



# Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

## 8954<sup>th</sup> meeting

Wednesday, 26 January 2022, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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*President:* Mr. Støre/Ms. Juul. . . . . (Norway)

*Members:*

Albania . . . . .	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil . . . . .	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China . . . . .	Mr. Zhang Jun
France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon . . . . .	Mr. Boubeya
Ghana . . . . .	Mr. Agyeman
India . . . . .	Mr. Tirumurti
Ireland . . . . .	Ms. Byrne Nason
Kenya . . . . .	Mr. Kiboino
Mexico . . . . .	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Polyanskiy
United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mrs. Nusseibeh
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America . . . . .	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

## Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in Afghanistan**

**The President:** 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 Uzbekistan 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. Mahbouba Seraj, Afghan women human rights defender and Executive Director of the Afghan Women Skills Development Centre.

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

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear remarks by the Secretary-General, as well as briefings by Special Representative Lyons, Ambassador Tirumurti, Permanent Representative of India, in his capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), and Ms. Seraj.

Before we begin with our speakers list today — recalling the Security Council's latest note by the President (S/2017/507) on its working methods — I wish to encourage all speakers, both members and non-members of the Council, to deliver their statements in five minutes or less. Note 507 also encourages briefers to be succinct and focus on key issues. In that spirit, briefers are further encouraged to limit their initial remarks to seven to 10 minutes. Everyone is also encouraged to wear a mask at all times, including while delivering remarks.

I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, to whom I now give the floor.

**The Secretary-General:** Six months after the takeover by the Taliban, Afghanistan is hanging by a thread. For Afghans, daily life has become a frozen hell. They are in the grips of another brutal winter of

blistering winds, cold and snow. Families huddle in makeshift tents under plastic sheets — even burning their possessions to keep warm. Clinics are overcrowded and under-resourced. Ambulances and hospital power generators are running dry because of sky-rocketing fuel prices. Afghans are stalked not only by the coronavirus disease, but by deadly preventable diseases, such as measles, diarrhoea and even polio. Education and social services are on the brink of collapse.

Millions of children — critically, girls — are out of school, and 70 per cent of teachers are not getting paid. Over half of all Afghans face extreme levels of hunger. The country is facing its worst drought in two decades, pushing 9 million people closer to famine. More than 80 per cent of the population relies on contaminated drinking water, and some families are selling their babies to purchase food.

The Afghan economy is enduring a bitter winter of its own. There is a danger that the currency could go into free fall and the country could lose 30 per cent of its gross domestic product within the year. Liquidity has evaporated. Sanctions and mistrust by the global banking system have frozen nearly \$9 billion in central bank assets. Vital systems are starved of needed funds. A lack of liquidity — particularly in local currency — is limiting capacity to reach Afghans in need.

As the economy spirals downward, human rights are also losing ground. Women and girls are once again being shut out of offices and classrooms. They lost their country overnight — years of steady progress gone in the blink of an eye. And I am deeply concerned by recent reports of arbitrary arrests and abductions of women activists. I strongly appeal for their release.

Meanwhile, terrorism remains a constant threat, not only to the security of Afghanistan itself, but to the entire world.

When it comes to complex humanitarian emergencies, Afghanistan is as bad as it gets. That is why we launched an appeal two weeks ago — the largest in United Nations history for a single country, more than \$4.4 billion for this year. We are ramping up life-saving support around health, shelter, nutrition, protection and emergency education, as well as cash transfers to help families make ends meet. Last year, the United Nations and its partners reached 18 million people across the country. And our teams are working at scaled-up capacity to reach even more people this

year, and keep the country's food, health and education systems from collapse.

The appeal also contains vital support for refugee-hosting countries. I will never forget the generosity of countries like Pakistan and Iran, which for decades have hosted millions of Afghans in need. At this moment, we need the global community and the Security Council to put their hands on the wheel of progress, provide resources and prevent Afghanistan from spiralling any further.

First and most urgently, we need to scale up our humanitarian operations to save lives. This goes far beyond our humanitarian appeal itself. We need to suspend the rules and conditions that constrict not only Afghanistan's economy, but our life-saving operations. At this moment of maximum need, these rules must be seriously reviewed. International funding must be allowed to pay the salaries of public sector workers. From surgeons and nurses, to teachers, sanitation workers and electricians — all are vital to keeping systems up and running, and they are critical to Afghanistan's future. We need to give them a reason to stay in the country.

I welcome the Security Council's adoption of resolution 2615 (2021), which provides a humanitarian exemption to the United Nations sanctions regime for Afghanistan. I repeat my call to issue general licenses covering transactions necessary to all humanitarian activities. We need to give financial institutions and commercial partners legal assurance that they can work with humanitarian operators without fear of breaching sanctions.

Standing with the people of Afghanistan also includes a strong role for the United Nations. This includes the One-UN Transitional Engagement Framework for Afghanistan, which is being launched today — a plan to extend and accelerate humanitarian and development support to the Afghan people, while sustaining and strengthening essential services and systems throughout this critical period of transition. And it includes recommendations for a new mandate for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan to support security, progress and human rights, contained in my upcoming report. I urge the Security Council to consider these recommendations as that country enters a new chapter in its history.

