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The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security*

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [68/11](#) and Security Council resolution [2543 \(2020\)](#), in which the Secretary-General was requested to report every three months on developments in Afghanistan.
2. The report provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan, including political, humanitarian, development and human rights efforts, since the issuance of the previous report, dated 15 June 2021 ([A/75/926-S/2021/570](#)).

II. Relevant developments

3. The situation in Afghanistan remained highly fluid, after a Taliban military offensive took control of provincial capitals and Kabul. The departure of President Ghani and entry of Taliban forces into the capital on 15 August saw the de facto disintegration of the Government. Fearing for their lives, rights and security, thousands of Afghan citizens rushed to Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport, attempting to leave the country, where the United States of America had increased its military presence to manage the evacuations of foreign nationals, including diplomats, and Afghans at risk, with all commercial flights having been suspended. Reports emerged from Taliban-held areas of the imposition of restrictions on personal and social freedoms and the erosion of women's rights and access to services, including education. Along with heightened levels of violence and displacement, the combination of natural disasters, severe drought, flooding and the third wave of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic put nearly half of the population of Afghanistan in dire need of humanitarian assistance. The United Nations reduced its presence around the country by means of relocations, including a portion of staff members, who were moved temporarily to Almaty, Kazakhstan, where they would continue to carry out their work on Afghanistan.

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A. Political developments

4. The Taliban extensively expanded its territorial control in a military campaign in which it seized 33 out of 34 of the provincial capitals within a 10-day period in August. Following the Taliban forces' entry into Kabul on 15 August, President Ghani left the country, stating via social media that his aim had been to prevent bloodshed. On 15 August, Taliban deputy leader and head of the Political Commission, Mullah Baradar, issued a video announcing the group's "unexpected" victory. He arrived in Kandahar on 17 August. On 18 August, the United Arab Emirates issued a statement in which it welcomed President Ghani to the country on humanitarian grounds. The same day, President Ghani stated in a video message that he intended to return to Afghanistan. The Chairperson of the High Council for National Reconciliation, Abdullah, the former President Hamid Karzai and the head of Hizb-i Islami, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, were reported to have formed a temporary council aimed at ensuring a peaceful transfer of power through engagement with Taliban leaders arriving in Afghanistan.

5. In a press conference on 17 August in Kabul, the Taliban, inter alia, emphasized that it had entered Kabul to prevent a security vacuum and "to ensure security of lives and property of the people". It also stated that it assured the security of embassies and United Nations entities, affirming that the group would not seek revenge and confirming that "the leader of the Islamic Emirate had issued a decree, pardoning all people who stood against jihad". It assured women of their rights "within the framework of Sharia law", adding that "no discrimination and violence will be committed against women"; called upon the media to operate based on "Islamic values"; stated its intention to end illicit drug trafficking and strengthen the country's economic infrastructure; and announced that negotiations were ongoing for the formation of an inclusive Islamic government. The Taliban encouraged civil servants to return to work. It furthermore announced the appointment of provincial governors and chiefs of police, as well as several other provincial officials, including heads of government departments and court officials.

6. On 17 August, women marching through Kabul called upon the Taliban to respect their rights to education, work and political participation. On 18 August, in several provinces, including in Nangarhar and Kunar, residents celebrated the national day of Afghanistan, taking down newly raised Taliban flags. In Jalalabad, the Taliban reportedly dispersed protests by firing into crowds, resulting in the death of at least one person. Reports indicated that Taliban members had physically assaulted two local journalists taking footage of the rally. Similar incidents were reported in Kunar and Khost Provinces.

7. The withdrawal of international military forces continued during the reporting period. On 14 June, the North Atlantic Council confirmed the impending end of the military operations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Afghanistan. On 2 July, the United States handed over Bagram airfield to Afghan forces, marking a 90 per cent completion of the international military withdrawal. Prior to the 15 August takeover of Kabul, NATO members had agreed to provide transitional funding to ensure the continued functioning of Hamid Karzai International Airport, where a lead role for Turkey had been identified in securing the facility.

8. In the prevailing atmosphere of insecurity, several political opposition figures announced the establishment of "resistance forces" and councils to coordinate local defence efforts, often supported by members of parliament and provincial councils, community elders and religious leaders. Following the takeover of Kabul on 15 August, First Vice President Amrullah Saleh posted on social media an invitation for Afghans to join the resistance to the Taliban, announcing himself as caretaker

under the constitution. He asked the foreign embassies and consulates of Afghanistan to continue to fly the country's national flag in their offices and that people's views be considered for the upcoming inclusive government system. Ismail Khan, a leading figure in the Jamiat-I Islami party from Herat Province, reportedly joined political figures, among them Hazara and Jamiat leaders, gathered in Islamabad, at the invitation of Pakistan, for meetings on the situation.

