



# Security Council

Seventy-sixth year

## 8908<sup>th</sup> meeting

Wednesday, 17 November 2021, 3 p.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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*President:* Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez/Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu. . . . (Mexico)

*Members:*

China . . . . .	Mr. Zhang Jun
Estonia . . . . .	Mr. Lipand
France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
India . . . . .	Mr. Tirumurti
Ireland . . . . .	Ms. Byrne Nason
Kenya . . . . .	Mr. Kiboino
Niger . . . . .	Mr. Abarry
Norway . . . . .	Ms. Juul
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines . . . . .	Ms. King
Tunisia . . . . .	Mr. Ben Lagha
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. DeLaurentis
Viet Nam . . . . .	Mr. Phan

## Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in Afghanistan**

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan and Tajikistan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Deborah Lyons, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and Ms. Freshta Karim, Director of Charmaghz.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Ms. Lyons.

**Ms. Lyons:** I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity. I also thank Council members for the opportunity to speak about Afghanistan at this very critical time.

For the past 20 years, the needs of Afghanistan have been discussed and acted on in the Chamber with particular sympathy and generosity. But with the Taliban takeover, the Afghan people now feel abandoned, forgotten and indeed punished by circumstances that are not their fault. To abandon the Afghan people now would be a historic mistake — a mistake that has been made before with tragic consequences.

I would like to begin by providing first a general assessment of the de facto Taliban Administration, based on our engagement with them in Kabul and the provinces over the past three months. Let me highlight that our formal interactions have been generally useful and constructive. The de facto authorities have assured us that they want a United Nations presence and value our assistance. They continue to seek international recognition, as well as ways to overcome the major trust deficit that they recognize exists between them and the international community.

In terms of governance, they have begun to raise revenues from customs and have used some of those

revenues to begin addressing pressing issues, such as partially paying civil servant salaries. As well, the Taliban continue to provide security to the United Nations presence throughout the country and allow broad humanitarian access, including for female humanitarian workers. That changed security situation has allowed us to visit parts of the country that we had not visited in 15 years, providing vital assistance.

Be assured that we have not shied away from raising difficult issues with the Taliban, particularly on ethnic rights, women's rights, girls' education, inclusivity and on reports we have heard of harassment and extrajudicial killings. In general, they have taken cognizance of those concerns and have often acknowledged that they have made mistakes and are trying to address them. However, they also make clear that, for now, there are limits to concessions they are willing to make on certain issues.

On girls' education, the de facto authorities have indicated that they are working on a nationwide policy so that the right to girls' education can be exercised across the country, but they say that they need more time to clarify the policy and its implementation. While the de facto authorities had initially assured the protection of women's rights within Islamic law, including education, there has been a general curtailment of Afghan women's and girls' fundamental rights and freedoms. Those range from limiting their right to work to the absence of women from major decision-making forums and from senior echelons of the civil service. It should be noted that those policies are applied disparately around the country, with some provinces becoming significantly less restrictive than others.

We continue to call for a far more inclusive administration in which Government institutions reflect Afghanistan's broad diversity. We have seen limited progress on that issue, however. The composition of the caretaker Cabinet — so called by the Taliban themselves — remains entirely male, essentially Pashtun and almost all Taliban. At both the capital and provincial levels, recent appointments continue to appear designed more to reward fighters than to promote governance and inclusion.

Be assured also that we maintain close contacts as well with other sectors of Afghan society around the country, including media, former Government officials, civil society, professionals and, most certainly, women's groups. Afghans in general remain apprehensive about

the future intentions of the Taliban de facto authority. Those apprehensions mitigate some of the relief that has come from the notable decline in conflict. The Afghan population is of course hugely concerned about their paralysed economy, the inability to withdraw money and fears of not being able to feed themselves and their children during the winter in the coming months.

There are also limitations on demonstrations and other attempts at freedom of expression. Media outlets continue to close, sometimes due to financial reasons and sometimes due to ongoing restrictions by the de facto authorities on the content of their publications and broadcasts. Continued inter-ethnic tension and violence give rise as well to concern for minority rights, with reports of forced evictions targeting minority communities.

Let me say that, while the overall security situation has indeed improved as the conflict has largely ended, we regularly receive credible reports of incidents impacting the right to life and physical integrity of Afghans. Those include house searches and extrajudicial killings of former Government security personnel and officials. The judicial system itself is unevenly applied. The availability of judges, civil servants, police personnel and legal and financial resources vary across the country. There are no women working in the justice sector. And it remains unclear how the de facto authorities intend to assure and ensure women's access to justice.

Another major negative development has been the Taliban's inability to curb the expansion of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP). Once limited to a few provinces and Kabul, ISIL-KP now seems to be present in nearly all provinces and is increasingly active. The number of attacks has increased significantly from last year to this year. While there were 60 such attacks in 2020, so far this year there have been 334 attacks attributed to ISIL-KP or, in fact, claimed by ISIL-KP. The group continues to target Shia communities. The Taliban insist that they are waging a concerted campaign against ISIL-KP, but that campaign is worrisome in that it appears to rely heavily on extrajudicial detentions and killings of suspected ISIL-KP members. That is an area deserving of more attention from the international community.

However, our general impression is that the Taliban are making genuine efforts to present themselves as a Government. Those efforts are partly constrained by

the lack of resources and capacity, as well as a political ideology that in many ways clashes with contemporary international norms of governance so present in this Chamber. The Taliban have not yet established full trust with much of the Afghan population or convinced them of their capacity to govern. The movement is also struggling to manage some serious internal divisions. Ultimately, however, the Taliban must decide on whether to govern according to the needs and the rights of the diverse Afghan population, or whether to rule on the basis of a narrow ideology and an even narrower ethnic base.

Since the Taliban took power, members of the international community, understandably, have focused on helping those Afghans who want to leave. Widespread fears of life under Taliban rule prompted the horrific scenes that everyone witnessed in the immediate aftermath of the Taliban takeover in August as thousands of Afghans chose to flee the country. But our attention now must turn to the vastly greater number of Afghans who remain in the country but face in the short term a most dire future.

We are on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe; however, we are on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe that is preventable. The financial sanctions applied to Afghanistan have paralysed the banking system, affecting every aspect of the economy. Gross domestic product has contracted by an estimated 40 per cent. Cash is severely limited. Traders cannot obtain letters of credit. People who have worked and saved for years cannot access their savings. Civil servants' salaries cannot be paid in full, if at all. Hospitals are running out of medicine and turning away patients. Prices have gone up as goods have become scarcer, instituting a punishing tax on the poorest and most vulnerable Afghans. Fuel and food prices have risen as winter approaches. An entire complex social and economic system is shutting down in part due to the assets freeze, the suspension of non-humanitarian aid flows and sanctions.

According to a recent United Nations report, almost one in two Afghans face crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity — one in two of a population of some 38 million. As we move into winter and households consume their very limited food stocks, we fear and predict that up to 23 million Afghans will be in crisis or at emergency levels of food insecurity — among the worst in the world. That will likely indeed worsen over the winter, making Afghanistan the country with

the largest population in the world facing the greatest risk of food insecurity — 23 million of a population of 38 million facing the greatest risk of food insecurity. I repeat: the largest population of any country in the world. Furthermore, while the risk of famine was once mostly in rural areas, 10 out of 11 of Afghanistan's most densely populated urban areas are now anticipated to be equally at emergency levels of food insecurity.

Against tremendous constraints — but backed by the incredible generosity of the many donors — we are delivering significant amounts of humanitarian aid. We — the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the many United Nations agencies functioning in Afghanistan — are grateful to the donors, who have now almost fully funded the September flash appeal. By the third quarter of this year, the United Nations humanitarian organizations and their accompanying non-governmental organizations have reached close to 10.5 million people with assistance across the country. That includes food assistance, agriculture and livelihood assistance, treatment for acute malnutrition of children, medical consultations and water trucking to reach thousands of drought-affected people. As I am sure the Council knows, Afghanistan has faced this year the second drought in four years, while we again anticipate another drought year in the years to come.

The support cannot stop there. My key message, however, is that humanitarian assistance is not enough. The international community needs urgently to find a way to provide financial support to health care workers in state hospitals, staff in food security programmes and eventually to teachers — provided that the right of girls to education is emphatically met. That can be done only through the institutions and delivery mechanisms that have been built at great cost over the past two decades with the contribution of many of the countries present here. I want to assure the Council that every effort will be made by the United Nations to ensure that funds provided through those delivery mechanisms will not be diverted to, or by, the Taliban. We have created an independent facility for the payment of salaries in the health sector, but that needs to be expanded and replicated to many other essential service areas. We will need intense dialogue with the donors on those issues. For the next three or four months, we must focus on helping the most vulnerable Afghans endure the winter. And we must do so without undermining the institutions

and coping mechanisms that are keeping the rest of the population from sliding into greater vulnerability.

On another disturbing note, I must report that the reality of the current situation threatens to heighten the risk of extremism. The continued deterioration of the formal economy will provide impetus to the informal economy, including illicit drugs, arms flows and human trafficking. The ongoing paralysis in the banking sector will push more of the financial system into unaccountable and unregulated informal money exchanges, which can only help facilitate terrorism, trafficking and further drug smuggling. Those pathologies will first affect Afghanistan, but then they will infect the region.

Countries of the region have created or continued various important formats of support. Both the Moscow format meetings and the so-called troika plus — involving China, Pakistan, Russia and the United States — have continued to meet. I am also happy to report that two meetings have been held, in Islamabad and in Tehran — and I believe the next one will be held in Beijing — in the new format of meetings of Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan's neighbours. India also recently hosted a conference of some countries of the region at the national security adviser level. Those are all indications of how strongly the countries of the region are stepping up at this critical time.