Secondly — and deeply connected to the first — we need to jump-start Afghanistan's economy through

increased liquidity. We must pull the economy back from the brink. This means finding ways to free up frozen currency reserves and re-engage Afghanistan's central bank, and it means exploring other ways to rapidly inject liquidity into the economy. The World Bank Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund transferred \$280 million to UNICEF and the World Food Programme last month. We need the remaining \$1.2 billion to be freed up urgently to help Afghanistan's people survive the winter.

Time is of the essence. Without action, lives will be lost and despair and extremism will grow. A collapse of the Afghan economy could lead to a massive exodus of people fleeing the country. Our team in Afghanistan stands ready to work with Member States and others to establish accountable systems to ensure that funds go to the Afghan people most in need and are not diverted.

Thirdly, now is the time for the Taliban to expand opportunity and security for its people and demonstrate a real commitment to being a part of the global community. The window for trust-building is open, but this trust must be earned.

Inside Afghanistan, Afghan and international female aid workers are hard at work implementing projects, supporting programmes and even leading country operations across the country. They are making a difference on the ground — clearly demonstrating the contribution that women can make when given the opportunity to do so. Unfettered humanitarian access to all regions of the country is vital. At the same time, every effort must be made to build inclusive Government institutions in which all Afghans feel represented.

Promoting security and fighting terrorism is also crucial. For far too long, the country has been a fertile breeding ground for terrorist groups. If we do not act and help Afghans weather this storm, the region and the world will pay a heavy price. Illicit drug flows and criminal and terrorist networks will increase. Without food, without jobs, without their rights protected, we will see more Afghans fleeing their homes in search of a better life.

I urge the Taliban to work closely with the global community and the Security Council to suppress the global terrorist threat in Afghanistan and build institutions that promote security. We must prevent the expansion of all terrorist organizations in the country. And just as I appeal to the international community to step up support for the people of Afghanistan, I make

an equally urgent plea to the Taliban leadership to recognize and protect the fundamental human rights that every person shares.

A stable, prosperous and peaceful Afghanistan is an inclusive Afghanistan — one in which all people can contribute to its future. This must include the rights of women and girls, who are once again being denied their rights to education, employment and equal justice. This is a tragedy for those women and girls who grew up believing that any dream was within reach and are now helplessly watching those dreams slip away. But it is also a collective waste of the talents and skills Afghanistan needs as it navigates a precarious future. As a moral imperative — and a practical one — all doors must be kept open for women and girls in schools, in the workplace, in the halls of justice and across all aspects of public life. Opportunities for a new beginning are rare. We urge the Taliban to seize this moment and garner international trust and goodwill by recognizing and upholding the basic human rights that belong to every girl and woman.

In the depths of a frigid Afghan winter, renewal and hope can seem distant. For decades — even centuries — Afghanistan has been unfairly used as a platform for political agendas, geopolitical advantage, ideological dominance, brutal conflicts and terrorism. As a matter of moral responsibility and regional and global security and prosperity, we cannot abandon the people of Afghanistan. They need peace. They need hope. They need help. And they need it now.

**The President:** I thank the Secretary-General for his valuable introductory remarks.

I now give the floor to Ms. Lyons.

**Ms. Lyons:** Your participation, Mr. Prime Minister, and that of the Secretary-General, Council members and colleagues at this debate speak volumes about the continued importance of Afghanistan to the international community, as well as the rising concerns of us all about the future of the country. It is, indeed, a pleasure to be here with my friend, Ms. Mahbouba Seraj, and to listen to her important message on behalf of civil society.

When Kabul fell to Taliban forces in August, the United Nations made a commitment to stay and deliver to support the Afghan people at a moment of humanitarian crisis and political uncertainty. A primary focus of our work, with the generous assistance of

donors, was to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation as far as possible in the face of this difficult winter. In addition to what the Secretary-General just said in that regard, I would like to begin with a report of what we were able to achieve.

By the end of 2021, as noted by the Secretary-General, almost 18 million people had been provided with life-saving assistance, including 10 million people with food assistance and 1.5 million with health care. That compares with 11 million people assisted during 2020, when ongoing drought conditions and the coronavirus disease pandemic had already pushed humanitarian actors to exceed their initial planning targets. Last year, more than 2,000 primary and secondary health facilities in all provinces were supported by humanitarian assistance, including 450 tons of imported life-saving health supplies. That expansion of assistance was possible in part because, due to the improved security situation after 15 August, humanitarian actors were able to access parts of the country that had been inaccessible for years.

It is clear from the above how much we have accomplished, but, as we all know, the humanitarian needs continue to be pressing. The approximately \$1 billion that we asked for last year to address the humanitarian crisis must now be supplemented by \$4.4 billion in additional humanitarian assistance for 2022, as set out in our recent appeal. To put it in perspective, that is roughly the same amount as donors spent on the entire operating budget of the Government of Afghanistan in a given year. It is quite simply unsustainable over the long term. We have therefore simultaneously been advocating, and will continue to advocate, for a relaxation of sanctions that prevent the full delivery of essential services and continue to starve the economy of liquidity. Because of the liquidity crisis and the inability of banks to operate, we face an extraordinary situation where people have money in the bank but do not have full access to it to feed their families or run their businesses.

