existential threat to the lives and livelihoods of the Afghan people. The de facto National Environmental Protection Agency participated as observers at COP29 in Baku, as Afghanistan struggles to address the harmful consequences of multiple climate and environmental shocks. I have seen this firsthand across the country where communities are struggling to access water. In Kabul city with a population over 5 million, available groundwater may be completely depleted as soon as 2030. These pressures ultimately have the most drastic impacts on women and children.

UNAMA has also convened discussions with the de facto authorities and private sector on microfinance. The aim is to have a nationwide microfinance movement to unlock financial access for people trapped in poverty, and especially women entrepreneurs, all of whom are crucial for Afghanistan's economic recovery.

These examples show that despite the lack of trust in the outside world and internal pressures, a willingness to engage by the de facto authorities is present.

Madam President,

I believe this willingness should be taken at face value, and reciprocated as part of a constructive, step-for-step approach in line with the independent assessment of November 2023, taken positive note of by the Security Council in its resolution 2721 of the year 2023. As I have stressed before, engagement is not normalization or recognition. It is a way of consistently communicating the advantages of rejoining the international system. It is a way of preventing Afghanistan's isolation or, worse, a return to conflict. Across Afghanistan, many people tell us that they want us to engage more with the de facto authorities and to help them to engage more.

It is tempting to recoil in condemnation at policies the de facto authorities have adopted against their own population and to progressively disengage from a crisis where there are no easy and no quick solutions. Some say that engagement has not worked because these decisions keep coming despite international condemnation. But pressure and condemnation do not seem to be working, and if pursued without forward-leaning, principled engagement, it will lead to Afghanistan's isolation. Isolation is not the solution, and we must continue to engage to build trust for the benefit of the Afghan people. We must be both patient and pragmatic, while also strong and resolute in our principles. But above all, we must be resolute in our support of the Afghan people.

Thank you.

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