9. Preceding the above-mentioned developments, the Government had accelerated appointments and reshuffles at the ministerial and senior levels in Kabul, in part to respond to the rapid Taliban advances and in part to accommodate the political opposition and strengthen unity within the Republic. On 16 June, President Ghani appointed a new acting Minister of the Interior. Three days later, he appointed him as acting Minister of Defence and appointed a new acting Minister of the Interior and Chief of Army Staff. Plenary debates in the upper and lower houses of parliament remained focused on issues of peace and security. The Meshrano Jirga (upper house) passed several pieces of legislation, including a law on whistle-blower protection, aimed at increasing the detection of corruption-related crimes.

10. Contacts between the negotiating teams of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban, which had paused during the holy month of Ramadan, resumed in Doha on 8 June. Discussions on an agenda and road map were reported, with no substantial progress. In mid-June, Qatar shared a proposal for third-party mediation with both parties, on which no agreement was reached.

11. On 7 and 8 July, the Islamic Republic of Iran hosted a meeting between delegations of the two sides to discuss ways to achieve a negotiated political settlement and prevent a further escalation of the conflict. The two parties issued a statement committing to a negotiated settlement of the conflict and to holding further meetings. On 17 and 18 July, a senior delegation led by Mr. Abdullah and including other government and opposition politicians held talks with the Taliban in Doha with the aim of expediting the peace process. The limited participation of women in the Republic's delegation (one out of seven) was highlighted by several women in Afghanistan. There were no women in the Taliban delegation. In a joint statement, the parties agreed to accelerate efforts towards a "timely and just solution" to the conflict. On 8 and 11 July, Taliban Political Commission delegates were received in the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan for talks reportedly focused on the peace process and the security situation in Afghanistan. In a 12 July statement, the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed expectations that efforts by regional and international partners to support the Afghan peace process would be made in direct consultation with the Government of Afghanistan. A Taliban delegation led by the deputy leader and head of the Political Commission, Mullah Baradar, visited China on 28 July and met with the Chinese Minister for Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi, as well as with Special Envoy Yue Xiaoyong and other officials. In reaction, the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement expressing expectations for the Government of China "to play a valuable role in strengthening regional consensus and exerting international pressure on the Taliban to stop violence, establish a ceasefire, secure peace and end the presence of foreign terrorists in Afghanistan".

12. From 10 to 12 August, Qatar hosted a series of meetings between representatives of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban, as well as envoys of China, Germany, India, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States and Uzbekistan, plus the European Union and the United Nations. Discussions covered the status of intra-Afghan negotiations and the potential contributions of the international community to the success of the peace process. At the end of the meetings, a statement by the Chair was issued. Among other things, the statement

reaffirmed the non-recognition of any government that would be imposed through the use of military force, called for the urgent acceleration of the peace process and a stop to the violence, and noted the following principles for guiding a political settlement: (a) inclusive governance; (b) respect for human rights, including the rights of women and minorities; (c) a mechanism to deliver a representative government; (d) a commitment not to allow any individuals or groups to use the territory of Afghanistan to threaten the security of other countries; and (e) respect for international law, including international humanitarian law.

13. Meanwhile, civil society, women and youth groups, as well as religious leaders and the media, continued to call for a ceasefire and a negotiated political settlement. Ulemas urged parties to the conflict to be flexible in reaching a peace agreement and highlighted the need for the increased protection of women and children. Women leaders continued to call for their meaningful participation in high-level processes and forums seeking to resolve the conflict and to participate in decision-making on humanitarian aid and service delivery, to mitigate protection risks.

14. On 10 June, Saudi Arabia and the Muslim World League hosted a peace conference in Mecca, where religious scholars in a joint declaration proclaimed the lack of justification for jihad in Afghanistan, as well as the need for a ceasefire and a just peace. The Group of Friends of Afghanistan and the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan met in New York on 16 June. Members expressed strong support for the inclusion of Afghan women in the peace process and for protecting the gains of the past 20 years. Also on 16 June, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, in partnership with the United Nations, launched a gender responsive ceasefire brief, articulating the urgent need for a comprehensive ceasefire that protects the rights of and addresses the needs of all Afghans and communities. The Commission, in partnership with the United Nations, also produced position papers on diverse human rights aspects for the negotiations, including women's rights and the freedom of expression. On 23 June, leaders of the Civil Society Joint Working Group, a consortium of more than 1,500 civil society networks, including women and youth organizations, resolved to develop a new strategy for engagement with the negotiating parties and to advocate for the protection of citizens' rights, including women's rights. On 3 July, the National Ulema Council gathered in Kabul and issued a declaration calling the conflict illegitimate and asking the parties to end the violence and resolve their differences through dialogue. On 13 July, the Afghan Women's Network issued a statement calling for an immediate ceasefire as the only way to advance the peace process.

15. During the reporting period, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continued its support for subnational authorities and communities on conflict resolution through 10 local peace initiatives. In the capitals of Herat and Faizabad Provinces, UNAMA began implementation of two local peace initiatives, supporting meetings with young people and university professors to promote tolerance and social cohesion.