The adoption of the humanitarian exemption resolution 2615 (2021) and the issuing of new general licences by the United States last December provided some welcome assurances that facilitated our humanitarian activities. I am also pleased to announce that this afternoon in Kabul we launched our One-UN Transitional Engagement Framework for Afghanistan, for which we are seeking an additional \$3.6 billion. That brings the total ask for 2022 to \$8 billion. That

comprehensive and system-wide strategy introduces a basic human needs pillar that will deliver essential services, such as health and education, as well as providing maintenance for community infrastructure and promoting livelihoods and social cohesion, with a specific emphasis on the socioeconomic needs of women and girls. Those investments are designed to prevent a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation and to generate a sufficient level of economic stability to reverse the steady increase in poverty rates that we have seen, while ensuring that the critical donor funds are not diverted or misused. Yet we know that donors are understandably reluctant to show more flexibility until they have a better idea of what sort of government the de facto Administration intends to create. Many donors were hesitant last fall to engage in ways that might help the de facto authorities consolidate their Administration or appear to legitimize the regime. That hesitancy has been temporarily overcome in order to help the Afghan people, who were suffering from an extended humanitarian crisis and facing a brutal winter. However, it is clear that donors, who face their own domestic constituencies, are still not satisfied with the political progress in Afghanistan and are watching closely for more encouraging signals.

We therefore hope that in the next few months we will see clear actions, not just announcements, that demonstrate that the Taliban are committed to a pathway of future engagement with the international community. By pathway I mean a series of clear, mutually understood commitments, with human rights at the forefront, which would result in Afghanistan rejoining the community of nations by securing domestic legitimacy that aligns with Afghanistan's modern history and the aspirations of its population, its multi-ethnic character and its traditional Islamic identity.

The de facto authorities have taken some steps to function more effectively as a Government, including the agreement on a budget fully financed by their own revenues, the payment of Government salaries, reduced corruption, the collection of revenues, the successful management of the currency devaluation crisis at the end of last year and efforts to engage the private sector. The well-organized economic conference that they hosted last week was an opportunity to present their economic vision of achieving self-reliance based on the private sector-led growth. However, we all know that for that to happen, the private sector needs an end to uncertainty, a stable policy environment, a reliable

rule-of-law framework and an educated population if it is to truly thrive.

With regard to political inclusion, there have been some signs of wider consultation with political and civil society actors. Senior Taliban officials met with ethnic minority representatives, but to date there have been no visible results in terms of greater ethnic inclusion in governing structures. The de facto Foreign Minister met with some former political leaders in Tehran earlier this month. There was also the meeting held over the past few days in Oslo between a high-level Taliban delegation and Afghan civil society actors, including my friend, Ms. Seraj, from inside and outside the country. Their joint communiqué highlights that "understanding and joint cooperation are the only solution to all the problems of Afghanistan". It is noteworthy that the Taliban delegation widely acknowledged the communiqué. Now they must act on it.

I would also like to take a moment to thank you, Mr. Prime Minister, and your very capable team for that timely initiative, which, we all understand, was not to imply legitimacy but, indeed, to advance an inclusive dialogue. It has succeeded in doing that.

On the other hand, here on the ground there is compelling evidence of an emerging environment of intimidation and a deterioration in respect for human rights. That suggests that the consolidation of Government authority may be leading towards control of the population by fear rather than by understanding and responding to its needs.

Afghans now live with different — but no less real — fears than those they faced during decades of war. Despite announcements of general amnesties for those who worked for or defended the former Government, we continue to receive credible allegations of killings, enforced disappearances and other violations that are not being addressed by the judiciary. In addition, we are seeing a growing number of detentions of political opponents, civil-society representatives and those who voice dissent.

We note as well the increasing contraction of media space, which is partly for economic reasons but also due to pressure from the de facto authorities to report in ways that are not critical of them. I must stress to the Council that we remain extremely concerned about the fate of several women activists who were abducted from their homes and have disappeared. No Afghans should live in fear of a knock at their door in the night,

and no family should be left to wonder about the whereabouts and fate of their loved ones. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is engaging with the de facto authorities on this and other incidents, urging them to investigate such cases, to provide clear information and to hold perpetrators accountable. We will continue to do so, and I expect that our strong communications with the de facto authorities will indeed lead to results in that area.

How can the Taliban demonstrate a clearer commitment to the path of governing based on trust rather than on fear, if that is indeed the path they choose to take?

First, it is past time for them to initiate a wider dialogue on a process for national reconciliation. The international community would of course support such a process, but it must be initiated and entirely shaped by Afghans within and outside the country. Inclusion, furthermore, should never be seen as an exterior demand but as a long-standing and required source of domestic legitimacy for such a diverse country and as entirely critical to ongoing stability. For now the war has ended, but peace has not yet been consolidated. The current comparative stability is in many ways underpinned by conflict fatigue and by communities and individuals focusing on mere survival. That peace, that stability is thus fragile and could unravel if measures are not taken to govern in a way that builds trust and accountability and that focuses on the genuine needs of the people, including the need and the right to participate in their Government.