All of those formats rightly stress the need for stability in Afghanistan as well as the urgent requirement to combat illegal drug-trafficking and transnational terrorism. Countries of the region, like the rest of the international community, have called for a more inclusive Government in Afghanistan as well as the need for girls' education, the return of women to work and respect for human rights and the rights of minorities. On those issues there is a strong regional and international consensus. The world is speaking with one voice to the Taliban on those issues.

The problems of Afghanistan are not limited to the region. The best way to promote stability and future international support is for the Taliban to avoid the isolation that characterized their previous experience in power. That will require a sustained and structured policy dialogue among the Taliban de facto authorities, other Afghan stakeholders and the wider region and the international community. UNAMA is well positioned to play a vital role in this important dialogue, depending on our future mandate. The goal

should be to establish a gradual but concerted pathway spelling out concrete steps for establishing constructive relations between Afghanistan and the world at large, with of course the well-being and rights of the Afghan people being the central goal of all these efforts. That is, to be frank, the only way to avoid losing much of the progress of the past 20 years. Such a road map — such a pathway — and continued engagement would pave the way for more constructive exchanges on a wide variety of international priorities, including on the de facto authority's responsibilities to the people of Afghanistan to implement the obligations of the many treaty bodies supported by the Council and to which the Afghan State is a party.

I know that no one can guarantee that all those measures in and of themselves will ensure a better future for the Afghan people, but we can guarantee that, without making this concerted effort, their lives will most certainly worsen. This is not the time to turn our backs on the Afghan people. If we do, our collective failure will resonate for decades, as will the pain of millions of Afghans.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Lyons for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Karim.

**Ms. Karim**: I thank the Security Council for inviting me. It is an honour to be here, but I must admit that it took a lot of courage for me to join this meeting.

That is because I am exhausted by this war and on the verge of an emotional breakdown, just like every other Afghan. The sense of loss is huge. Every Afghan family, including my own, has lost at least one of its members to the decades of never-ending war. Our graveyards are a proof of that, and our land is witness to the amount of human blood spilled on it. In the silence of the graveyards, looking at the graves of soldiers from the previous Government, soldiers from the Taliban, young women and children, I have come to a stark and clear realization: that no one is an enemy, and no human must be killed anymore for this war or any other war.

After years of suffering, every one of us — from me as an Afghan, to my peers, to the Taliban and the international community — must stop seeing each other as enemies. We need to make the effort to see the humanity in others and hear their suffering and their stories. We also need to be brave, to apologize for our

wrongs and for the lives that were lost. It is not easy, and I understand, but we need to do that.

Today I start this journey by declaring that no one is my enemy. Each of us has our own demands and our own vision of truth and future. We do not agree on many things, but we must coexist. I call on the United Nations to work with all stakeholders in the creation of a political structure that allows for co-existence and an end to the cycle of war that Afghanistan has been trapped in for decades.

Since the Taliban takeover, the global approach has been to focus on evacuations, the Afghan migrant crisis, humanitarian aid and lobbying for girls' education. All of those are very important, but the well-being of Afghan citizens can be sustainably realized only if we have political stability. However, I do not see enough global efforts for that. That frightens me. That absolutely frightens me because without it, we have just a pause to the war — just a pause. This is not the end of it. There will be more human lives lost, poverty and global isolation. Let me explain why I say that this is a pause to the war rather than an ending.

It is because the current arrangements of political power by the Taliban are exclusionary. They exclude other Pashtuns beyond themselves. They exclude all ethnic groups. They exclude women and all previous political actors. Exclusion and lack of power-sharing does not work in Afghanistan, in the same way that it does not work in any other part of the world. People dissent, and our recent history is proof of this. Just looking at history, we had a civil war among different ethnic groups just 30 years ago, in the 1990s, after the withdrawal of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, post-2001 when the Taliban were excluded from the Bonn Conference and negotiations, they came back. We witnessed that.

Another problem of Afghanistan is that it has an overly centralized political structure and system, which the Taliban inherited from the previous Government. It disempowers people in provinces and rural areas. That is why so many of our rural, excluded and poor citizens joined the fight to take over Kabul. Without a political structure that allows all groups to make themselves heard through non-violent means, they are likely to use violence. Violence is still pervasive in the country even after the takeover by the Taliban. We already see Da'esh doing exactly what the Taliban were doing: committing suicide attacks. It is sobering to see

soldiers from the previous Government joining them. Also, I wish to mention that just a couple of hours ago there was a suicide attack in Kabul, killing two children and several other people.

That is why I say we are seeing a pause to the war. Unless we act to break the cycle, it will continue to repeat itself. We have seen the violent takeover of power in Afghanistan by different groups over the years. At best, they only paused the cycle of war for a few years. However, it is only through non-violent means and negotiations involving all groups that we can create a new political system in which we can all coexist. Only in that way can we end war and sustain peace. We need a genuine global effort to turn the current moment into a window of opportunity for long-lasting peace. To that end, I have three recommendations.

First, I urge the United Nations and friendly neutral Governments to play a leading role in bringing all stakeholders back under a Bonn Conference model. The aim should be to ensure transitional justice through that model so as to create a political system acceptable to all and inclusive of all — one that will ensure social justice, the distribution of wealth and opportunities and the decentralization of power — as well as ensuring the fundamental rights of all citizens.

Secondly, I urge all rival regional Powers, including India and Pakistan, but not limited to them, to bring the best versions of themselves, setting aside their regional rivalries, to genuinely work for peace. Moves to gain power in the region cannot gain them respect when it comes at the cost of misery of children, of people living in war and of graveyards full of young men who could have had a life.

Thirdly, I urge the global community to support local actors, non-governmental organizations and associations working in Afghanistan. They must be given financial and social support to continue their grass-roots work for peace. In that way we can have a local-level peace effort working in parallel with international efforts.

I will end with a call to all of us to make brave decisions, because it is the darkest of our times that require our bravest decisions.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Karim for her briefing and her participation in this meeting.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

**Ms. Juul** (Norway): Allow me to first thank Ms. Lyons, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for her briefing. We are delighted to have the Special Representative with us here in the Security Council Chamber and commend the entire UNAMA team for its crucial and relentless work to support the Afghan people.

Indeed, the people of Afghanistan are entering a particularly difficult winter. As Special Representative Lyons has just said, more than half of the population faces acute food insecurity, and the World Food Programme has issued multiple warnings about the risk of large-scale death from hunger throughout Afghanistan in the coming months. Afghanistan is highly vulnerable to drought and other effects of climate change, which exacerbates food insecurity and compounds the humanitarian crisis. It may also lead to further instability and displacement and increase the vulnerability of marginalized groups, including women. Against that backdrop, humanitarian aid is of urgent importance, and we expect the Taliban, as well as all parties in Afghanistan, to ensure that humanitarian assistance is provided, in line with humanitarian principles.

Norway has increased its humanitarian support to Afghanistan to a total of \$37 million this year, but we know that humanitarian assistance alone is not enough. The political challenges of dealing with the Taliban taking power by force must not prevent us from doing all we can to save Afghan lives. The re-establishment of basic services, in particular health care and education, is vital. We underline the importance of ensuring safe access to the right to education and safeguarding that right, including through the full implementation of resolution 2601 (2021). In order to secure the provision of basic services, Norway has decided to contribute approximately \$23 million to the newly created Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan. The international community must explore all avenues for Afghanistan to recover a normally functioning economy, with people engaging in trade and gainful employment, as well as a re-established, functioning financial sector. Preventing a total economic collapse is essential.

I would also like to thank Ms. Freshta Karim for her briefing to the Security Council and for her important messages on inclusive governance. I commend her long-standing advocacy on the right to education for all children in Afghanistan. Her statement is yet another reminder to the Council and the international community about the importance of continuing to consult with Afghan women in all our efforts affecting the future of Afghanistan. Norway is therefore increasing its support to organizations promoting women's rights and participation in Afghan society, especially those working at the grass-roots level to prevent conflict and protect human rights.

Allow me also to express my condolences to all those who knew the human rights defenders Frozan Safi and Hijratullah Khogyani. We firmly echo the calls for a prompt, independent and impartial investigation into their deaths and for the perpetrators to be held accountable.

The security situation in Afghanistan is still a cause of great concern. Recent acts of terrorism targeting places of worship and hospitals deserve our strongest condemnation. Those attacks add to the suffering of the Afghan people. We expect the Taliban to do its utmost in countering terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province, mindful of the importance of respecting human rights as an integral part of any successful counter-terrorism strategies.

I would like to conclude by re-emphasizing the severity of the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. The responsibility lies with those who rule. Nevertheless, the international community must also do its utmost to assist the Afghan population in this critical time. If we are to avert a disaster of enormous proportions, there is no time to lose.

**Mr. Lipand** (Estonia): I want to thank Ms. Karim for her message and her courage today. I also wish to thank Special Representative Lyons for her briefing.

It is evident that the situation in Afghanistan has become more dire, and the role of the United Nations and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in that regard are now more necessary than ever. The importance of UNAMA in coordinating humanitarian aid delivery and relations with authorities, monitoring and reporting on the security and human rights situations and assisting in governance and rule of law cannot be understated.