B. Security

16. Insecurity in Afghanistan steadily increased during the reporting period as the Taliban initiated a large-scale offensive amid the withdrawal of the remaining international military forces. As at 18 August, they controlled all of Afghanistan, except Panjshir Province.

17. The Taliban offensive was launched following the movement's 15 April statement that it would take "every countermeasure" should foreign forces stay beyond 1 May. It initially sought to expand territorial control at the district level, with

the Taliban first focusing on the north and north-east prior to expanding throughout other regions. Many district administrative centres fell without resistance as part of what the Government described as tactical retreats and provided the Taliban with extensive movement corridors and a consolidated presence on key transportation axes and around cities. The Taliban also captured a growing number of border crossings, thus controlling the sources of an important share of State revenue.

18. The Taliban seized their first provincial capital, Zaranj, on 6 August and subsequently captured 33 out of 34 provincial capitals within 10 days, including the national capital Kabul on 15 August, following a series of probing attacks and a progressive build-up around provincial capitals in late June and throughout July. The capture of cities systematically entailed the release of prisoners from provincial prisons, including 5,000 of the 11,000 prisoners incarcerated in the Pul-e Charkhi prison in Kabul and prisoners from the Bagram detention facility at the former Bagram military base in Parwan Province, to which an estimated 850 security-related prisoners had been transferred from other provincial prisons in the preceding two weeks.

19. Amid the stoppage of commercial flights, the United States military took control of Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport on 15 August, with 5,000 troops assigned to manage the evacuations of foreign nationals, including diplomats, and Afghans at risk. An additional 1,000 troops were sent there on 16 August. Security at the airport remained highly volatile, as thousands of civilians gathered seeking an evacuation flight. In attempts to control the crowds at airport gates, the Taliban and international military forces fired into the air and used tear gas, which at times resulted in civilian harm. Initial reports indicated that, on 16 August, at least 4 civilians were killed and 13 injured.

20. After seizing Kabul, Taliban fighters erected checkpoints throughout the capital and increased patrols, without uniforms. Reports also suggested that some people had been shot after having crossed checkpoints without approval. While statements by the Taliban included instructions not to enter anyone's house without permission and that "life, property and honour" would be protected, numerous reports emerged of the Taliban conducting house-to-house searches for government personnel, weapons and property, and in some cases confiscation of the latter. Some reports indicated that the Taliban were allegedly searching for people who had "worked with foreigners" and at times, beating them.

21. Prior to the Taliban's capture of Kabul, the Government had adopted a number of measures to counter Taliban advances, without success. These included a reconfiguration of security responsibilities at the local level with delegations to corps commanders, the announced reestablishment of the recently disbanded Afghan Local Police, and the merging of special operations and special air operations forces. A series of personnel changes had also been implemented, including replacements of provincial chiefs of police in 23 provinces since 1 May, as well as several provincial heads of the National Directorate of Security and provincial Afghan National Army commanders. On 24 July, the Ministry of the Interior announced a curfew in 31 provinces from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m., except in Kabul, Nangahar and Panjshir. On 2 August, President Ghani had also informed the parliament of the finalization of a six-month security plan focused on defending strategic points and urban areas, along with continued efforts to mobilize locally recruited forces in support of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces.

22. Between 16 May and 31 July, the United Nations recorded 6,302 security-related incidents, a 25.6 per cent increase from the 5,016 incidents recorded during the same period in 2020. Armed clashes rose by 37.8 per cent, from 2,931 to 4,039 incidents; airstrikes increased by 236 per cent, from 136 to 457; and assassinations increased by 6 per cent, from 235 to 250. By contrast, detonations caused by improvised explosive

devices decreased by 15 per cent, from 635 to 538. The southern, eastern and northern regions accounted for 60.4 per cent of all recorded incidents, with Helmand, Kandahar and Nangarhar Provinces consistently ranking as the most conflict-affected. As the Taliban progressively consolidated its territorial control since early August, conflict-related types of security incidents, such as airstrikes, armed clashes and improvised explosive devices-related incidents, decreased significantly.

23. High-profile attacks by anti-Government elements occurred countrywide prior to the Taliban takeover of major cities. Between 16 May and 31 July, 18 suicide attacks were documented, compared with 11 in the prior period, including 16 suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices primarily targeting Afghan National Defence and Security Forces positions. In addition, there were 68 attacks using magnetic improvised explosive devices, including 14 in Kabul. Targeted and usually unclaimed assassinations occurred countrywide, with victims including, among others, the Policy and Planning Director of the Ministry of Urban Development and Land, killed in Kabul on 30 May; the deputy of the Ulema Shura, killed in Herat on 3 June; an appeals court provincial prosecutor and a pro-government religious scholar, killed in Logar on 7 and 12 June, respectively; and the Head of the Government Media and Information Centre, killed on 6 August. On 4 August, the Taliban claimed responsibility for an attack in Kabul on the residence of the acting Minister of Defence.