Secondly, there is the all-important issue of girls' education. We welcome the recent statements by the de facto authorities' leaders that girls of all ages will be educated nationwide. Some international donors have declared themselves ready to pay financial incentives to Afghan teachers for January and February, but future incentives will likely be determined by whether the de facto authorities deliver on their stated commitments. I am happy to report that UNICEF and the Ministry of Education are having intensive sessions on technical preparations to open schools for all Afghan boys and girls in March. UNAMA also continues to meet with the de facto authorities regarding higher education, a vital and often overlooked sector that was particularly dynamic in the past 20 years but that has been devastated by the recent economic crisis.

Thirdly, there must be more meaningful actions behind the Taliban's promise to contain terrorist groups in Afghanistan. Since my previous briefing (see S/PV.8908), it appears that the de facto authorities have attempted to constrain the Islamic State's ability to carry out major attacks, and yet small-scale attacks are still being carried out, particularly against religious minorities. The existence of numerous terrorist groups in Afghanistan remains a broad international and especially regional concern. The desire of the de facto authorities to take on that threat across the board remains to be convincingly demonstrated. Yet at the same time, a certain amount of realism is required regarding its capacity to do so. Given the common interest in addressing that threat, and if sufficient trust can be established, this could be an area for potential cooperation between the international community and the de facto authorities. A new conversation, a new dialogue on this is warranted.

I would like to take a moment to highlight the cautious but constructive approach that countries of the region have taken towards Afghanistan since last August. Numerous meetings have been held in various formats, as detailed in the Secretary-General's report (S/2021/759). Of particular note was the recent extraordinary meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), hosted by Pakistan in December. The OIC agreed to establish a humanitarian trust fund for Afghanistan and appointed a Special Envoy. We welcome the increased involvement of the OIC as a truly substantive partner and look forward to its engagement with us and the de facto authorities on inclusivity, human rights, girls' education and a broad set of common issues. I am happy to report to the Council that I had a highly productive meeting with the OIC's Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Ambassador Tarig Ali Bakheet, and that we are preparing together a comprehensive agenda of cooperation.

The commitment of the United Nations in August to stay and deliver means that we are well positioned now to continue supporting the Afghan people, acting as an enabler of others who are willing to provide additional support and engaging as a bridge with the de facto authorities on the way forward. As the Secretary-General has just noted, he is about to present recommendations on a future political mission in Afghanistan. Those are based on a presumed consensus that it is in no one's interest to see a collapse of the

current State in Afghanistan, but also that continued engagement with the Taliban can and will lead to progress along a negotiated pathway that delivers for the people of Afghanistan, the region and the rest of the world. Testing that hypothesis will be our task in the months ahead.

I thank the Council once again for this opportunity. The debate today and the high level of its participants shows the people of Afghanistan that their plight is not being ignored. It demonstrates our sincere hope that the opportunity provided by the current end to the conflict can and will transition to a dignified and responsible peace. Indeed, we look forward to the Council's deliberations on UNAMA's future mandate in the coming weeks, and we trust in its support.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Lyons for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Tirumurti.

**Mr. Tirumurti:** I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the work of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), which I am pleased to do in accordance with paragraph 56 of resolution 2255 (2015). I am also thankful to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Deborah Lyons and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for their support of the work of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) and their continuous assistance to the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team. I would also like to thank the Monitoring Team and the Secretariat for their assistance and efforts during the previous year in supporting the work of this Committee in relation to events in Afghanistan.

As Council members are aware, the latter half of 2021 saw consequential change in Afghanistan with the Taliban takeover of Kabul in August, the concurrent collapse of the Government of Afghanistan and the humanitarian crisis that followed, as well as the concern over the eroding of human rights and women's rights. These events occurred at a pace few envisioned or expected. Given the fluid situation in Afghanistan and the negotiations leading to the adoption of resolutions 2611 (2021) and 2615 (2021), this briefing to the Security Council, in accordance with paragraph 56 of resolution 2255 (2015), has been deferred until now.

I would therefore like to begin this briefing on the work and activities of the 1988 Committee and

the Monitoring Team by recalling that the main goal of the sanctions regime was, ultimately, to facilitate conditions that promoted dialogue between the Taliban and the Afghan Government, and which was furthermore intended to result in a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. Although the events of August 2021 create a new situation, the need for peace and stability in Afghanistan remains a key goal of this Committee.

In an effort to support that goal, on 22 December 2021, the 1988 Committee once again extended the three-month travel ban exemption for 14 listed Taliban members so that they could continue attending talks in the interest of promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan. The exemption to the ban will be until 22 March 2022 and was accompanied by a decision, on this occasion, to grant a limited asset-freeze exemption for the financing of exempted travel. In this regard, I would like to recall that the country hosting the peace and stability talks will be required to report to the Committee within 30 days from the date of travel.

The Committee fully supports the travel-ban exemption for listed Taliban to attend talks that are in the interest of promoting the prospect for peace and stability in Afghanistan. However, I would remind Member States that the travel-ban exemption is for this purpose and this purpose only.

With the need for further discussions to promote peace and stability also comes the need for further reporting of the activities of the Taliban and those individuals and entities listed under the 1988 sanctions regime, in order to ensure compliance with sanctions measures. To facilitate this, on 17 December 2021, resolution 2611 (2021) extended the mandate of the Monitoring Team relating to the Taliban for a further year, until December 2022.

