



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, 21 June 2024**

[As delivered]

President,

The stability in Afghanistan that the de facto authorities have continued to maintain, despite what I perceive as growing signs of popular discontent, should not hide the fact that as an international community we are still in a crisis management mode. In order to move towards solving the structural problems between the international community and Afghanistan, which were identified in the Independent Assessment issued at the end of last year, all stakeholders need to recommit to the objectives identified in that assessment.

On the economic front, the de facto authorities continue to implement their policy of self-reliance through the private sector and public investments. It is positive that this private sector focus also allows some space, albeit limited, for women entrepreneurs. More support could be provided to female entrepreneurs through financing or even visas to visit trade fairs outside the country. Afghan private sector actors generally note an improved environment, such as better security and reduced corruption, for business activity, while citing concerns regarding the lack of a clear legal framework, low demand, and ongoing difficulties in making international banking transactions and gaining access to international markets.

More than seven billion dollars have been provided by international donors for humanitarian assistance and more than four billion to support basic human needs to the Afghan people since the Taliban takeover. Yet Afghanistan remains beset by massive poverty that leaves the population even more vulnerable to the many natural disasters that we have seen over the past few years as a result of climate change. Afghanistan has an almost zero carbon footprint but is the sixth most vulnerable country to climate change and the least prepared to address climate shock. International assistance resources are, unfortunately, decreasing, in part due to competing global demands on diminishing donor resources. The 2024 appeal of some three billion dollars is only 20 per cent funded. Donors would be more assured of the effectiveness of their assistance if the de facto authorities removed restrictions on women working for NGOs and the UN and provided greater transparency on how much revenue they are raising and what it is being spent on.

The engagement of the region in promoting greater trade, diplomatic contacts, and economic investments has improved stability in Afghanistan. These have been aided by much improved

security and reduced corruption. The region has valid concerns about potential threats of terrorism or extremism emanating from Afghanistan, as well as the need for greater cooperation on counter-narcotics but these efforts to promote stability through pragmatic engagement especially in the economic field are positive and necessary and should continue.

I highlight these developments for two reasons. The first is to underscore the amount of engagement and cooperation that actually exists between Afghanistan, the region, and the wider international community despite the non-recognized status of Afghanistan's de facto authorities. Second, many outside Afghanistan tend to underestimate the positive developments that have taken place in Afghanistan, including ongoing humanitarian access, while the de facto authorities tend to underestimate the contributions of the international community to the successes that they claim.

President,

On the surface, political stability has been maintained. On the other hand, there is little space for internal dissent. Political parties and civil society organizations have been banned and there are increasing restrictions on the activities of some prominent non-Taliban political actors. The media also faces constraints on what it is allowed to report. A stability that depends on the suppression of opposing ideas is inevitably fragile.

Since my last briefing, there have been several popular protests against the policies of the de facto authorities, especially those policies that have affected people's already strained livelihoods, including the ban on opium cultivation. This is a relatively new phenomenon. In some cases, attempts to repress these protests have led to deaths due to heavy handed responses of the de facto security institutions.

This highlights the fact that the de facto authorities lack predictable, transparent, and consistent institutions for receiving feedback from the population, where they can approach the de facto authorities without fear. Such institutions are essential for internal political legitimacy. As has often been said before, domestic legitimacy is critical for international legitimacy.

The continued application of corporal punishment, often for crimes against the de facto authorities' rigid definitions of morality, is also of concern. Public executions of individuals sentenced to the death penalty is in contravention of international human rights standards. The Secretary-General strongly opposes the death penalty, which is incompatible with the right to life, and urges all states which maintain it to establish an immediate moratorium on executions with a view to prohibiting their use altogether.