24. Attacks claimed by or attributed to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) increased. Between 16 May and 18 August, the United Nations recorded 88 attacks, compared with 15 during the same period in 2020. The movement targeted civilians in urban areas using asymmetric tactics. It has claimed the launches of an estimated seven rockets targeting the presidential palace in Kabul during the official Eid celebration on 20 July, as well as a series of attacks using improvised explosive devices against religious minorities, including a Hazara gathering in Kunduz city on 13 May and a Sufi mosque in Kabul on 14 May, and several passenger vans either carrying Hazara Shias or traveling through predominantly Hazara Shia populated areas in Parwan Province and Kabul between 1 and 12 June. The group also claimed an attack on HALO Trust deminers in Baghlan Province on 8 June, in which 10 deminers were killed. Several claims concerned attacks on economic infrastructure and assets. Not all claims were verified amid controversy over the extent to which ISIL-K claimed attacks carried out by other groups or in coordination with it. The movement also issued an editorial on 17 June announcing plans to escalate attacks and in recent weeks had increasingly sought to challenge the Taliban as it asserted control across Afghanistan.

25. Between 16 May and 18 August, the United Nations documented 54 incidents affecting its personnel, including 32 cases of intimidation and 15 cases of criminality-related incidents. On 30 and 31 July and 2 August, a United Nations compound in Herat was attacked with small arms fire and rocket-propelled grenades, causing several casualties among Afghan National Defence and Security Forces personnel protecting the premises, despite having received prior assurances from the Taliban. On 2 August, a convoy carrying United Nations personnel to Herat airport came under small arms fire, with no casualties resulting. Since 15 August, the United Nations recorded 19 incidents of Taliban and/or criminals entering or attempting to enter United Nations compounds and offices and, in some cases, damaging and/or stealing United Nations property, and 4 incidents of restricting United Nations freedom of movement.

C. Regional cooperation

26. On 3 June, the foreign ministers of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan held a virtual meeting to discuss countering terrorism, ensuring peace and security in Afghanistan and the region and expanding trilateral cooperation. On 5 and 6 June, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, Mohammad Haneef Atmar, hosted his Turkmen counterpart, Rashid Meredov, in Herat for a ministerial meeting on bilateral relations, peace process, cross-border trade and commerce and infrastructure projects.

27. On 14 and 15 June, Mr. Atmar received the visiting Special Envoy of Germany, Markus Potzel, and Special Envoy of Uzbekistan, Ismatullah Irgashev, to discuss, among other things, the peace process. On 23 and 24 June, the Special Envoy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mohammad Ebrahim Taherian, visited Kabul and Islamabad, where he discussed regional efforts for peace and security in Afghanistan with his counterparts. The Special Envoy of Qatar, Mutlaq bin Majed Al-Qahtani, visited Kabul and Islamabad on 6 and 9 July to consult with senior Afghan and Pakistani officials on the latest developments in the intra-Afghan negotiations in Doha.

28. On 18 June, the National Security Adviser of Afghanistan, Hamdullah Mohib, met with the Minister for Defence of Kazakhstan, Nurlan Yermekbayev. They concluded a bilateral agreement on military cooperation.

29. Participating in the diplomatic forum in Antalya, Turkey, on 20 June, Mr. Atmar met with his Iranian and Turkish counterparts, Javad Zarif and Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, to discuss expanding trilateral economic cooperation, including via Iranian transit routes, and joint efforts to combat terrorism. The ministers reaffirmed support for intra-Afghan negotiations, a permanent ceasefire and an inclusive political settlement.

30. To enhance regional engagement between Central Asia and Afghanistan, on 7 July, the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia convened a meeting on the theme “The Afghan Peace Process and Impact of Withdrawal of International Forces: Regional Security and Economic Development”, in partnership with the ministries of foreign affairs of Afghanistan and Turkmenistan and with the participation of foreign ministers of the five Central Asian countries and UNAMA. The participants shared views on security, political and economic developments in Afghanistan and opportunities for enhanced cooperation between Central Asia and Afghanistan.

31. On 13 July, Mr. Atmar participated in the fourth meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Afghanistan Contact Group in Dushanbe. In a joint statement, member States expressed concern over increasing insecurity in the northern provinces of Afghanistan and confirmed their readiness for greater cooperation under the coordinating role of the United Nations for the stabilization and development of Afghanistan. Separately, Mr. Atmar held talks with the foreign ministers of China, India, Pakistan and Uzbekistan to advocate for a negotiated political settlement and an end to violence.

32. President Ghani participated in the high-level international conference in Tashkent on 15 and 16 July, on the theme “Central and South Asia 2021: Regional Connectivity, Challenges and Opportunities”. On the sidelines, he also met with the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev; the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan; the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov; the Minister of External Affairs of India, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar; and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu; as well as with officials from the United Kingdom and the United States. Interlocutors discussed opportunities to enhance Afghanistan-centred regional cooperation and expressed their support for the Afghan peace process. Separately, President Ghani spoke by telephone with the

President of China, Xi Jinping, who expressed support for the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan and assistance to address the COVID-19 epidemic. On the margins of the conference, representatives of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States and Uzbekistan agreed to establish a quadrilateral diplomatic platform to cooperate on enhancing regional connectivity.