I would highlight to Member States that, in 2022, the Monitoring Team will be more reliant upon information provided to it from outside Afghanistan, and I would therefore urge all Member States officials, including intelligence and security services, to respect the annexes to resolutions, including resolution 2611 (2021), to consult in confidence with the Monitoring Team to facilitate the sharing of information, and to strengthen implementation of sanction measures.

On 30 November 2021 and pursuant to paragraph 44 of resolution 2255 (2015), the Committee invited representatives of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United

Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations World Food Programme to brief it on the impact of the sanctions regime on the current humanitarian situation in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover of 15 August. Subsequently, on 22 December 2021, the Security Council adopted resolution 2615 (2021) concerning the need to facilitate the workings of humanitarian agencies and those institutions involved in supporting the resourcing and financing of critical humanitarian-relief efforts in Afghanistan.

Resolution 2615 (2021) acknowledged the current humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, emphasizing food insecurity and the disproportionate effect the situation was having on women, children and minorities. The resolution provided clarity to ensure the continued provision of assistance in future. The Security Council decided that provision of humanitarian assistance and other activities that support basic human needs in Afghanistan are not a violation of sub-paragraph (a) of paragraph 1 of resolution 2255 (2015), and that the processing and payment of funds, other financial assets, economic resources and provision of goods and services necessary to ensure the timely delivery of such assistance or to support such activities are permitted. It further decided to review the implementation of this provision after a period of one year. The current United Nations assessment is that over 30 listed members of the Taliban now occupy senior Cabinet positions, and the Security Council therefore encourages humanitarian providers to use reasonable efforts to minimize the accrual of any benefits, whether as a result of direct provision or diversion, to individuals or entities designated on the 1988 sanctions list.

In its latest report for 2021, the Monitoring Team noted that the ties between the Taliban, largely through the Haqqani Network, and Al-Qaida and foreign terrorist fighters remain close and are based on ideological alignment and relationships forged through common struggle and intermarriage. The continued presence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and its activities in Afghanistan remain a matter of our concern. Terrorist attacks have become despicable acts used by this terrorist organization to demonstrate its power and influence in the country and abroad.

Lastly, I wish to thank all Member States and international bodies that have provided support to the 1988 Committee and to the Monitoring Team in a flexible and amenable manner during the coronavirus disease pandemic and corresponding restrictions on

foreign travel and meeting engagements. At this critical time for Afghanistan, under my chairmanship of the 1988 Committee in 2022, the Committee looks forward to continuing close engagement with UNAMA and with States in the region.

**The President:** I thank Ambassador Tirumurti for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Seraj.

**Ms. Seraj:** My name is Mahbouba Seraj. I am an Afghan-American women's rights activist who has been living in Afghanistan since 2003. Over the last 20 years, the people of Afghanistan — especially women and girls — have fought for equality, human rights, inclusive governance and peace in our country. Yet the hasty exit of the international community from Afghanistan last August has undermined our achievements and dashed our hopes for a democratic nation. The Taliban is once more in control and is dismantling our rights daily. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans have been displaced to countries around the world. Today in Afghanistan women are literally being erased from public life, down to the beheading of female mannequins in shop windows.

My Afghan sisters and I warned the Security Council and broader international community of this possibility for decades. It pains me to be in this Chamber before the Security Council today to affirm this truth. But we will not be silenced, and the Council has a tremendous responsibility for keeping the promises it has made to us over the years. My statement today will focus on the responsibility of the Security Council, the United Nations and the international community for keeping Afghan women's rights front and centre throughout all deliberations on Afghanistan.

After 20 years of tasting freedom — working, studying, playing sports, performing music — it has taken less than six months to completely dismantle the rights of women and girls across the country. The majority of Afghanistan's girls are banned from secondary school and university. Many women have fled the country or are prisoners in their own homes. Female judges, once celebrated by the international community, are on the run from the very individuals they imprisoned.

Women are now required to travel with a mahram, or male guardian. This has restricted not only their basic freedom of movement, but their ability to live

their lives. It has prevented women from reaching their health appointments, escaping situations of domestic violence and seeking employment. In a country where millions of Afghan women are widows and the sole breadwinners for their children, this rule is sabotaging families and threatening their survival.

It feels as though the world has given up on Afghanistan and Afghan women, but we have not. Every day, we are in the streets protesting, despite the threats, weapons and violence. We are fighting for our inclusion, for justice and for an end to the repression of our people. But we need the Council's political support and resources to succeed. We need the Council to stand by us and ensure that Afghan women are equal partners in making decisions about the future of our country. That means calling for the Taliban to rescind the mahram policy and uphold women's freedom of movement and to ensure that we can exercise our right to education, work and health. It means that, upon hearing that women human rights defenders like Tamana Zaryab Paryani and Parwana Ebrahim Khel have been taken from their homes for protesting against the hijab, not giving up when asking about their whereabouts or about the disappearance of Alia Azizi. If the Council claims to support us, it cannot remain silent.

We are in the midst of a catastrophic humanitarian crisis. Since the Taliban's takeover, hunger and poverty in Afghanistan have skyrocketed. More than half the population needs urgent food assistance at this very moment. Some families have resorted to selling their children or marrying off their girls — some as young as nine years of age — in order to pay for food and urgent health care. The Taliban's restrictions on women aid workers and their systematic dismantling of the country's mechanisms to address gender-based violence are endangering women's access to services. Our hospitals lack equipment and medication, including tests for the coronavirus disease. As the humanitarian situation has rapidly deteriorated over the past five months, the people of my country have asked what they have done to deserve this, and no one has answers for them.