There have been a number of different meetings concerning Afghanistan recently, in different locations and formats, including the extended troika that took place this past week, but the main messages that all of these events have all been similar and could be summed up as a call on the Taliban to fulfil its promises and live up to its public statements. First and foremost, this means the formation of an inclusive and representative Government. The make-up of the current Administration is being viewed with great disappointment. Ignoring the diversity of the people of Afghanistan and excluding women are clear decisions that go against the expectations of the international community and fuel concerns over the continued future instability of the country, as Ms. Karim highlighted very eloquently in her statement today.

Estonia again emphasizes that sustainable peace in Afghanistan can be ensured only by respecting and upholding international norms and standards and constitutional protections for the rights of all the people of Afghanistan, particularly women, girls and persons belonging to minorities. By excluding women from employment and public life, restricting their mobility, and by undermining the right of women to full, equal and meaningful participation in decision-making and all other aspects of Afghan society, as well as their access to justice, Afghanistan will not enjoy development or prosperity. Without the participation and support of women, Afghanistan will not be able to provide all its children with an education or ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to everyone in need.

Humanitarian aid is greatly needed right now in Afghanistan. Estonia and all other European Union members together pledged almost \$800 million for humanitarian assistance as part of the flash appeal in September. It is positive to see that aid has started moving into Afghanistan through a number of different channels, but to reach those in need, all parties have to allow immediate, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for United Nations humanitarian agencies and other actors to provide assistance, including for women aid workers to deliver aid, for women health-care workers to provide medical care and for women teachers to educate students. We welcome the rapid establishment of the United Nations Development Programme Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan and encourage further measures that would assist in strengthening its economy and liquidity.

Estonia remains committed to helping the people of Afghanistan. However, our cooperation with any Afghanistan leadership will be based upon its willingness to uphold the positive achievements of recent decades and act by the norms and standards of international law, including international human rights law. We condemn the use of violence against peaceful protestors and journalists, for whom Afghanistan continues to be one of the top-most dangerous places in the world to work in, despite a general improvement in the security situation in the country. We further condemn the recent terrorist attacks, which have multiplied across the country, and recall the expectation that the territory of Afghanistan would not be used as for terrorist activity against any country.

I would like to conclude by giving special thanks to the staff of UNAMA and to the broader United Nations personnel in Afghanistan, whose efforts in delivering aid and stability for the benefit of the people of Afghanistan have been vital during this time of crisis.

**Mr. Phan** (Viet Nam): I thank Special Representative Lyons for her comprehensive and substantive briefing. I highly commend the efforts — especially those that have been made over the past three months — of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and other United Nations personnel on the ground. I also thank Ms. Freshta Karim for sharing her thoughts and stories.

Viet Nam continues to closely follow the developments in Afghanistan. We strongly condemn the continued terrorist attacks in Afghanistan in recent weeks and express our deepest condolences to the families of the victims. It is our sincere hope that the situation in the country will soon stabilize, for the benefit of the Afghan people and for peace and stability in the region, particularly in the neighbouring countries.

Today I wish to highlight the following points.

First, it is imperative to promote an inclusive political settlement with the full, strong and meaningful participation of women to ensure the stability, unity and development of the country. We urge all relevant parties in Afghanistan to continue to engage in dialogue, resolve their differences and promote national reconciliation and harmony. We also call for the active participation of women and young people in all aspects of society, particularly in education and employment.

Secondly, it is critical to ensure order and security in the country, as well as the safety, security and well-being of all people in Afghanistan. All relevant parties must continue to respect their obligations under international law, including humanitarian law. The normal operations of indispensable infrastructure and essential services for the civilian population, particularly vulnerable groups such as women, children and persons with disabilities, must be ensured. The safety, security and working conditions of United Nations personnel, humanitarian workers, foreign nationals, international organizations and diplomatic missions must continue to be guaranteed.

Thirdly, further efforts are needed to tackle the increasing challenges related to the humanitarian and economic situation, food insecurity, migrants and refugees and the coronavirus disease pandemic. The current economic situation in Afghanistan is facing tremendous challenges. It is extremely alarming that more than 20 million people, over half of the country's population, are facing crisis levels of food insecurity, as Special Representative Lyons has just described. Immediate, safe and unhindered humanitarian access must be ensured to reach the Afghan people in need. Furthermore, we call on the United Nations regional and international partners to redouble their efforts in supporting peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan in order to save the country's economy from the brink of collapse. It is also heartening to note the continued efforts of various partners to provide humanitarian assistance over the past few months.

Fourthly, we commend the efforts of UNAMA at this critical time. We once again stress the importance of ensuring the security and safety of the Mission and all of its personnel, international and national. We look forward to the upcoming report of the Secretary-General on strategic and operational recommendations for the mandate of UNAMA. We reiterate our call on all relevant parties in Afghanistan to fully cooperate and create favourable conditions for the United Nations and UNAMA to carry out their mandate for the benefit of the people of Afghanistan and development of the country.

**Mr. Kiboino** (Kenya): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the Niger, Tunisia and Kenya, as well as Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (A3+1).

We would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Deborah Lyons, for her briefing on the latest developments in Afghanistan. We also thank Ms. Freshta Karim, Director of the non-governmental educational organization Charmaghz, for her insightful briefing.

The A3+1 is extremely concerned about the increasing number of terrorist attacks carried out by the Islamic State-Khorasan Province, which have mainly targeted religious minorities. We strongly condemn the recent spate of heinous attacks that have targeted holy sites in Kandahar and Kunduz, whose aim is to instil fear and fuel divisions among the Afghan people. The reprehensible targeting of civilians, including medical personnel and civilian infrastructure, is also a violation of international humanitarian law. All those responsible must be held to account.

The worrying turn of events in Afghanistan calls for immediate steps to revitalize the global counter-terrorism architecture to ensure structured and coordinated action to address these attacks, which clearly constitute a threat to international peace and Security. The Security Council should endeavour to ensure that any interventions are informed by the peace, safety and security interests of the Afghan people and not motivated by geostrategic interests, which would only further complicate the situation.

The A3+1 welcomes the third meeting of the participants of the Moscow format consultations on Afghanistan on 20 October, noting its recommendations, which, if pursued, could contribute significantly to peace and stability in Afghanistan. We call in particular on the Taliban to immediately take steps to improve governance and to form a truly inclusive Government that adequately reflects the interests of all ethno-political diversity groups as a prerequisite for a national reconciliation process in Afghanistan.

The A3+1 remains disappointed that sufficient efforts have not been undertaken by the Taliban to deliver on its promises to the Afghan people. We reiterate our call on the Taliban to make sustained tangible efforts to embrace peace, cut its links with terrorist groups and affiliates and engage in a meaningful dialogue with all components of society, with a view to restoring security, putting in place a sound governance structure and upholding human rights for all people, without discrimination on account of religion, ethnicity, gender or any other considerations.

We also call upon the Taliban to take immediate steps to apprehend Al-Qaida and Islamic State leaders and operatives, hold them to account and demonstrate that Afghanistan will not be a haven for terrorist networks. The raft of measures laid out under resolution 1267 (1999) and subsequent resolutions should in that regard be brought to bear as necessary.

With over 23 million facing acute hunger and nearly 9 million in near-famine conditions, the A3+1 remains deeply concerned about the dire humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. The situation is compounded by the collapsing economy, which has pushed many Afghans into abject poverty. We are particularly concerned by the children's situation; an estimated 3.2 million children under the age of 5 are on the edge of acute malnutrition.

To address the immediate needs, the humanitarian agencies and the international community should prioritize vital public services, including health and education for all. In that regard, the A3+1 commends the support from the international community, especially its pledges of more than \$1.1 billion in humanitarian aid and development, made during the pledging conference on 13 September. We caution the Taliban against capitalizing on the goodwill of the international community to hold the Afghan population hostage for the purpose of extracting financial or political concessions.

The A3+1 is gravely concerned by the plight of the women and girls of Afghanistan, who are being denied their fundamental human rights, including the right to work and the right to education. Education is not only a fundamental right, but also an important religious obligation that should not be distorted as an excuse to discriminate against women and girls. We therefore stand in solidarity with the Afghan women and their inalienable right to contribute positively to the development of their country. In that regard, we underscore the imperative for their full and meaningful participation in all aspects of Afghan life, including at the grass-roots and leadership levels. For that to be achieved, there must be an equal commitment to eliminating all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and other gendered harms against Afghan women, girls and children, as well as any actions intended to restrict women's freedom of movement.

Finally, Kenya, the Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Tunisia reaffirm our unwavering

solidarity with the people of Afghanistan and stand ready to support all endeavours aimed at securing their safety and well-being.

**Mr. Tirumurti** (India): I thank Special Representative Deborah Lyons for her briefing. I would like to express in particular my delegation's appreciation for the work that is being done by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in these challenging times. I also thank Ms. Freshta Karim for her insights.

Afghanistan has already seen much bloodshed and violence in recent years. We have also heard from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General today about the dire situation in Afghanistan. Furthermore, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, more than half of Afghanistan's population is facing crisis or emergency levels of acute food insecurity, and urgent humanitarian assistance is required to meet the basic food needs of the people.

Over the past two decades, India has contributed significantly to the development of Afghanistan. Indian development projects have been undertaken in every critical area of socioeconomic development, including power, water supply, road connectivity, health care, education, agriculture and capacity-building. Even as we speak, India continues to grant educational scholarships to thousands of Afghan men and women to continue their education in India. India has undertaken more than 500 development projects covering all 34 provinces of Afghanistan. We have also extended humanitarian assistance through the delivery of 75,000 metric tons of wheat, as well as essential medical supplies and coronavirus disease pandemic vaccines to Afghanistan last year. India is once again ready to deliver urgent humanitarian aid consisting of food grains and medicines to the people of Afghanistan.