33. Regional countries took actions to address their increasing concerns over Taliban advances, in particular in northern Afghanistan. On 21 and 22 July, Tajikistan held military exercises and announced the deployment of 20,000 troops to its border with Afghanistan. This was followed by announcements on 24 July by the Interior Minister of Pakistan, Sheikh Rashid Ahmed, that regular army units would replace paramilitary forces on the country's border with Afghanistan, and on 28 July by Russian Minister for Defence, Sergei Shoigu, that the Russian Federation intended to strengthen its military base in Tajikistan. The Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan announced joint military exercises for the period from 5 to 10 August.

34. The Secretary-General's Personal Envoy on Afghanistan and Regional Issues, Jean Arnault, visited Afghanistan, Germany, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan from 3 to 24 June; Qatar from 10 to 19 July; the Islamic Republic of Iran from 7 to 8 August; and Qatar from 8 to 13 August, for consultations focused on the state of negotiations and the potential role of the region in supporting a political settlement to the conflict.

III. Human rights

35. On 26 July, UNAMA released its mid-year update on the protection of civilians. From 1 January to 30 June 2021, UNAMA documented 5,183 civilian casualties, including 1,659 killed (including 219 women, 293 boys and 171 girls) and 3,524 injured (including 508 women, 748 boys and 451 girls), representing a 47 per cent increase compared with the same period in 2020. UNAMA documented record numbers of women and girls killed and injured, as well as record high overall child casualties. UNAMA further documented a record number of civilian casualties from the use of non-suicide improvised explosive devices by anti-Government elements, as well as increases in civilian casualties from ground engagements and airstrikes compared with the first half of 2020. There was a decrease in the number of civilian casualties from suicide attacks conducted by anti-Government elements, as well as from airstrikes by international military forces. Of specific concern, UNAMA documented a 25 per cent increase in the number of civilian casualties since the start of the Afghanistan peace negotiations in September 2020, compared with the same period one year earlier. From May to June, UNAMA recorded 2,392 civilian casualties, nearly half of all civilian casualties for the first six months of 2021, and the highest-ever number documented by UNAMA for that two-month period.

36. In the first six months of 2021, almost two thirds of civilian casualties were caused by anti-Government elements (64 per cent), mainly by the Taliban (39 per cent), ISIL-K (9 per cent) and undetermined anti-Government elements (16 per cent). Approximately 25 per cent of all civilian casualties were attributed to pro-government forces, including 23 per cent caused by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, while the remaining 2 per cent were caused by pro-government armed groups or undetermined pro-government forces. In total, 38 per cent of civilian casualties were caused by anti-government elements using non-suicide improvised explosive devices, while ground engagements, targeted killings and air strikes caused 33 per cent, 14 per cent and 8 per cent of civilian casualties, respectively.

37. During the second quarter of 2021, the country task force on monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children in armed conflict verified 1,179 grave

violations against 1,112 children (673 boys, 420 girls, 19 sex unknown) during the reporting period, including 1,085 children killed or maimed (309 killed and 776 maimed) (647 boys, 419 girls, 19 sex unknown). Of concern, the killing and maiming of children almost doubled compared with the previous quarter. Combined child casualties verified during the first two quarters of 2021 constituted the highest number of children killed and maimed for this time period ever recorded by the country task force in Afghanistan. Anti-government elements were responsible for 594 child casualties, while pro-government forces were responsible for 347. The leading causes of child casualties during the quarter were non-suicide improvised explosive devices (430, or 40 per cent), followed by ground engagements (385, or 35 per cent) and aerial attacks (143, or 13 per cent).

38. The country task force verified the recruitment and use of 26 children (all boys) aged between 12 and 17 years by the Taliban (16), Afghan National Police (6) and pro-government militias (4). It verified sexual violence against six boys by the Afghan National Police. It verified the abduction of 2 children (1 boy and 1 girl) by the Taliban, and 21 attacks on schools and educational personnel, attributing incidents to the Taliban (12), undetermined armed opposition groups (3), jointly to armed opposition groups and pro-government forces (3), Afghan National Army (1), pro-government militia (1) and undetermined (1). The country task force verified 26 attacks against hospitals and health-care personnel, attributed to the Taliban (10), undetermined armed opposition groups (8), Afghan National Army (4), Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (2), pro-government militia (1) and ISIL-K (1). It verified 14 incidents of denial of humanitarian access during the quarter, attributed to the Taliban (7), undetermined armed opposition groups (5) and ISIL-K (2). Those denials involved the abduction of 5 humanitarian personnel, targeted killings resulting in 19 personnel killed and 18 injured, the destruction of civilian property and 2 attempted improvised explosive devices attacks against humanitarian personnel.