Ongoing restrictions on women and girls – who have now endured more than 1000 days out of school - have tragic direct effects on the lives of half of the Afghan population and an indirect impact on the population at large. United Nations engagements with Afghan women reveal growing levels of depression among women who, apart from being denied education and restricted in their movements, also feel that they are becoming less respected in their homes and less involved in decision-making. Information has emerged that Afghan civil servants who have been forced to stay at home are now facing a drastic cut in their salaries, provoking concerns that

they will not be able to pay their rents or support their families. UNAMA is seeking clarification with the de facto authorities on the validity of this instruction.

These restrictions deprive the country of vital human capital that it needs to implement the Taliban's own policy of self-reliance. They contribute to a brain drain that undermines Afghanistan's future. By being deeply unpopular they undermine the de facto authorities' claims to legitimacy. And they continue to block diplomatic solutions that would lead to Afghanistan's reintegration into the international community. UNAMA raises these arguments on every occasion with the de facto authorities. But we receive no convincing explanations as to why these policies continue, only vague, unfulfilled, and increasingly unbelievable promises that they are being addressed. I would also like to note with gratitude the efforts of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation which, through its regular contacts on the ground in Afghanistan and high-level visits including those of prominent Islamic scholars, has continued to advocate for a reversal of these bans and reiterate that they have no basis in Islam.

The larger picture, however, is that the relative stability the de facto authorities have maintained since the takeover and a stated interest in rejoining the institutions of the international community, remain an opportunity that must continue to be tested through patient and thoughtful diplomacy, while keeping international standards at the fore. The mechanisms for this engagement are largely in place. They have not been sufficiently exploited, however, by either the international community writ large or the de facto authorities.

President,

One of these mechanisms, the third meeting in the large group Doha format, is scheduled to take place in nine days. This meeting has generated significant expectations that cannot realistically be met in a single meeting. We are trying to establish a process and preserve an important mechanism of consultation. We must be realistic about how much each meeting in this process can deliver, especially at this early stage where confidence and trust are insufficient. For this process to truly begin, it is essential that the de facto authorities participate at Doha. We welcome recent statements from the de facto authorities that they are preparing to attend. At the same time, it is vital that we maintain the basic international consensus established at the first meeting in this format in May 2023. That is that there is no substitute for engagement with Afghanistan and there is no interest in seeing instability emerge in or from Afghanistan. We must also remain focused on the objective stated in the Independent Assessment of an eventual full reintegration of Afghanistan into the international community while respecting its international legal commitments. It cannot be repeated enough that this sort of engagement is not legitimization or normalization. Only engagement through a common, coordinated and principled international position can provide a strong incentive for the de facto authorities to adopt policies that would allow for their reintegration into the international community.

I would like to stress that this position is shared by the Afghan population. Over the past weeks, in preparation for the third Doha format meeting, UNAMA has met with hundreds of Afghans, and especially women, around the country. These consultations revealed a broad agreement that it was important for the de facto authorities to attend the meeting, but that there should also be no

recognition of the de facto authorities until the issues of women's rights, girls' education, and an acceptable constitution were broadly addressed. There were high expectations that restrictions on women's rights will be forcefully addressed at this meeting. Economic concerns also featured prominently in these discussions, including the need to find employment opportunities for youth.

UNAMA will continue its ongoing engagements around the country at all levels. We appreciate the increasing number of visits by representatives of countries that do not have a constant presence in Afghanistan. We have seen in some areas where ongoing engagement has led to some flexibility by the de facto authorities. It has at the very least led to greater understanding and trust-building on all sides. We hope that in Doha key stakeholders will convene around the table, speak to each other face-to-face, reinforce the principles underlining the consensus to engage, and agree on next steps to alleviate the uncertainties that face the Afghan people as prescribed in last year's independent assessment. This will only happen if there is greater flexibility among all stakeholders, and a clearer political willingness on all sides to move beyond crisis management to addressing the larger problems within Afghanistan and among Afghans, and those between Afghanistan and the international community.

Thank you, President.

Press contact: spokesperson-UNAMA@un.org

[Website](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Facebook English](#) | [Facebook Pashto](#) | [Facebook Dari](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Flickr](#)

