



**Briefing to the United Nations Security Council  
by the Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan, Markus  
Potzel**

**New York, 27 September 2022**

[As delivered]

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Madame President,

I am afraid that patience is running out by many in the international community regarding a strategy of engagement with Afghanistan's Taliban authorities.

There have been positive developments in the past few months, but they have been too few and too slow and they are outweighed by the negatives. In particular, the ongoing ban on secondary education for girls – unique in the world —and growing restrictions on women's rights are signals that the Taliban are indifferent to more than 50 per cent of the population and they are willing to risk international isolation. Yet in our discussions with numerous members of the de facto authority at all levels, Taliban leaders state that this decision has been made and is maintained by Emir Haibatullah, defended by hardliners around him, but questioned by most of the rest of the movement who are either unable or unwilling to change this trajectory. The relegation of women and girls to the home not only deprives them of their rights, but Afghanistan as a whole is denied the benefit of the significant contributions that women and girls have to offer.

Some of the Taliban's claimed and acknowledged achievements are also eroding. In the past months there has been a steady rise in security incidents monitored by UNAMA—both armed clashes and criminality, as well as high profile deadly terrorist attacks. Our earlier warnings about the capabilities of Islamic State Khorosan Province (ISKP) were dismissed by the Taliban. But ISKP has demonstrated in the last few months alone that it can carry out assassinations of figures close to the Taliban, attacks against foreign embassies, as well as fire rockets across Afghanistan's border to attack its neighbours, all while maintaining its long-standing sectarian campaign against Shia Muslims and ethnic minorities. We are particularly concerned about the recent attack at the Russian embassy in Kabul that killed 10 people, among them a Russian diplomat. In addition to attacks carried out by ISKP, a number of unclaimed incidents killed and wounded Afghans going about their daily lives, in particular while attending places of worship. I take this opportunity to express our condolences to all victims and their family members.

The reported presence of al Qaeda leader al Zawahiri in the heart of Kabul and the strike against him, as well as continued presence of other terrorist groups, have forced a questioning of the Taliban's counter-terrorism commitments, further deepening the trust gap with the international community. These questions are still unanswered.

Armed clashes persist between the de facto security forces and armed opposition groups in the Panjshir, Baghlan, Kapisa, Takhar, and Badakhshan provinces. There are disturbing reports, as well as videos and photos, indicating possible serious human rights violations committed in Panjshir. UNAMA has called on the de facto authorities to investigate allegations of extra-judicial killings in



Panjshir in line with international standards. The de facto authorities have stated that they will conduct serious investigations into these allegations. The status of these investigations is unknown. UNAMA will continue to carefully monitor this and other reports of serious human rights violations.

Madame President,

The economic situation in Afghanistan remains tenuous. While the Taliban claim they have increased exports, maintained the value of the Afghani currency, and generated solid revenue collection, per capita income has collapsed to 2007 levels—erasing 15 years of economic growth. However, like many aspects of Taliban governance, the details behind their claims remain opaque. Part of the enduring economic downturn is due to liquidity problems that are related to Afghanistan's isolation from the international banking system. Liquidity remains heavily dependent on the cash that the UN continues to bring in for humanitarian operations—cash, I must stress, that supports the needs of the Afghan people and does not directly reach the de facto authorities.

But even this funding is uncertain. To date, the 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan has only received US \$1.9 billion out of a \$4.4 billion requirement. That's not even half. Amid growing needs and a worsening food security situation, such a funding gap is all the more alarming given that winter is almost upon us again. In the immediate term, humanitarian partners require \$614 million to support priority winter preparedness in addition to the \$154 million required to reposition essential supplies before areas get cut off by the weather.

We have noted the creation by the United States of the Afghan Fund, which will place half of the seven billion US dollars of Afghan reserves in an account in Switzerland where they will be used to help stabilize Afghanistan's macro-economy. We have been informed that this should be seen as a temporary measure until there is greater confidence in the ability of Afghanistan's central bank to create safeguards against money laundering and potential financing of terrorist groups.