It is the responsibility of the Security Council, the international community and the United Nations to do everything in their power to provide life-saving assistance in order to avert further suffering. Aid must reach all Afghans, including women, minorities and other marginalized groups. All humanitarian workers, including women, must be able to carry out their

work freely and without fear of reprisals. Further, the international community must continue to ensure that humanitarian assistance goes directly to principled humanitarian organizations and local organizations operating on the ground and not routed through the Taliban. Women's organizations in Afghanistan must be consulted on all aspects of this humanitarian operation.

While humanitarian assistance is critical to managing short-term needs, the collapsing banking system and economy must also be addressed. Presently, ordinary Afghans who need to withdraw money must wait for hours before collecting the small amount permitted for that day. The prices of food staples continue to rise. Afghans have lost half a million jobs since August, which disproportionately impacts women. The massive brain drain, prompted by the Taliban takeover, has left the country without enough qualified workers.

Even if the banking system restarts and supply-chain demands are addressed, women's engagement in the workforce will be critical to the success of Afghanistan's economy. We were taxpayers, breadwinners and innovators — all critical for the country's prosperity. In fact, restricting women's right to work could reduce Afghanistan's gross domestic product by up to \$1 billion. And although the Taliban does not support our right to work outside the home, the majority of Afghans do. The international community must protect that right, dedicate funds to supporting us and engage us as partners in developing solutions to the current crisis.

That brings me to my final, but most important point. The people of Afghanistan, especially its women, see the dilemma the world currently faces regarding how to engage with the Taliban while addressing the present, urgent need of all Afghans. Ordinary Afghans must not be punished for a crisis they had no part in creating. At the same time, the Taliban cannot use the lives of Afghans to hold the international community to ransom. It is therefore in our collective interest to ensure that there is a robust international presence through the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) who can be our eyes and ears on the ground, monitoring developments in the country and whether the Taliban are following through on their commitments. That is especially important at a time where civil society, the media and international non-governmental organizations are unable to do so. UNAMA should also play a key role in supporting dialogue with the Taliban

and ensure inclusive consultations with Afghans from all parts of the country and all walks of life.

At the same time, the international community must not be afraid to use its important leverage over the Taliban. Human rights, women's rights and accountability must be part of every conversation. In addition, clear conditions must be placed on any economic and political support to the Taliban in order to ensure that they respect human rights. The Council affirmed the importance of upholding all human rights in resolution 2593 (2021). Now the Council must act on it.

Finally, the international community must stop sending all-male delegations to meet with the Taliban. That sends a dangerous signal that the international community does not value our rights or our views. Sending foreign women is not enough; we must start the process of inclusive governance for and by Afghans. Diverse representation of Afghan women, especially civil society, is essential.

I am not the first, nor will I be the last Afghan woman to address the Council. But this time, I hope the international community will start to take us seriously. While we cannot turn back the clock, we can choose to work differently moving forward. Ensuring that Afghan women are meaningfully a part of our country's future is a critical place to start.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Seraj for her briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Prime Minister of Norway.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General, Special Representative Lyons and the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) for their introductions. I also extend our heartfelt gratitude to Ms. Mahbouba Seraj for her powerful and compelling statement.

During the past few days, a high-level delegation from the de facto Afghan authorities visited Oslo. It was not a bilateral visit in the traditional sense. The purpose was to offer a most-needed opportunity for non-Taliban women and men from Afghan civil society to engage the Taliban in dialogue on the way forward for Afghanistan. It offered an opportunity for Norway and a range of national delegations to engage the Taliban representatives on how the needs — political, human rights and humanitarian — of millions of Afghans will be met in the time to come.

Let me be clear — the Taliban heard the serious concerns shared by a variety of representative civil Afghans, as well as a united international community. The visit did not bestow international recognition on the de facto regime. It provided an opportunity to talk, exchange and formulate clear expectations on the way ahead.

Such dialogue at this very moment is imperative. The dire humanitarian situation in Afghanistan makes dialogue even more important. We need new agreements and commitments in place to be able to assist and help an extremely vulnerable civilian population and the most vulnerable among them — the children, who are facing hunger and suffering. We must do what we can to avoid another migration crisis and source of instability in the region and beyond, and we need to express clearly that it will not be possible to re-establish a sustainable political system in Afghanistan unless Afghan men and women from a variety of backgrounds are included. I commend all delegations that were at the Oslo meeting for having contributed to three days of meaningful dialogue and exchange.

*(spoke in French)*

The humanitarian crisis facing the Afghan people is dire. It has been exacerbated by the effects of climate change, the global pandemic and the collapse of the Afghan economy. We are witnessing the disruption of civilian infrastructure and basic services, including in the areas of health and education. The situation is disproportionately affecting women and girls. We therefore welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2615 (2021) on 22 December 2021. The resolution clearly states that humanitarian assistance can be provided without violating the United Nations sanctions regime. We must now make best use of the humanitarian exemption provided for by the resolution.