India remains steadfast in its commitment to providing humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan. In that context, India has supported the call of the international community that access to humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan should be direct and without any hindrance. Humanitarian assistance should be based on the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence, and disbursement of the aid should be non-discriminatory and accessible to all, irrespective of ethnicity, religion or political belief. In particular, the assistance should reach the most vulnerable first, including women, children and

minorities. We call on the international community and countries of the region to come together, rising above partisan interests. As Afghanistan's largest regional development partner, India is willing to coordinate with other stakeholders to work towards enabling the expeditious provision of much-needed assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

Terrorism continues to pose a serious threat to Afghanistan and to the region. In fact, the Security Council itself has come together, on several occasions since August, to pronounce itself in one voice with respect to the places of religious worship, including those used by religious and ethnic minorities, and other public places such as hospitals, that have been targeted by terrorists. Resolution 2593 (2021) clearly sets out boundaries outlining the international community's expectations on a range of critical and immediate issues. The resolution lays down the requirements in terms of the fight against terrorism, where it has noted the commitment of the Taliban to not allow the use of Afghan territory for terrorism, including on the part of terrorists and terrorist groups designated under resolution 1267 (1999).

Resolution 2593 (2021) also lays down the expectations of the international community in terms of an inclusive, negotiated political settlement with the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and minorities and diverse political-ethnic groups in the country; the importance of upholding human rights including those of women, children and minorities; and the requirement to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan. One of our immediate priorities is to evacuate stranded people, as well as to ensure their free movement so that they are allowed to travel in and out of Afghanistan.

The situation in Afghanistan continues to be a cause of pressing concern. As its immediate neighbour and a long-standing friend of its people, the current situation has direct implications for India. In that context, India recently held on 10 November the third Regional Security Dialogue of national security advisors on Afghanistan, together with the participation of regional partners. The Delhi Declaration on Afghanistan, adopted at the meeting, reflects the much-needed regional consensus on Afghanistan. The international community and key stakeholders, including from Afghanistan, have welcomed the Delhi Declaration on Afghanistan.

India calls for an inclusive dispensation in Afghanistan that will represent all sections of Afghan society. A broad-based, inclusive and representative formation would gain greater international acceptability and legitimacy. Today it is more necessary than ever that the international community speak with one voice on Afghanistan. Resolution 2596 (2021) requires the Secretary-General to report to the Security Council on strategic and operational recommendations for the mandate of UNAMA, in the light of recent political, security and social developments. We believe that this report should contain holistic recommendations from a strategic perspective. When the Council decides on the future of the UNAMA mandate in March 2022, its focus needs to be centred on the welfare, well-being and expectations of the Afghan people.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Ms. Deborah Lyons, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for sharing her thoughts and views on the situation in Afghanistan. We are also grateful to Ms. Fresha Karim for her clear, emotional and brave statement. We also welcome the participation of representatives of regional States to today's meeting.

The new realities in Afghanistan since 15 August have brought neither the Afghans nor the international community any closer to stabilizing the country or to establishing a peaceful, indivisible and drug- and crime-free State on its territory. Due primarily to a lack of international recognition, long-standing, decades-old problems remain, and new challenges have emerged. We remain in favour of the formation in Afghanistan of a genuinely inclusive Government that adequately reflects the interests of all the political-ethnic forces in the country, a moderate domestic and friendly foreign policy and respect for basic human rights, including those of women and children. Eliminating the threat posed by terrorism and narcotics remains a key task.

We trust that the new authorities will be more far-sighted than the previous leadership of Afghanistan, which, to satisfy its own ambitions, sacrificed national interests and left its people to fend for themselves. We note that the Taliban are ready for practical cooperation with the international community and regional partners to address the main challenge facing the country: restoring order and rebuilding the country after years of conflict. We can indeed see the first positive signs

with regard to the return of women to work in the social sector as well as girls' education.

We also note the efforts of the new authorities to combat the Islamic State in the context of the increasingly frequent bloody terrorist attacks through which the Islamic State-Khorasan Province is seeking to destabilize the situation in the country and beyond. Drugs are also linked to terrorism, because they are terrorists' main financial lifeline. Today there is a real threat of a spillover of terrorist and drug activity, including those masquerading as migration flows, into the territory of neighbouring countries. We trust that the Taliban will continue to fulfil its promises to eradicate those problems. Such problems, however, go hand-in-hand with poverty, food shortages and corruption, and they are not new to Afghanistan. To a large extent, they were inherited by the Taliban given that they had not been systematically addressed in the past 20 years.

However, unlike the situation a few months ago, the new authorities in Afghanistan are deprived of any sources of income. The banking system is paralyzed and there is no cash flow in Afghanistan. Physicians, doctors, teachers and police officers are not being paid. All of that is leading inexorably towards a humanitarian catastrophe that could affect millions of ordinary Afghans. The priority at the moment is to provide urgent humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. We welcome the swift action taken by the United Nations in that area, as well as the timely cooperation with the local authorities. We support the coordinating role of the United Nations in consolidating international efforts in the area of humanitarian assistance. For our part, we are also prepared to make our own contribution to that common endeavour. We will soon be sending food, medicine and other essential goods to Afghanistan. We trust that the key donors will also demonstrate the generosity that is needed in this critical situation.

At the same time, we must note that despite the scaling-up of aid through the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, different funds and programmes, it will not be possible to resolve the social and economic problems of Afghanistan without unfreezing its financial assets from international financial institutions. We hear that from staff of the United Nations itself, who have predicted that Afghanistan is headed for an inevitable economic collapse because its assets remain frozen. In that context, we support the efforts of United Nations funds

and programmes to work with relevant ministries in Afghanistan to distribute unfrozen funds to enable the uninterrupted work of various categories of civil servants charged with providing services to the population.

It is encouraging that the positions of regional and extraregional players with regard to the prevention of an economic catastrophe in Afghanistan are quite similar. In that regard, we believe that it would be useful to convene, as soon as possible, a representative international donor conference under the auspices of the United Nations, based on the understanding that the main burden of post-conflict economic and financial reconstruction and development in Afghanistan should be borne by the forces whose military contingents have been present in that country for the past 20 years.

The Russian Federation continues to provide direct assistance to the Afghan settlement process. The extended troika plays a key role in that regard. The most recent meetings of the extended troika were held in Moscow on 19 October and in Islamabad on 11 November. The Moscow format remains a unique platform for broad regional cooperation, with the participation of Afghans themselves, and its special role was reiterated during the most recent round of talks held in Moscow on 20 October.

We are in regular contact with all five Central Asian countries. In that regard, we believe that it is more important than ever to ensure cooperation within the regional organizations, namely, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, (CSTO) including CSTO the Working Group on Afghanistan and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), including the revitalized mechanism of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group.

In conclusion, we reiterate our unwavering commitment to preserving the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan. Its security and stability are in the interest of the Afghans, their neighbours and the entire international community.

**Mr. Zhang Jun** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Deborah Lyons and Ms. Karim for their briefings. China thanks Special Representative Lyons for leading the diligent work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), despite the difficult conditions.

At present, Afghanistan finds itself on the precipice between chaos and order and faces challenges on the humanitarian, economic, counter-terrorism and political fronts. Peace and reconstruction remain an uphill task. The international community should strengthen unity through cooperation, lend a helping hand and work together to support the country as it embarks on the road of peace, stability and development.

First, it is important to support Afghanistan in alleviating its humanitarian difficulties and in gradually rebuilding its economy and society. The United Nations should further play its coordinating role and mobilize all parties to step up humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and deliver it as soon as possible. In the long run, that is necessary to help the country rebuild its domestic market, participate in regional and international economic cooperation and find a sound development path. We call on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, among others, to consider resuming financing support to Afghanistan.

Secondly, we should actively work with Afghanistan and support the realization of independent, stable and effective State governance in that country. The future of Afghanistan is in the hands of the Afghan people. The international community should provide positive guidance to Afghan political parties and ethnic communities and encourage Afghanistan to maintain a broad-based and inclusive political orientation, pursue moderate and stable domestic and foreign policies, protect the fundamental rights and interests of ethnic minorities, women, and children and develop good-neighbourly relations and cooperation.

Thirdly, in a context of increasing terrorism, including combat terrorism, it is imperative to be comprehensively and resolutely vigilant. The recent spate of large-scale terrorist attacks in Afghanistan has once again demonstrated that terrorist forces are taking advantage of the situation to gain strength. China is deeply concerned about that. The international community should urge all parties in Afghanistan to make a clean break from terrorist forces. It should also support its independent, resolved and effective actions to combat all terrorist forces, including the Islamic State and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement.

Fourthly, there should be more coordination and therefore greater synergy between all the mechanisms on Afghanistan. We support the United Nations key coordinating role in the maintenance of

stability and the delivery of emergency assistance. Afghanistan's neighbours have officially launched a coordination and cooperation mechanism, and China will host its third Foreign Ministers meeting next year to promote cooperation among neighbouring countries and contribute to the long-term stability of Afghanistan. We look forward to the international community's respect and support for the efforts of the neighbouring countries.

Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis is its most severe and pressing challenge, as we heard in the briefing presented by Special Representative Lyons. Recent reports of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme show that more than half of the Afghan population faces unprecedented levels of acute hunger, and 95 per cent of families do not have sufficient food. According to UNICEF statistics, by the end of this year, 3.2 million Afghan children under the age of five will be severely malnourished. If no immediate action is taken, 1 million children might perish because of that.