39. In the 2020 annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/75/873–S/2021/437](#)), the Afghan National Police was delisted for the recruitment and use of children, and the Afghan National Army was listed for the killing and maiming of children. The country task force continued to support the Government of Afghanistan on measures to ensure that the Afghan National Police continues to make progress and for addressing the listing of the Afghan National Army.

40. In July, the armed conflict in Afghanistan entered a new, deadlier and more destructive phase, when the Taliban began full-scale offensives on provincial capitals. Intense fighting in densely populated urban areas led to significant numbers of civilian casualties, the destruction of property and large-scale displacement. Since 9 July, when the Taliban intensified pressure on provincial capitals, until 12 August, in just four cities (Lashkar Gah, Kandahar, Herat and Kunduz), preliminary figures indicated that fighting between the Taliban and Afghan National Defence and Security Forces had caused more than 1,558 civilian casualties (at least 199 killed and 1,333 injured), including children. Ground engagements were the leading cause of civilian casualties; with airstrikes carried out by pro-government forces also contributing to the civilian casualty toll.

41. The Taliban taking control of districts had been followed by allegations of regression in the enjoyment by Afghan women and girls of their fundamental rights and freedoms, specifically access to education, access to health clinics, the right to work and freedom of movement, owing to the directive that women were to be accompanied by a male family chaperone when leaving the home and the reinstatement of strict dress code. In several locations, the Taliban had reportedly threatened that violation of those rules would result in harsh punishments. There were reports of women having been flogged and beaten in public because they had breached the

prescribed rules. In one case in Balkh Province, on 3 August, a women's rights activist was shot and killed for breaching the rules.

42. Human rights defenders and media workers continued to be targeted. UNAMA recorded the killing of a civil society activist and his wife by the Taliban in Helmand Province; the killing of a civil society activist in Kabul Province; the killing of an international photojournalist in Kandahar Province; and the killing of a female journalist, claimed by ISIL-K, in Kabul Province. In addition, a private radio worker was injured in an armed attack by unknown perpetrators in Ghazni Province; a journalist, a female non-governmental organization employee and a female civil society activist were threatened by unknown perpetrators in Daikundi and Herat Provinces; and a female journalist reportedly escaped an attack by ISIL-K in Nangarhar Province. In Parwan Province, Radio Bareen stopped broadcasting after one of its female staff was assaulted by unknown perpetrators.

43. Reports emerged during the reporting period of media entities temporarily ceasing their activities in districts in Baghlan, Zabul, Jawzjan, Kunduz, Nuristan and Paktia Provinces after they had been overtaken by the Taliban. On 26 July, in Kandahar, the National Directorate of Security arrested four journalists after their return from a reporting trip in Spin Boldak.

IV. Coordination of development assistance

44. The Government released the mid-year report on the implementation of the Afghanistan Partnership Framework on 20 July and a supplementary self-assessment on 27 July. On 28 July, the Government of Afghanistan and UNAMA, as co-chairs, convened a special session of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board with international partners, where participants reviewed the commitments and progress in implementing the Framework and the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework II. Donors affirmed their commitments made at the 2020 Afghanistan Conference and reiterated that democracy, the delivery of essential services, observing the rule of law and promoting human rights would remain the basis of their support. In its fifth anti-corruption report, released on 4 August, UNAMA highlighted the progress made by Afghanistan through institutional and legal reforms and recommended specific measures to increase integrity, transparency and accountability.

45. To promote accountability for international crimes under the 2018 Penal Code, UNAMA continued to build the capacity of and advise investigators and prosecutors from the International Crimes Directorate of the Attorney General's Office through specialized mentoring and training activities that took place from 24 May to 11 June and from 20 to 29 June.

46. The Government continued its work to establish a merit-based civil service and employ more women in leadership positions. After the reopening of educational institutions, which had been closed since March 2020 owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations supported the Ministry of Education in developing quality data and monitoring and evaluation measures, as well as educational funding and investment platforms.

47. On 1 June, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), with the support of Australia, Germany and the European Union, established a multi-donor, multi-stakeholder women protection centre trust fund for women's shelters across the country, under the leadership of the Ministry of Women's Affairs. The Fund will support women survivors of violence with services.

48. On 7 July, the common country assessment document and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Afghanistan (2022–2025),

which aligns United Nations system programming with the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework II and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, was sent to the Office of the First Vice-President for comments.

V. Humanitarian assistance

49. Overlapping challenges, including drought, intensifying conflict resulting in new displacements, and a third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, left almost half of the population of Afghanistan in humanitarian need in 2021. Between 1 January and 30 June, humanitarian partners reached more than 7.8 million people in 394 of 401 districts, out of a targeted 15.7 million people, with life-saving assistance.

