



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, 21 June 2023**

[As delivered]

Madam President, members of the Security Council,

We as the United Nations continue to face a complicated situation in Afghanistan. The April 5 restrictions against Afghan women working for the United Nations place a question mark over our activities across the country. We have been given no explanations by the de facto authorities for this ban and no assurances that it will be lifted.

We will not put our national female staff in danger, and therefore we are asking them not to report to the office. At the same time, we have asked all our male national staff performing non-essential tasks to stay home to respect the principle of non-discrimination. Finally, we are steadfast: female national staff will not be replaced by male national staff as some de facto authorities have suggested.

We welcome Security Council resolution 2681 that both condemned the ban and stressed the critical importance of a continued presence of UNAMA and other United Nations Agencies, Funds, and Programmes across Afghanistan.

We must all remind the de facto authorities of their continuing responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations. Afghanistan, as a State, committed to these obligations as one of the earliest members of the Organization in 1946. These include the obligation to respect the privileges and immunities of the United Nations and its officials, including Afghan women who work for us.

The April ban specifically targets the United Nations. The Taliban ask to be recognized by the United Nations and its members, but at the same time they act against the key values expressed in the United Nations Charter.

The ban against Afghan women working for the UN adds to earlier restrictions placed on Afghan women and girls by the de facto authorities: against women working for NGOs, against women working for other diplomatic entities; preventing girls attending non-religious secondary and tertiary education institutions; against girls and women visiting public parks, baths, and gyms. These and other edicts limit their physical movement of women and girls and their participation in economic, social and public life.

The de facto Taliban authorities must rescind these bans to enable the United Nations to continue its full support to the people of Afghanistan. My colleague from OCHA will provide additional details in a separate briefing today on how these bans affect the humanitarian sector, as well as on the overall humanitarian situation.

But I would also like to emphasize the human effects of these bans. UNAMA, in collaboration with UN Women and the International Organization of Migration, has just released report on the situation of Afghan women. This report, which is available on the UNAMA website, documents the distressing toll these bans are taking on women's physical and mental health, and their sense of security.

Madam President,

Another unfortunate effect of these bans is that they obscure some of the other more positive achievements that have taken place under the de facto authorities. One of these is the growing evidence that the Taliban's ban on opium cultivation, announced in April last year, has been effectively enforced in many parts of the country. According to initial media reports, cultivation of opium has significantly decreased. At the same time, the opium economy has helped sustain parts of the rural economy in Afghanistan. Donors should consider allocating funding to alternative livelihood programmes that address the specific needs of farmers affected by the ban.

The Afghan economy remains stable, albeit at a low equilibrium. The World Bank reports that inflation is declining and the exchange rate remains steady. In part this is due to the welcome reduction of high-level corruption. The de facto authorities continue to report the collection of sufficient revenues to finance government operations, including paying civil service salaries. These include, according to the de facto authorities, some 500,000 who were working under the Republic. This macro-economic stability, however, coexists with severe household poverty. According to the World Bank, 58 percent of households struggle to satisfy basic needs. United Nations humanitarian efforts continue to address the needs of the nearly 20 million people who need some form of assistance. Afghanistan, I would remind you, remains the world's largest humanitarian crisis.

United Nations cash shipments, required for humanitarian operations, are expected to decrease as donor funding declines. This could begin having a negative effect on monetary stability.

I would like to draw your attention to the United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan that we will issue next week. This updates and replaces the Transitional Engagement Framework from last year. It outlines the range of activities the United Nations could carry out in Afghanistan between now and 2025 if the necessary enabling environment were provided by the de facto authorities.

This enabling environment requires greater transparency and accountability. Politically, the Taliban regime remains insular and autocratic. The composition of the de facto government is entirely male, and almost totally derived from the Taliban's Pashtun and rural political base. We have noted efforts and mechanisms towards consultation by the de facto authorities at the local level that acknowledge the pluralism of the country and that at times have had a moderating effect on some Taliban policies. But the general trend is of centralization of power by an unaccountable central authority. One of the key issues raised at the meeting of Special Envoys convened by the Secretary-General in Doha in May was the need for inclusive governance. There is a widespread concern that a lack of inclusivity and participatory governance will lead to instability.

On counter-terrorism the picture is mixed. The de facto authorities are making concerted efforts to counter ISIL-KP. Despite this, attacks targeting both the de facto authorities and the civilian population have taken place. Most recently in Badakhshan on 6 and 8 June, two attacks targeting the de facto authorities killed and wounded at least 63 people, including 14 killed, 49 wounded,

the majority of whom were civilians. Both attacks were claimed by ISIL-KP. Indiscriminate attacks by ISIL-KP, such as the use of Improvised Explosive Devices in populated areas, and attacks deliberately targeting civilians, constitute serious violations of international law and must cease.

We have taken note of the recent annual report by the Monitoring Team of the Sanctions Committee. The report contains information on other terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan and their relationships with the de facto authorities. We note the report's observation that the existing sanctions procedures are obsolete and should be updated to reflect the realities in Afghanistan today.

While the end of the armed conflict has greatly reduced the number of civilian casualties since the Taliban came to power, the United Nations Mine Action Service in Afghanistan estimates around one hundred casualties per month from unexploded ordinance. Unfortunately, the de facto Directorate of Mine Action Coordination has suspended its cooperation with the United Nations for technical reasons that we are trying now to resolve. Without UN support, the sector operates with limited technical capacity and monitoring. Discussions continue with the de facto authorities to lift the suspension as soon as possible and enable us to provide full support within our mandate to this vital sector.

Finally, we are greatly concerned by Afghanistan's vulnerability to climate change. Years of drought have compounded the effects of conflict and poverty. Climate change is fostering population displacements inside Afghanistan that could be destabilizing. In order to address Afghanistan's lack of water and consequent food insecurity, the de facto authorities have begun digging a canal that will divert waters from the northern Amu Darya river, raising the concerns of neighbouring countries. Overall the need to mitigate the effects of climate change requires a more specific dialogue between the de facto authorities and the international community.

Madam President,

In my regular discussions with the de facto authorities, I am blunt about the obstacles they have created for themselves by the decrees and restrictions they have enacted, in particular against women and girls. We have conveyed to them that as long as these decrees are in place it is nearly impossible that their government will be recognized by members of the international community.

Based on our discussions with many interlocutors across the country, it is also clear that these decrees are highly unpopular among the Afghan population. They cost the Taliban both domestic and international legitimacy, while inflicting suffering on half of their population and damaging their economy.

Despite these bans, I do believe that the international community can do more to ensure the future stability of the Afghan economy in a way that directly improves the lives of Afghans. This is particularly important in light of a likely significant decline in funding for the humanitarian response this year.

I welcome the visit now being undertaken by the Special Coordinator, Mr. Feridun Sinirlioğlu, who is currently in Afghanistan. We look forward to his recommendations. I would also like to highlight the importance of continuing the momentum established at Doha in May this year by holding a subsequent meeting in the same format before the end of the year. We have begun consultations on the timing and content of this meeting.

Despite the problems I have mentioned, we have established reliable, effective working channels of communication with the de facto authorities, and we have identified, as I have described, greater opportunities for cooperation that could build mutual understanding but also improve the

lives of the Afghan people. We have a mandate to engage on your behalf and we will continue to do so.

We could do much more, however, if the Taliban rescinded its punishing restrictions on its female population.

Thank you, Madam President.

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