*(spoke in English)*

Multilateral cooperation is vital to respond to the crisis in Afghanistan. It is essential that the Council provide the United Nations political mission with a comprehensive and robust mandate to engage the Taliban, monitor and report on the human rights situation and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance and support for basic human needs.

In that context, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the United Nations on the launching of the One-UN Transitional Engagement Framework

for Afghanistan today. It is extremely important. The protection of civilians, including children, must be our first priority. It is also critical to safeguard the rights and equal participation of women, and Ms. Seraj made such a contribution in her powerful explanation. That was also clearly communicated by all delegations at the meeting with Taliban at the Oslo meeting.

We are gravely concerned about the persistent reports of women peace builders and human rights defenders facing grave risk and reprisals for raising their voices. Tamana Zaryabi Paryani and Parawana Ibrahimkhel — two among the many who have faced that risk — must be released. The members of the Taliban must abide by the commitments that they have made, and we have to hold them accountable.

Humanitarian assistance, while crucial, will not be sufficient in the long-run. Afghanistan's need for development assistance did not decrease during the past six months — on the contrary. Norway will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan, through United Nations organizations and the appropriate humanitarian non-governmental organizations. We will support activities to meet basic human needs and safeguard human rights.

We must not forget, however, that the primary responsibility for responding to the current acute crisis lies with the de facto authorities. The Taliban must listen to the appeals of the Afghan people and the international community to respect human rights and establish a more inclusive and just Government. So far, little progress has been made in addressing those fundamental concerns. That has to change.

Finally, let me also take the opportunity to reiterate the importance of combating terrorism, a priority that we all share. Norway remains committed to fighting terrorism worldwide, including in and from Afghanistan. But I would like to emphasize that it is the responsibility of the Taliban to prevent terrorist groups from gaining a foothold in Afghanistan and once again threatening international peace and security.

We must work together, leaving no stone unturned, to tackle the profound and complex crisis that Afghanistan and its people are facing. There can be no sustainable peace, security or development without respect for human rights, including the rights of women and girls. The renewed mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan must reflect those

fundamental priorities. We count on the support of the Council.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Gabon.

**Mr. Boubeya** (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his informative briefing and welcome the presence of Special Representative Deborah Lyons and Ms. Mahbouba Seraj among us. I thank them for their clear and powerful briefings. I also thank the Permanent Representative of India, in his capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), for the information he provided us.

My statement will focus on three main points: first, the extremely worrisome sociopolitical and economic situation; secondly, the security challenges being faced and the serious humanitarian crisis that is devastating the Afghan population; and, lastly, the unacceptable treatment of women in the country.

Since the Taliban took power, the sociopolitical environment has been marked by a total lack of transparency with regard to the political process. The closed circle of leaders that has emerged is hardly representative of the diversity of the Afghan people and clearly excludes most ethnic, political and social minorities. The Taliban regime's lack of inclusiveness presents a genuine obstacle to the effectiveness of the Government, garnering the support of the entire Afghan population and the stability of the country.

We also believe that the international community must maintain dialogue with the Taliban, as that is important for the individual and collective well-being of the people. I must nevertheless stress that the call for dialogue does not imply recognition of the Taliban regime.

We support the exemption of the of the sanctions list travel ban for Taliban members for travel related to the peace process in Afghanistan, as stated by the Chair of the Sanctions Committee. We also welcome the 12-month extension of the mandate of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team to assist the Sanctions Committee in establishing lasting and inclusive peace, stability and security in Afghanistan. We should nonetheless note the clear progress in the fight against corruption since the Taliban took power, while bearing in mind the extent of the phenomenon

of corruption in the country and its negative impact on economic growth, the rule of law, social norms and a sense of civic awareness.

With regard to the security and humanitarian situation, we remain deeply concerned about relationship that Al-Qaida maintains with the Taliban, including the Haqqani Network. Similarly, we are concerned about the continuing danger posed by foreign fighters over whom the Taliban seems to lack all control and who are adding to the volatility of the security situation on the ground. We fear an even more dramatic humanitarian crisis in the face of the collapse of the economy and the banking system. The cessation of funding from donor countries and the freezing of the central bank's assets have already led to a major financial crisis, affecting the majority of the Afghan people. Those sanctions, although necessary, have contributed to increased poverty, hunger and displacement.

With regard to the condition of Afghan women and girls, it is unbearable to watch as their freedoms are violated and their fundamental rights, including access to education and basic health services, are denied. Many have been stripped of their freedom of movement and freedom to engage in the work of their choice. When they do have the right to work, they are confined to specific areas such as health, customs, education and immigration. The situation is unacceptable.

Finally, I would like to stress the importance of what is at stake in Afghanistan. Beyond the legitimate aspirations of the Afghan people to security and dignity, this is a question of the stability of the entire region. There is a looming threat of a rear base for international terrorism and a lawless zone for women and girls. The international community needs to join forces and step up its engagement, while the Council must react and act commensurately with the perils of the situation and the responsibilities to be assumed.

**Mr. Kiboino (Kenya):** I thank the Secretary-General for his remarks. I also thank Special Representative Lyons for her briefing on the latest developments in Afghanistan and Ms. Mahboubia Seraj, Executive Director of the Afghan Women Skills Centre, for her insights this morning. I would also like to thank Ambassador Tirumurti, as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), for his briefing to the Council and for his work.