As winter approaches, the Afghan people urgently need food, medicine and warm clothes; otherwise, they stand to face a very harsh winter. In that context, unilateral sanctions, especially with regard to Afghanistan's frozen overseas assets, have become a bottleneck issue that cannot be ignored. Teachers, doctors and nurses in Afghanistan have not received their salaries for more than half a year. When teachers are not paid and schools do not function, how can we even begin to talk about girl's schooling? If doctors and nurses are not paid, how will they help people fight the coronavirus disease pandemic? The freezing of assets is a collective punishment of the Afghan people. It is unacceptable morally, and in reality it exacerbates humanitarian disasters. The frozen Afghan assets should be returned to their true owners as soon as possible. They cannot be used as a bargaining chip for the purpose of threat or coercion.

China supports the United Nations in its ongoing role of helping Afghanistan achieve a smooth transition. The future mandate of UNAMA should fully reflect evolving situations, meet the expectations of Afghanistan and fit within the work and the priorities of the relevant international regional mechanisms in a mutually reinforcing manner. With regard to UNAMA's future mandate, we hope that the Secretary-General will listen extensively to Afghan parties and

international partners in order to put forth practical and viable recommendations.

**Mr. De Rivière (France)** (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Lyons and Ms. Karim for their briefings. I commend the courage of the United Nations teams working in difficult conditions, as well as that of Afghan civil society actors, who never give up. When they took power by force on 15 August, the Taliban created a crisis situation that has serious consequences for the Afghan people and carries the risk of destabilizing the entire region. Faced with this situation, the Security Council must show unity and firmness in defending the fundamental rights of the Afghan people. So far, there has been no sign of change on the part of the Taliban; they have done nothing to respect the commitments they have made to the international community.

On the security front, resolution 2593 (2021), adopted on 30 August, set clear conditions for a complete and clear break with terrorist groups and Al-Qaida. However, it is clear that the links between the Al-Qaida command and the Taliban continue, the Taliban are not mobilizing against the Islamic State in Khorasan, and several recent attacks have plunged Afghanistan into mourning. Our thoughts are with the victims.

The fight against terrorism remains a priority for France, and we cannot accept Afghanistan becoming a sanctuary for terrorist organizations. Our action in the Council, as elsewhere, is aimed at drying up the resources of terrorist groups and countering their propaganda, but also guaranteeing respect for human rights and ensuring that there is no impunity for terrorists. We expect the Taliban to demonstrate that terrorist groups receive no direct or indirect financial, ideological, political or logistical support in Kabul or in the Afghan provinces.

France is seriously concerned about the humanitarian situation. Half of the Afghan population is in need of emergency aid, and this number is increasing as winter approaches. We cannot stand by and do nothing. That is why France committed itself at the Geneva conference on 13 September to provide €100 million in humanitarian aid for the civilian population. We must now ensure that this aid is delivered to the population, while ensuring full compliance with the requirements of resolution 2593 (2021) and the sanctions regimes established under resolutions 1988 (2011) and 1267 (1999). In that regard, it is important that the Taliban

comply with international humanitarian law and not pose any obstacles to the delivery of aid. They must also, as they have pledged to do, ensure the protection of humanitarian personnel, including women and infrastructure.

We expect the Taliban not to set Afghanistan back 20 years. Respect for human rights, especially for women, and for the freedom of the media, as well as the formation of a government representative of the various components of Afghan society, are *sine qua non* conditions to which they must subscribe. Despite assurances, there have been many cases of arbitrary executions, repression of peaceful demonstrations and violence against journalists. These actions must stop.

We condemn any infringement of the right to education for girls and adolescents, and to higher education for female students. Women must be able to work without fearing for their lives. It is also essential to ensure women's access to medical care. Afghan women have fought for their rights — they continue to do so — and we must support them in their struggle.

The Taliban must ensure that threatened Afghan men and women who wish to leave the country have freedom of movement and that they do not face administrative obstacles to their departure.

In conclusion, France will continue to give its full support to the Afghan people and will be vigilant to ensure that the commitments made by the Taliban are respected and translated into concrete actions on the ground. We will not tolerate impunity for those who violate international humanitarian law and human rights.

**Mr. Kariuki** (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Lyons and Ms. Karim for their powerful briefings.

The situation in Afghanistan the briefers describe today is of deep concern. The risks of a humanitarian catastrophe are real and are exacerbated by the onset of winter and an economy in sharp recession. Some 19 million people are already facing crisis and emergency levels of food insecurity. Allowing Afghans to starve to death serves no one's interests. Urgent action is needed.

Special Representative Lyons said that this humanitarian crisis is preventable. The work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the United Nations leadership will be crucial. We

need to ensure an adequately resourced, prioritized and coordinated international response led by the United Nations.

The United Kingdom will continue to be one of the foremost supporters of the humanitarian response. Total United Kingdom aid to Afghanistan this year is now £286 million, of which £50 million will provide life-saving humanitarian support for over 2.5 million vulnerable Afghans.

But the international community needs to do more and act quickly to find creative solutions to address the liquidity crisis and establish principles and mechanisms for providing assistance beyond basic humanitarian aid. We hope the World Bank and donors will find a way to quickly repurpose the \$1.5 billion in the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund in support of health and other basic services. For its part, the Taliban should address the concerns of the international community with regard to terrorism, humanitarian access, safe passage, inclusive government and human rights, particularly those of women and girls.

On terrorism, we urge the Taliban to make clear in public that foreign terrorist fighters are not welcome, and not to allow Al-Qaida, the Islamic State or other terrorist groups to organize, raise funds or plan attacks from Afghan territory.

We welcome Special Representative Lyons' report that the Taliban are taking positive steps to provide unimpeded and safe humanitarian access for male and female aid workers. We are also encouraged by the reopening of secondary schools to girls in at least eight provinces. However, all children, including girls of all ages, should be able to go to school, and all women should be able to work, have access to services and participate in public life. Educated healthy women and girls will contribute to peace, stability and development.

We hope that the leaders from across the Islamic world will continue to reinforce this message. While the number of conflict-related deaths may be falling, the human rights situation in Afghanistan remains of deep concern, with credible reports of serious human rights abuses and violations, including extrajudicial killings, restrictions on civil society and attacks on minority groups.

Our approach to the Taliban will continue to be calibrated according to their actions, not their words. The Security Council clearly set out its minimum

expectations in resolution 2593 (2021). The best way for these expectations to be met and to avoid the worst humanitarian outcome is for the international community to be united, including in its engagement with the Taliban.

**Ms. Byrne Nason** (Ireland): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Lyons for her briefing; we deeply appreciate it. I am really grateful to Ms. Karim for her briefing, especially when we know that her sharing her testimony at this time is not without risk. She has left her mark in this Chamber; I want to assure her of that.

Since we last met on 9 September (see S/PV.8853), little of what we hoped for has come to pass, while much of what we feared has come to be. The much-promised inclusive Government is nowhere in evidence. There is no credible dialogue, representative of all Afghans, towards future governance. There is no stability. Instead, what we are seeing and what the Afghan people are living with is violence, fear and repression at the hands of the Taliban.

Women and girls in Afghanistan remain under attack. They are being targeted by the Taliban for their education, for their work, for their activism, for demanding their fundamental rights. Put simply, they are being targeted for their gender. This is deliberate and driven by a desire to repress and control—to take away women's autonomy, their choice and their freedom.

Many Afghan women have come to the difficult conclusion that their lives and futures are only possible outside of Afghanistan. Despite assurances regarding safe passage that the Council stipulated in resolution 2593 (2021), the Taliban has not respected that choice either.

Reports regarding the killing earlier this month of women human rights defender and economist Frozan Safi demonstrate all too clearly the dangers that women face. Ms. Safi and three colleagues intended to leave Afghanistan. A call received was thought to be about an evacuation flight. Instead of safe passage, those women found only hatred and, in the end, horrific and fatal violence.

I have said it before, and I will say it again today: we cannot look the other way while the women of Afghanistan are being targeted and attacked. The courage and fortitude of countless Afghan women

such as our briefer today, Ms. Karim, Ms. Safi and her colleagues, should be recognized, but the international community also needs to be clear with the Taliban that their actions are not without consequences.

Today marks 61 days of the Taliban's restrictions on girls attending secondary school, each day marking an unconscionable loss to Afghanistan's own future. A generation of girls are being deprived of an education because of the fear and suspicion of some men. Every child has an equal right to education regardless of gender.

It is also reported that the rights of children in Afghanistan have significantly deteriorated since August, with increased child labour, recruitment and use, trafficking and marriage. The erosion of rights for women and children in Afghanistan under Taliban control has been both stark and swift. Their protection and the upholding of their rights must be central as a focus of all our deliberations on the future of Afghanistan.

We also strongly condemn recent terrorist attacks, violence, intimidation and forced displacement targeting minorities. We condemn the repression of Afghan civil society and Afghan journalists.

Words almost fail to capture the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis now under way in Afghanistan, as winter approaches and millions face starvation. We have been warned, including today by Special Representative Lyons, of the gravity of this situation. The international community and the Council must listen. The international community and the Council must act.

The Taliban now bear primary responsibility for the conditions facing the people of Afghanistan, but the international community also needs to move beyond pledges and rhetoric and take action in order to prevent widespread suffering and death. Humanitarians must be allowed to deliver in all parts of the country. At this critical time, the United Nations and partner non-governmental organizations on the ground cannot and should not be impeded in their life-saving operations. The Security Council has a role to play in facilitating the humanitarian response. We need to deliver on this; it is our duty and our obligation.

Since August, the Council has been clear about what we expect from engagement with the Taliban. We said that we would judge them by their actions,

not their words. The Council and the international community must reaffirm publicly, without ambiguity, that the rights of all Afghans, especially women and girls, children and minorities, must be protected. That message surely stands alone in its own right.