50. As at 22 August, 152,511 people were confirmed to have contracted COVID-19, while some 7,070 had died since the start of the pandemic. Those figures probably represent underreporting, as only 747,745 tests had been conducted countrywide. With a more contagious third wave of the pandemic, test positivity rates surged, averaging about 52 per cent in June and July. Testing capacity expanded from 26 to 31 laboratories, which were able to process 8,700 tests per day, with plans to establish 9 more laboratories by the end of August. Treatment capacity, however, remained limited, with reports of a shortage of beds and isolation units. The United Nations had provided 10 oxygen plants since 15 June and at least 83 oxygen concentrators in July. As at 22 August, more than 1.6 million people had been partially vaccinated, with close to 900,000 being fully vaccinated. Vaccination among women and vulnerable groups remained disproportionately lower.

51. Between 1 January and 9 August, escalating conflict brought the total number of people displaced to over 550,000, in addition to the 5 million people who had remained displaced since 2012. Humanitarian partners distributed shelter and household items to more than 420,000 people between 1 January and 31 July. Conflict further burdened the already strained health-care system. Trauma cases increased by at least one-third compared with last year, in particular blast-related injuries, which represented 42 per cent of total casualties, and gunshot wounds, which accounted for 25 per cent. Children made up more than one fifth of blast injuries. In June alone, close to 28,000 people received trauma care. Attacks on health facilities in the first half of 2021 left more than 200,000 people without access to care. Health partners were able to provide medical assistance to more than 3.8 million people between January and June.

52. Between January and June, humanitarian partners provided sexual reproductive health response to some 93,000 people at entry points with the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. Emergency reproductive health kits distributed during the same period gave support to 17,000 women and girls.

53. In 2021, as at 29 July, Afghanistan had experienced one case of wild polio virus type 1, and 42 cases of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2. All of those cases were reported from areas where house-to-house polio vaccination campaigns remained banned. The Ministry of Public Health and United Nations partners conducted three nationwide polio vaccination campaigns in 2021, targeting 9.9 million children in each campaign. Access to polio vaccinations in the east was temporarily disrupted for some 430,000 children owing to recent attacks. In inaccessible areas, plans to conduct mosque-to-mosque vaccinations were on hold, in addition to other contingency vaccination approaches, until a new Government was in place.

54. One third of the country experienced meteorological drought, and one quarter of the country was under agricultural drought. Already, one third of the country was at “crisis” and “emergency” levels of food insecurity, with most of the drought-affected

and acutely food insecure areas overlapping. Half of all children under five were expected to face acute malnutrition in 2021, with more than a 16 per cent increase since the projection at the start of the year. In total, 14 provinces were experiencing a severe reduction in water. Since January, humanitarian partners had provided more than 84,000 metric tons of food and \$27 million in cash to nearly 5.5 million people. Between 1 January and the end of June, an estimated 132,000 children under five had been given nutritional assistance. Humanitarian partners also provided livelihood protection humanitarian assistance to 1.1 million people between April and June. Since January, partners had provided safe drinking water, sanitation facilities and hygiene options to 2.1 million people.

55. Undocumented Afghans returned at record high levels, with close to 709,000 having crossed into Afghanistan between January and 5 August. Deportations of undocumented Afghans from the Islamic Republic of Iran exceeded 369,000 between January and the end of July. Refugee returnees remained small, with only 1,210 crossing into Afghanistan. Between 20 May and 1 August, 245,690 undocumented Afghan migrants and 152 refugees returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2,147 undocumented Afghans and 152 refugees returned from Pakistan, and 17 refugees returned from other countries.

56. From May to June, the Mine Action Service and partners cleared more than 1.58 km² of land contaminated by high-impact explosives, safely removing over 260 items of explosive ordnance to the benefit of 70 communities. In addition, 148,270 people received explosive ordnance risk education.

57. Interference with humanitarian activities escalated, with 435 access constraints reported between 20 May and 1 August, bringing the total to 1,213 since January. This already exceeded the 1,095 constraints recorded in all of 2020. Attacks on aid workers continued in 2021, with 30 aid workers killed, 77 injured, 54 abducted and 42 detained or arrested. Some female aid and health workers report facing restrictions on their movement if unaccompanied by a male guardian.

58. As at 22 August, the humanitarian response plan remained only 38 per cent funded, with a shortfall of some \$790 million. The humanitarian community in Afghanistan, some 156 United Nations agencies and partners, was conducting a gap analysis to assess response gaps and highlight top priorities.

VI. Counter-narcotics

59. From 9 May to 13 July, law enforcement authorities in Afghanistan conducted a total of 454 counter-narcotics operations. They led to the seizure of 115 kg of heroin, 347 kg of opium, 1,253 kg of hashish and cannabis, 2,088 kg of methamphetamine, 6,817 kg of diverse chemical precursors and 8,952 tablets of methylenedioxymethamphetamine. The seizures resulted in the arrest of 538 suspects and the confiscation of 86 vehicles and 108 weapons.