But these humanitarian and economic measures will not meet the Afghan people's longer-term requirements. Humanitarian assistance alone cannot replace essential service delivery systems, such as health and water, nor prevent an economic collapse. UNAMA has been urging donors to take a complementary approach to meeting people's needs by supporting, in addition to humanitarian action, some basic human needs projects that leverage the capacity of local communities, address underlying structural issues, promote economic growth, and seek to minimize the effects of climate change—which are particularly severe in Afghanistan. There is, so far, no consensus among donors on the provision of limited technical assistance to the de facto line ministries, or on whether to complete construction of small-scale infrastructure projects. Many donors feel that the Taliban should not be relieved of their responsibility to meet the needs of the population they control. This includes making their own budget more transparent so that donors can better assess where the real needs are that cannot be met by the de facto authorities.

In the meantime, the Taliban themselves state they are committed to a private-sector-led growth that will prevent aid dependency and conditionality. But this will require practical steps that, so far, have not been taken, including a clear legal framework, public investments, a functioning banking system, reliable energy and communication services, and an educated workforce that includes women. Two days ago, I met with a group of women entrepreneurs in Kabul who decided to stay in Afghanistan and continue their business activities. These women must be supported and not forgotten by the international community.

There is also a continued lack of political inclusivity and transparency in decision-making. Most Afghans do not see themselves represented at all levels of governance. There are no consistent mechanisms



for citizens to provide feedback to the authorities and little indication that the Taliban wish to even hear any. UNAMA, through its field offices, consistently works to bring together de facto local authorities and representatives of Afghan communities, including women, to improve the level of consultation.

In its human rights report issued in July this year, UNAMA set out the human rights situation in Afghanistan since the Taliban took power last year. In addition to the significant curtailment of the rights of women and girls, as well as potential violations of international human rights, UNAMA continues to record violations of the amnesty declaration that the Taliban laudably declared but inconsistently enforced. Media, previously one of the most vibrant in the region, is struggling from intimidation and restrictions while civil society remains under threat, and the de facto Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice takes on a larger and more intimidating presence in Afghan society.

Madame President,

Since taking over Kabul, the Taliban's self-identified emirate has not been recognized by any State. At the same time, the international community also did not want to see the country collapse. Afghanistan's neighbours in particular adopted a pragmatic approach and sought to deepen economic and trade ties and build stability.

The 26 July Tashkent conference, which for the first time brought together representatives of the Taliban, members of the region, and traditional donors, provided a platform for engagement and an opportunity for the international community to express its united position on what it expects from the de facto authorities. It was regrettable that the Taliban delegation did not take the opportunity to constructively address these expectations. Nonetheless, we believe that the Tashkent format is useful and should be continued.

Initially the de facto authorities made commitments regarding the security and independence of humanitarian assistance. These commitments have also gradually been eroded. We viewed with great concern the detaining by the de facto Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice and the General Directorate of Intelligence of three women working for UN agencies in Kandahar, as well as increasing pressures on our staff and premises and those of other agencies. In general, de facto authorities are creating operational obstacles that make the work of the United Nations and its humanitarian partners increasingly difficult, and in some cases contravene global and well-established humanitarian principles.

If the Taliban do not respond to the needs of all elements of Afghan society and constructively engage within the very limited window of opportunity with the international community, it is unclear what would come next. Further fragmentation, isolation, poverty, and internal conflict are among the likely scenarios, leading to potential mass migration and a domestic environment conducive to terrorist organizations, as well as greater misery for the Afghan population.

That's why we have to engage. The objective of our engagement is to promote governance in Afghanistan that works for the benefit of the Afghan people and respects the norms of the global community. While success is not certain, continued qualified engagement remains the most realistic chance of achieving these objectives.

Thank you, Madame President, for this opportunity to brief the Council. We at UNAMA are looking forward to the arrival of our new SRSB, Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, in Kabul. In the meantime, it has been my honour to convey to you UNAMA's understanding of the situation at this critical moment.