**Mr. DeLaurentis** (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Lyons and Ms. Karim for their briefings. We appreciate their efforts to draw attention to the plight of the people of Afghanistan as the Security Council considers the action it should take to better support the country's peace, security and stability.

I would also like to express our deep appreciation for the tireless work and commitment that the national and international staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) have shown during the past few months. It is clear that the United Nations presence in Afghanistan is more critical than ever. We are deeply grateful for the support that UNAMA continues to provide to the Afghan people and the international community through its work.

We meet today as Afghanistan faces immense challenges, among them a humanitarian crisis of daunting proportions. A variety of factors lie at the root of this crisis — endemic aid dependency exacerbated by the coronavirus disease pandemic, severe drought and the seasonal impact of winter conditions and decades of prolonged conflict that culminated in a seizure of power through military means instead of a negotiated settlement.

Over the years, the international community, including the Security Council, made it clear to the Taliban time and time again that it was in the Taliban's own interest to peacefully pursue a political settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan, instead of a battlefield victory. The Taliban chose the latter path, and we are now seeing the horrible consequences of that choice unfold before our eyes. But the Afghan people should not have to pay twice for the Taliban's decision. That is why we must all do our part to address the emerging humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

Just last month, the United States announced more than \$144 million in additional assistance to Afghans affected by the ongoing humanitarian crisis. That brings our total humanitarian assistance contribution to Afghanistan to \$474 million in 2021 alone. We are proud to remain the largest contributor in support of Afghanistan's humanitarian assistance needs. That

assistance will flow through independent humanitarian organizations, including UNICEF, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Health Organization, and it will directly support some of the estimated 24 million vulnerable people likely to need assistance in Afghanistan by next year.

We welcome the efforts of agencies like the World Food Programme, which is undertaking an immense operation to combat escalating food insecurity in Afghanistan. We are encouraged by its effort to rapidly scale up its programming month by month to reach millions of people in need. For international assistance to continue to be effective as needs grow, however, all aid workers, including women staff members, must be permitted to operate independently and safely. Without women staff members, safe and principled humanitarian programming is simply not possible. Humanitarian implementers must be able to reach all populations in need, including women and girls, without impediments.

Through resolution 2593 (2021), the Council has stressed the need for full, safe and unhindered access for the United Nations, its specialized agencies and implementing partners and all humanitarian actors engaged in humanitarian relief activity to all those in need. The United States and our partners will continue to call on the Taliban to live up to the international community's expectations in that regard. Of course, United States aid is not sufficient to address Afghanistan's looming needs. We therefore urge other Member States to increase their assistance to humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan as well and thank those who already have.

We are also deeply concerned about the ongoing liquidity shortage, inflation and other economic factors hampering the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. We welcome creative solutions from the international community to help mitigate those challenges in a way that limits undue benefit to the Taliban and sanctioned individuals. And although we and many others are rightly seized with Afghanistan's humanitarian needs, we continue to pay close attention to whether the Taliban are demonstrating compliance with its commitments on counter-terrorism, respect for human rights and inclusivity. Women and girls must be able to participate fully in political, economic and social life in Afghanistan. That is not a demand unique to the West, the United States or even the Biden Administration. We are simply demanding that

Afghanistan's women and girls be afforded the ability to enjoy the universal human rights to which all of us are entitled.

There is no excuse for the disruption of women's and girls' access to education. All girls, including those in secondary and post-secondary schools, must be allowed, and publicly encouraged, to return to school immediately. Women must also be allowed to return to their workplaces. Allowing half of the country's workforce to participate in economic life would be a good place to start helping Afghanistan's economy move in a positive direction.

In the light of all the challenges that we have discussed today, the United States looks forward to receiving the Secretary-General's strategic and operational recommendations for the future of UNAMA's mandate. The role of the United Nations in coordinating humanitarian operations, reporting impartially on developments on the ground and providing crucial good offices is more vital now than ever.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Mexico.

I thank Special Representative Lyons and Ms. Karim for their valuable contributions at this meeting. I would like to focus on four points.

First, as has already been said, the onset of winter represents a huge challenge for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, on which 18.5 million civilians depend. In line with resolution 2596 (2021), we highlight the importance of redoubling efforts to provide that assistance. Unrestricted, safe and unimpeded access to all humanitarian actors must be guaranteed, in accordance with international humanitarian law. To that end, we emphasize that the full participation of women is essential. The gender approach in developing such programmes and in their implementation is crucial. Likewise, it is necessary to ensure that the humanitarian response plan be adequately funded.

We note with concern the reports of human rights violations, including threats to women human rights defenders, arrests, forced disappearances and murders. Respect for the human rights of all Afghans must be without distinction. Likewise, the right to education for girls and to paid work for women must be safeguarded.

We unequivocally condemn the targeted attacks against civilians, in particular the terrorist attacks that have taken place in recent weeks. Terrorism continues to be one of the main threats to peace and security in Afghanistan and the region. The Council must be vigilant regarding patterns and trends throughout the area in order to more effectively deal with that scourge. Afghanistan must not again become fertile ground for terrorism.

We echo the point made by Ms. Karim about the focus on inclusion. A stable and peaceful Afghanistan will be built insofar as the plurality and diversity of Afghan voices have a space and representation in the political, economic and social fields. We cannot go back to an Afghanistan that does not have the full, effective and meaningful participation of women, young people and ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities. In that regard, resolution 2596 (2021) is unequivocal, as it highlights the importance of establishing an inclusive and representative Government, with the full, equal and meaningful participation of women. We stress the importance of that.

In conclusion, I express Mexico's support for the work carried out by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and Special Representative Lyons in this complex situation. Their efforts are vital to promoting stability in Afghanistan for the benefit of the Afghan people and the region as a whole.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

**Mr. Isaczai** (Afghanistan): Allow me at the outset to join others in congratulating Mexico on its presidency of the Security Council. I would also like to welcome the physical presence of Special Representative Lyons at this meeting, and I commend her efforts and leadership of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) under very difficult circumstances. I also thank my countrywoman Ms. Freshta Karim for her emotional and powerful briefing.

On behalf of the Afghan people, I take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude and appreciation to the staff of the United Nations system, other international organizations and local non-governmental organizations for providing life-saving assistance to the people of Afghanistan during these very difficult and challenging times.

Since the previous Council meeting (see S/PV.8853) on 9 September, the situation in my country has worsened. Afghanistan is currently facing a crisis of historic proportions. The lives and dignity of millions of Afghans are threatened by a failing economy, severe food insecurity and an absence of security, basic rights and freedom.

We have heard different figures regarding the number of Afghan people needing humanitarian assistance. I will not quote them, because those figures change as we speak, and the numbers are rising. Let me be blunt: I would say that the entire population of 35 million people will, sooner or later, need some form of assistance. Time and our efforts are therefore of the essence.

Poverty remains widespread. The United Nations Development Programme estimates that, if the current trends continue, Afghanistan will experience near-universal poverty — a 97 per cent poverty rate by mid-2022.

Unfortunately, amid that grim situation, the Taliban have failed to deliver on its promises and commitments to Afghans and the international community to mitigate the impact of the crisis and suffering on the Afghan population. The Taliban continue to defy international calls to ensure respect for the human rights of Afghans, form an inclusive Government and cut its ties with international terrorist groups. Furthermore, they continue to commit gender apartheid by preventing women from working and girls from attending secondary schools. Today is the sixty-second day of the Taliban's nationwide ban on girls' schooling at the secondary level. That cannot continue.

The Taliban have also suppressed peaceful protests and continue to engage in revengeful killing despite its so-called amnesty. In addition, we have not seen any concrete steps by the Taliban to broaden the base of their transitional authority and establish a road map for peace that can lead to a truly inclusive and democratic Government.

The members of the Security Council rightfully said on many occasions that they would not judge the Taliban on their words but on their actions. The Afghan people expect the international community to keep that promise and pressure the Taliban to pave the way for an inclusive Government that has both internal and external legitimacy and represents the voices of all Afghans.

While the responsibility for that catastrophic situation rests squarely with the Taliban for having chosen to take power by force and impose itself on the Afghan people, the international community has no choice but to remain engaged and hold the Taliban to its promises and commitments.

Let me outline five areas where the international community can exercise some leverage and remain engaged.

First, and without question, as we have heard from other speakers, humanitarian assistance and the delivery of health services must be scaled up significantly to save lives and prevent the country's total collapse. With a major drought taking hold, winter approaching, the pandemic spreading, the economy in a state of collapse and a regime that cannot pay salaries or provide people with the most basic services, a perfect storm is brewing. The impact of the crisis on the most vulnerable will be devastating and difficult to reverse, especially for women, children and people with disabilities.

According to UNICEF, without immediate treatment 1 million children are at risk of dying due to severe acute malnutrition. Therefore, humanitarian interventions must prioritize those vulnerable groups and actively target them to ensure that they are not left behind. We should also scale up delivery mechanisms by supporting pre-existing platforms, such as the Afghan National Solidarity Programme and the Community Development Councils, which have been used in the past to facilitate the distribution of humanitarian assistance. We should also support national non-governmental organizations, which are key to the distribution of humanitarian assistance.

That scale-up requires significant additional funding from the donor community to the United Nations and other international organizations working on the ground. The people of Afghanistan are grateful for the very generous pledges announced during the Secretary-General's high-level ministerial meeting on the humanitarian situation and at the Group of 20 extraordinary leaders' meeting on Afghanistan, but it is not enough. I urge donors to continue to fund the humanitarian appeals and programmes of the United Nations, as needs are far greater than the current funding level can address.