60. The Airport Interdiction Unit at Hamid Karzai International Airport, Balkh International Airport, Kandahar International Airport and Herat International Airport conducted 44 operations, leading to the arrest of 68 suspects and the seizure of 60 kg of heroin and 1 kg of hashish. Different currencies amounting to \$5,400 were confiscated.

61. Poppy eradication was greatly constrained in most of the high opium poppy cultivation provinces owing to insecurity.

VII. Mission support

62. As at 31 July, vacancy rates in UNAMA were 13 per cent for international staff, 10 per cent for United Nations Volunteers, 9 per cent for National Professional Officers and 4 per cent for national staff, compared with approved rates of 6 per cent, 7 per cent, 3 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively. The proportion of female staff was 34 per cent for international staff, 46 per cent for United Nations Volunteers, 12 per cent for National Professional Officers and 9 per cent for national staff.

63. In June and July, following increased insecurity in many provinces, human rights defenders and journalists raised concerns with UNAMA regarding their need to relocate temporarily to safer areas. In cooperation with the civil society coalition Human Rights Defenders Committee, UNAMA supported the relocation of 92 individuals, including 15 women, until 31 July. Those individuals included 36 human rights defenders, 9 media workers, 13 staff of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and 34 dependents, coming from Kunduz (21), Baghlan (6), Lashkargah (4), Gardez (22), Ghor (17), Mazar (13), and Bamyán (9). Following the Taliban military takeover in August, UNAMA reduced its presence in the regions and temporarily relocated personnel to Almaty, where they would perform their functions remotely. The United Nations also worked to deploy essential supplies and specialist teams to support its personnel in Afghanistan.

VIII. Observations

64. The world is following events in Afghanistan with a heavy heart and deep disquiet about what lies ahead. Scenes of chaos, unrest, uncertainty and fear have caused alarm, as well as trepidation for what lies in the balance in terms of the hope, progress and the dreams of a generation of young Afghan women and girls, boys and men. I urge the Taliban and all other parties to exercise utmost restraint to protect lives and to ensure that humanitarian needs can be met. I call for an immediate end to violence; for the safety, security and rights of all Afghans to be respected; and for adherence to the international obligations of Afghanistan, including all international agreements to which it is a party.

65. Recent conflict has forced the displacement of hundreds of thousands from their homes. Kabul has seen a huge influx of internally displaced persons from provinces around the country where they felt insecure or which they fled during fighting. I remind all parties of their obligation to respect and protect civilians and call on them to provide humanitarian actors with rapid and unimpeded access, including across conflict lines, to deliver relief to those in need. I also urge all countries to be willing to receive Afghan refugees and refrain from any deportations.

66. I am extremely concerned about heightened levels of civilian casualties, including of women and child casualties. I call upon the Taliban and all other parties to respect and protect international humanitarian law and the rights and freedoms of all persons. Reports of severe restrictions on human rights throughout the country are highly concerning, particularly accounts of mounting human rights violations against the women and girls of Afghanistan, who fear a return to the darkest days. It is essential that the hard-won rights of Afghan women and girls are protected. It is also essential to have an inclusive government representing all Afghans, including women and the different ethnic groups.

67. I strongly condemn the horrific terrorist attack perpetrated on 26 August, which underscored the volatility of the situation. Afghanistan must never again be used as a platform or safe haven for terrorist organizations to threaten or attack any country. I appeal to the Security Council and the international community as a whole to speak

with one voice, act together and use all tools at its disposal to counter the global terrorist threat in Afghanistan, ensure that fundamental human rights are respected and support the establishment of an inclusive government.

68. Countries in the region have expressed grave concerns about the extended conflict in Afghanistan and its potential repercussions, which include refugee flows, migrant movement, illicit drug and other forms of trafficking, terrorism and lost opportunities for economic connectivity and mutually beneficial trade. The region needs to speak with one voice and demonstrate collective actions in support of peace and stability.

69. The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan affects 18 million people, half of the country's population. It is vital that basic services continue to be provided. It is crucial that civil servant salaries continue to be paid, infrastructure is maintained, airports are reopened and health and education services continue. Humanitarian actors, including female staff, must have unimpeded access to deliver timely, life-saving services without bureaucratic delays. The underfunding of the humanitarian response plan, which is only 38 per cent funded with a shortfall of some \$790 million, requires urgent addressing. I call on all donors to renew their support so that life-saving response is urgently scaled-up and delivered on time, and so that suffering is mitigated.

70. While the presence of the United Nations will adapt to the security situation, we are committed to supporting the people of Afghanistan, to stay and deliver to help advance peace, opportunity and human rights for all. I call upon all Member States to support United Nations efforts to ensure the safety and security of all United Nations personnel operating in Afghanistan. Afghans have known generations of war and hardship and deserve the full support of the international community. They must not be abandoned.

71. I extend my deep appreciation to all United Nations personnel in Afghanistan, my Special Representative and Head of UNAMA, Deborah Lyons, and my Personal Envoy, Jean Arnault, for their continued dedication and service under extremely challenging conditions.