The United Nations remains one of the main lifelines of support for the majority of Afghans today, but humanitarian aid will not be enough to prevent a

collapse of the Afghan economy. The international community must find ways to operate across the humanitarian, development and peace continuum. While doing so, it is, of course, critical to not directly fund the Taliban regime or implement operational modalities that indirectly aid them.

In that regard, I applaud the efforts of the United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations agencies to establish a Trust Fund and other mechanisms to pay the salaries of health personnel and teachers and transfer cash directly to poor households.

I urge the Council to find ways to address the current banking crisis and continue to exempt humanitarian and service delivery operations from sanctions.

Secondly, to overcome the perpetual state of crisis in Afghanistan, it is imperative to resuscitate the dormant peace process that began in Doha and work towards a long-term and durable peace.

The situation in Afghanistan is extremely fragile. It is only through an inclusive Government that we can safeguard against a new civil war along ethnic lines and the use of Afghan territory by foreign terrorist outfits, as well as make a transition from a perpetual state of humanitarian crisis to a more stable economy.

The role of the United Nations as an impartial and honest broker in putting together a road map for peace is paramount. In that regard, I echo Ms. Karim's call for the organization of an international conference that can turn the current crisis and transition into new opportunities for peace and lead to an inclusive government in which Afghans of all ethnicities and backgrounds, including women, see themselves. Towards that aim, we ask the Council to consider, during its deliberations in March, a comprehensive and strong mandate for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan that can initiate dialogue among Afghans for lasting peace.

Thirdly, it is important that the international community engage with the Taliban in accordance with the commitments made in various Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, that is, not to recognize the reinstatement of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan or any Government imposed by force. Women's rights, girls' education, freedom of media and the establishment of an inclusive Government, including with the participation of women, should be at the centre of international engagement with the Taliban.

Fourthly, the international community must establish a human rights monitoring and accountability mechanism in Afghanistan. We are pleased with the decision of the Human Rights Council establishing a Special Rapporteur for Afghanistan, but more needs to be done to hold the Taliban and other parties accountable for past and ongoing violations of human rights.

Fifthly, we call on the international community to engage Afghans, not as victims but rather as stakeholders, in building sustainable peace in Afghanistan. While the Taliban has not changed, the Afghan population has. Many Afghans today are well educated and have benefited from the opportunities provided during the past 20 years and remain determined to change their country for the better. They can provide alternative voices, inform policies and drive local and national change.

Therefore, I urge the international community to consult and engage Afghans, particularly women, in all its actions, and to directly support civil society organizations, including human rights defenders on the ground.

At this challenging time, we ask the international community for its support in getting us back on track to halt the spiral of crisis facing my country and work towards a stable Afghanistan that can fulfil its obligations to its citizens and protect and promote the rights and dignity of all its citizens without any discrimination.

The overarching desire of every Afghan is to achieve a just and durable political settlement and the establishment of an inclusive and representative government that includes women and all ethnic groups. That settlement must lead to a dignified and lasting solution to the conflict and the preservation of the gains of the past 20 years, especially for women and girls.

We need the support of the international community in those efforts. The United Nations, and most notably the Council, must be clear that it will not recognize a government that is not inclusive and representative. It must be made clear that women's rights and empowerment are non-negotiable issues and that any Government wishing to enjoy international support has to provide constitutional guarantees for the rights of all its citizens and comply with Afghanistan's international commitments.

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate the need for urgent action to address the humanitarian crisis and achieve sustainable peace in Afghanistan. As Special Representative Lyons mentioned, the collapse of Afghanistan is not only an Afghan issue. It is an issue that should concern the entire international community. While Afghans are the primary victims of the tragedy today, we are unlikely to remain the only ones in the future.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Mr. Takht Ravanchi** (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to thank you, Sir, for organizing this meeting. I would also like to thank Special Representative Lyons for her briefing and for leading the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

Today's meeting is very timely and important, given that Afghanistan is facing serious challenges. The humanitarian situation is highly alarming. As winter approaches, the people are facing an imminent humanitarian crisis. That makes the provision of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan more urgent.

The role of the United Nations in the current situation is crucial. We support the efforts of UNAMA and other United Nations agencies in aiding the Afghan people.

As a neighbouring country, and based on the common historic, cultural, linguistic and religious bonds between our two nations, Iran cannot remain indifferent to the plight of the people of Afghanistan. For over four decades, we have hosted millions of Afghans and generously helped them, particularly during the pandemic and under severe economic situations resulting from unlawful United States sanctions.

Since mid-August, thousands of Afghans have been entering Iran on daily basis. If the humanitarian situation is not addressed urgently and properly, hundreds of thousands more Afghans are estimated to enter Iran in the coming winter months. To date, we have done everything in our power to help Afghans entering Iran, including through the provision of basic needs. Additionally, we have dispatched many humanitarian convoys to Afghanistan.

However, due to unlawful and inhumane United States sanctions and in the absence of sufficient new

financial resources, we will no longer be able to help them on our own.

Let us be straightforward. This is not a local challenge, and Afghanistan's neighbouring countries must not be left alone and expected to address this extremely difficult challenge single-handedly. We call on the international community and in particular donor countries to live up to their responsibilities and extend new and adequate financial resources to Afghanistan's neighbours to help Afghan refugees and displaced persons.

The timely provision of humanitarian assistance and the release of Afghanistan's frozen assets, which are essential for reviving Afghan's economy and saving people's lives, should in no way be politicized or conditional. Parallel efforts must also be made to avoid a total collapse of the Afghan economy. However, these urgent efforts must not deflect our attention and efforts from the need to counter terrorism and drug trafficking in Afghanistan.

The recent terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, including the ones that took place in Kabul today, are alarming and of grave concern. They indicate how essential addressing these threats have become for regional and international peace and security. They also exhibit, once more, the brutalities of terrorists. There should therefore be zero tolerance towards terrorism and those who finance, organize and support it in Afghanistan. It must be ensured that the territory of Afghanistan must never be used for terrorist activities or operated as a safe haven for terrorist groups or as source for producing, and trafficking in, drugs.

The establishment of a truly inclusive and representative government, with the participation of all ethnic and religious groups, committed to combating terrorism and organized crime and guaranteeing and protecting the human rights of all Afghans including ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities and women, based on true Islamic teachings and principles, is vital for building a secure, stable, and prosperous Afghanistan. To that end, Iran will continue its engagement with all parties in Afghanistan, including the Taliban. In pursuing our peaceful and humanitarian endeavours in the country, Iran's Special Representative for Afghanistan is currently visiting Kabul. During his visit, he has met with senior Taliban officials and discussed urgent issues, such as humanitarian aid,

refugees, and security and economic challenges that the people of Afghanistan are facing.

We will also continue our consultations with Afghanistan's neighbours as well as regional and international partners, including the United Nations, to help bring durable peace, security, and stability to Afghanistan. In that context, on 27 October 2021, we hosted the second ministerial meeting of neighbours of Afghanistan, including China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as the Russian Federation. In a statement issued at the end of that meeting, the participants expressed their strong support for achieving peace, stability and national reconciliation in Afghanistan and encouraged all parties in the country, including the Taliban, to continue political dialogue and consultations to establish an inclusive and representative government with participation of all groups and segments of the country.

Iran will continue to assist the people of Afghanistan and to work with Afghanistan's neighbours and other partners to ensure a durable peace and sustainable development in the country.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Tajikistan.

**Mr. Hikmat** (Tajikistan): I thank the Mexican delegation for convening today's meeting. I would like to join previous speakers in thanking the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Ms. Deborah Lyons, for her comprehensive briefing. I would also like to thank Ms. Freshta Karim for her insightful story. We also thank the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for the work that it has been doing in Afghanistan.

With the withdrawal of coalition forces, Afghanistan has entered a new era — an era that has begun with growing economic, financial and political challenges, rampant discontent and increasing doubts about the future of the country. Achievements and progress that the country had made during the last 20 years, particularly in empowering and protecting the rights of women and girls, are fading out. Today Afghanistan stands at a critical juncture.

A grave humanitarian crisis is unfolding in the country. Almost half of the population is already in need of humanitarian assistance. Some 7 million people have no access to health-care facilities. Many people do

not have enough to eat, with 3.1 million children at risk of severe acute malnutrition, and there are high levels of violence and displacement. This is the Afghanistan that the international community has left behind. The current difficult situation in Afghanistan requires us, its immediate neighbours, to make more efforts to restore peace and stability in this country.

The Taliban's takeover of Kabul has worsened the internal political, socioeconomic and security situation in the country, which will have greater implications not only for countries of the region but also for countries beyond the region. The exportation of extremism, terrorism and radical ideologies, an increase in drug trafficking and a greater flow of refugees are some of the immediate challenges the countries of the region could face if the situation further deteriorates. There is therefore a great need for the international community to undertake concerted efforts aimed at preventing the aforementioned challenges at Afghanistan's borders.

With the Taliban's current approach, we will be heading towards the point of no return sooner rather than later. Through different formats in Italy, Russia, India, Pakistan and Turkey, the international community has sent clear messages to the Taliban: to form an inclusive government, cut their ties with other terrorist organizations, not turn Afghanistan into a safe haven for terrorists, and ensure the fundamental rights of women, children and ethnic groups. So far, none of our demands has been met or, to be exact, none of their promises has been kept. Their caretaker Government is entirely dominated by the representatives of one ethnic group — a terrorist group.

In cooperation with Al-Qaida, the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations, the Taliban continue their military operations in the Panjshir province against the National Resistance Forces led by Ahmad Massoud. Today the Taliban have concentrated their forces in the northern part of Afghanistan settled by such terrorist groups as Al-Qaida and Jamaat Ansarullah next to the border with Tajikistan.

In the Taliban's medieval mindset and in their misinterpretation of sharia law there is no place for the rights of women and girls. They made that crystal clear by abolishing the Ministry of Women's Affairs and stating that women would not be part of their new Government. It is important to note that the removal of women from decision-making posts and other controversial decisions by the Taliban are contrary to

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Taliban's own previous promises.

Twenty years have passed, and the world has changed, but the Taliban have not. Nevertheless, Afghanistan has changed during these years. Certain progress has been made in ensuring the rights of women and girls. A new generation of young people and educated women — individuals who have witnessed the changes and freedoms that the last 20 years have brought — has emerged; to them the lifestyle and barbaric governance methods of the Taliban are alien.

We therefore should not be misled by the Taliban's empty promises. Real change should take place on the ground before the international community makes the next move. As an international community, we should be consistent in our approach and cohesive in our actions. We must apply additional pressure on Taliban to make sure that they hear our messages and comply.

Tajikistan strongly condemns all forms of lawlessness, murder, robbery and persecution of the Afghan people, including Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras and other ethnic groups. Long-suffering Afghanistan and its people should not be drawn again into another bloody war. As a country sharing not only common cultural and linguistic ties but the longest border among the Central Asian countries with Afghanistan, Tajikistan cannot remain indifferent when the entire Afghan people are on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe.

The winter is coming. The current socioeconomic and humanitarian situation will deteriorate even further. To that end, urgent, unimpeded and direct humanitarian assistance should be provided to the Afghan people and distributed in a non-discriminatory manner across all sections of Afghan society, under the auspices of the United Nations. In that endeavour, the international community should take care to avoid strengthening and boosting the Taliban.

In that connection, we commend the recent efforts and initiative of the United Nations Development Programme to pay the salaries of more than 23,000 health workers in Afghanistan, providing \$15 million to prevent the collapse of the entire sector. Tajikistan is ready to lend its infrastructure and territory to help deliver the necessary humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people.

Tajikistan has always supported the restoration of lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and remains

committed to its position. We reiterate that we will only support an inclusive Government in Afghanistan in which all social and ethnopolitical strata of the country are represented. We also hope that the future Government of Afghanistan will guarantee the fundamental rights and freedoms of all Afghan citizens, particularly women. Tajikistan will not recognize any Government formed through oppression, persecution and without taking into account the interests of the entire Afghan people, especially ethnic minorities.

At this historical juncture, we believe that the creation of an inclusive Government is the only way to meet the hopes of millions of Afghan people who strive to see peace and prosperity return to Afghanistan.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

**Mr. Akram** (Pakistan): The delegation of Pakistan is grateful for this opportunity to participate in the Security Council's review of the situation in Afghanistan.

We commend Ambassador Deborah Lyons, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for her very comprehensive briefing, in which she described the role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan. We also heard from two Afghan citizens— Ms. Karim, whose emotional message obviously resonates with us, and Ambassador Isaczai, who represents a country, but not a Government. We believe that this Council meeting and similar meetings would benefit from those who are actually ruling in Kabul and getting a comprehensive picture of the situation there, rather than relying on an *ex parte* discussion of this nature.

The nightmare scenarios that were feared after 15 August have not come to pass. There has been no widespread violence or violations of human rights in Afghanistan. According to United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations, the security situation is vastly improved. The interim Government has allowed and facilitated the provision of direct assistance to the Afghan people, including through women aid workers — and I would like Ms. Lyons to confirm that. It is responding positively to engagement with the international community, including the neighbouring countries. The glass may be only half full, yet engagement has yielded progress on several concerns of the international community. Unfortunately, that has not been fully reflected in today's debate.

Schools for girls through the sixth grade are open all across Afghanistan. I think Ambassador Lyons can confirm that as well. Universities are open, with women attending those universities, albeit in segregated classes. What is not open is secondary school, where — we are told by the Taliban — they lack teachers and the ability to pay the teachers in order to open those schools.

The immediate challenge, of course, is the dire humanitarian and economic crisis in Afghanistan. Half the population — 28 million people — face acute food insecurity. Winter will exacerbate hunger and deprivation, especially in the inaccessible parts of Afghanistan. We commend the efforts of the Secretary-General, the United Nations and international organizations — the World Food Programme (WFP), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, the World Health Organization and others — in responding to the food and other humanitarian needs of the Afghan people. They report that they are receiving — and I quote the Secretary-General — “excellent cooperation” from the Government in Kabul. We are grateful that the Secretary-General’s flash appeal for 2021 has been fully funded.

But we all realize that more help will be needed to avoid a humanitarian disaster and an economic collapse. Humanitarian organizations are also facing practical challenges due to the existence of bilateral and Security Council sanctions. As the Secretary-General has said, humanitarian assistance must be unconditional. I am therefore shocked at the demands here to leverage humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan in order to extract political concessions. That is contrary to international law. We hope that the appropriate decisions will be made to enable the United Nations and other organizations to overcome the practical problems that are impeding the critically needed assistance to the Afghan people.

The larger crisis that is looming is the danger of a complete economic collapse. Cash is needed to revive the economy — to pay salaries, restore small businesses and revive the banking system. We welcome the establishment of the special trust fund for Afghanistan. We hope that this and similar mechanisms will be set up quickly to scale up the flow of money and stabilize the Afghan economy and that the unjustified freeze of Afghanistan’s assets will be lifted soon.

The consequences of a major humanitarian crisis and economic collapse in Afghanistan would be horrendous — massive human suffering, the outflow of millions of additional refugees, the likelihood of chaos and further conflict and the strengthening of Da’esh and other terrorist groups. When millions of Afghan refugees start flowing across our borders, we, who are already hosting 4 million Afghan refugees, will not be able to take in any more. They will have to go elsewhere. These are consequences that the international community must avoid.

Pakistan is doing all it can. We have committed \$30 million in assistance to Afghanistan. Wheat, rice, emergency medical supplies and other essential items are being sent to Afghanistan. We have lifted duties on imports of Afghan commodities. We are facilitating transit trade, providing essential medicines and refurbishing Afghan hospitals. Pakistan is also facilitating the WFP’s delivery of 10,000 tons of wheat flour, and a humanitarian air service — an air bridge — has been set up between Islamabad and Kabul.

During the recent visit of the acting Foreign Minister of the Kabul authorities, accompanied by Kabul’s acting Finance, Trade and Aviation Ministers to Islamabad, Pakistan agreed to provide training in aviation, safety and other fields for doctors, nurses and paramedics. We have also taken other steps to help stabilize Afghanistan’s economic governance.

Pakistan has also taken concrete steps towards Afghan stability. We initiated the platform of the six neighbouring countries plus Russia, which has met twice and will meet again in China early next year. The aim is to promote a regional consensus on steps to normalize the situation in Afghanistan, especially through economic integration and connectivity.

The extended troika grouping — China, Pakistan, Russia and the United States — is a key format to promote the political decisions required to stabilize Afghanistan and the region. The extended troika met last week in Islamabad, and also interacted with the visiting acting Afghan Foreign Minister. The meeting conveyed the expectations of the members of the extended troika on inclusivity, human rights, girls’ education and women’s participation, the prevention of vengeful acts against former Government officials, the elimination of the presence of terrorist organizations within Afghanistan and controlling drug trafficking. For his part, the acting Foreign Minister of Afghanistan

conveyed that the authorities in Kabul have disavowed revenge and announced an amnesty for its former opponents and functionaries who are now incorporated in the governance structures and ministries in Kabul. Evacuations of people wishing to leave Afghanistan are allowed in the normal process.

There has been progress towards opening of girls' schools and universities. Women are working in the health and education sectors, and their right to work in other sectors is recognized. The interim Government has also reaffirmed assurances in all formats that Afghanistan's soil will not be used against any country and that it will take effective action against Da'esh and the Islamic State-Khorasan Province. It has sought assistance in countering the menace of drug trafficking. It has also called for the unfreezing of Afghanistan's assets. That would be the best reaffirmation of solidarity.

The process of engagement with the interim Government in Kabul has produced progress towards the objectives and expectations of the international community; it should be continued and intensified. It is through such further engagement and dialogue, rather than coercion, that the international community will be able to advance its desire for an inclusive Government, respect for human rights, especially the rights of women, and effective counter-terrorism. While pressing its concerns, the international community must also remain responsive — and realistic — to Afghanistan's humanitarian and economic needs, its culture and its historical circumstances.

I endorse the Special Representative's suggestion for a road map towards normalization in Afghanistan, one that would eventually lead to international acceptance, recognition and representation of the new Government at the United Nations. Pakistan believes that UNAMA will continue to have an important and vital role in the process of normalization in Afghanistan. We hope that UNAMA's renewed mandate will be responsive to the role it should play in such a process of normalization.

Unfortunately, there are some in our region that, for narrow national reasons, continue to play the role of spoiler in Afghanistan. They are still involved in schemes to destabilize Afghanistan. They must be exposed and isolated.

After 40 years, there is an opportunity for peace throughout Afghanistan, an opportunity to root out terrorism from there. That opportunity must not be sacrificed at the altar of ego, revenge or disappointment, much less allowed to be sabotaged by those who see personal or strategic gain in continued conflict and chaos in Afghanistan.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I would again like to thank Ms. Karim for her participation in today's meeting.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

*The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.*