Over the past few months, we have witnessed a consistent and disturbing trend of terrorist attacks against civilians that continue to undermine peace efforts in Afghanistan. Kenya condemns all of those atrocious acts, including the recent terrorist attack by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province in Herat, which claimed several innocent lives and left many people injured.

That trend requires that international community demand, in a unified voice, that the Taliban commit to fighting terrorism and ensure that Afghanistan is not a haven from which terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State and Al-Qaida, can perpetrate their heinous acts of terror, not only in Afghanistan but also within the region and beyond.

Kenya commends the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for its versatility and ability to operate in an increasingly complex and challenging environment.

The harsh winter conditions have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis, with over 24 million people in need of urgent assistance. We appeal to the international community and donor agencies to provide adequate funding for the Afghanistan humanitarian response plan.

The deteriorating economy is pushing more Afghans into situations of need. Local industrialists warn that, if the economy is not turned around urgently, about 1.5 million people — including 500,000 women — could lose their jobs. There is a need to consider how Afghan frozen assets, within an agreed framework, can be injected into the ailing economy as part of efforts to revamp it.

We want to underscore the importance of investing in the livelihoods of the poorest and most vulnerable, as that would have a positive net effect on the humanitarian situation. In that regard, we commend the United Nations team in Afghanistan for its relentless efforts over the past few months and welcome the launch of its One-UN Transitional Engagement Framework to assist Afghans in 2022.

The recent disappearance of two Afghan women activists is a representation of the perilous conditions in which Afghan women find themselves. We call on the Taliban to take the necessary steps to not only investigate and locate and return the two women to safety, but also to guarantee the inalienable right of Afghan women to

positively contribute to the development of their country without their voices being silenced or ignored. 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.

We also call on the authorities to prioritize the elimination all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and other gendered harm against Afghan women, girls and children, as well as the reversal of any actions intended to restrict women's freedom of movement. Kenya welcomes reports that higher schools for girls and public universities for girls and boys will be reopened in the next educational year, starting in March. We hope that commitment will be fulfilled.

We wish to commend Norway for hosting the recently concluded talks with the Taliban, and we hope that the deliberations in Oslo will help to chart a new path towards sustainable peace for Afghanistan.

Finally, Kenya reaffirms its unwavering solidarity with the people of Afghanistan and stands ready to support all endeavours aimed at securing their safety and well-being.

**Ms. Byrne Nason** (Ireland): I thank you, Mr. President, and once again warmly welcome you to the Chamber. I also thank the Secretary-General for his presence today, which underlines the enormous effort of the United Nations system to help the people of Afghanistan. I want to renew my thanks, of course, to Special Representative Lyons and her team for the tireless work they are doing, particularly during the past challenging months for the Afghan people.

My thanks also go to Ms. Seraj, to whom I am deeply grateful for her presence, as well as the much-needed clarity and uncompromising voice that she brought to the Chamber today. She has brought the rights of Afghan women and girls to the heart of our discussion in the Security Council, which is where they should be. I wish to reassure her that I take her very seriously indeed.

I would also like to thank my colleague Ambassador Tirumurti, as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), for his briefing.

I will focus on three issues of deep concern.

First, I will address the colossal humanitarian crisis facing Afghanistan during this harsh winter. We

are horrified by the fact that over half of Afghanistan's population is now facing acute food insecurity in what the Secretary-General described earlier as a "frozen hell".

We acknowledge and have strongly supported the actions taken by the United Nations in response the extraordinary need in Afghanistan. The exemption, unanimously adopted here by the Council, to the resolution 1988 (2011) sanctions regime provides certainty to the humanitarian response. The United Nations Development Programme Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan has injected much-needed liquidity into the economy, while the Afghanistan humanitarian response plan — once sufficiently funded — will be a lifeline for millions. But it is clear that a crisis of this magnitude requires a sustained response from the international community. We must continue to stand with the Afghan people in what are clearly going to be challenging months ahead.

Secondly, Ireland remains deeply concerned that the Taliban is depriving Afghan secondary school-age girls of their education. For 131 days, girls have been stripped of their right to learn and, as of today, those girls are without a guaranteed path back to the classroom. That cruel prohibition on access to schooling is not solely about education, it is also about silencing an entire generation of young girls. A future without education, without the means to economic and social independence, will mean many more girls — these are children — will face forced early marriage and childbirth. That unnecessary, unacceptable deprivation must be reversed, and the rights of Afghan young girls must be fully respected. Their futures are at stake. A generation is at stake.

My third point is the issue so viscerally outlined by Ms. Seraj in her briefing today. The fact is that women of Afghanistan continue to be targeted; Afghan women continue to be cruelly erased from society by the Taliban. As their fundamental human rights continue to be systematically denied, women across the country are standing up and speaking out in defiance of the Taliban.

The response has been chilling: women torn from their families, deprived of liberty, women disappeared. Is that what the Taliban mean when they say the international community should not worry about women's rights in Afghanistan? Where are Tamana Paryani and Parawana Ibrahimkhel? They were abducted from their homes just last week. Where are

they? And former police officer Alia Azizi has been missing since October. Where is she? And there are countless more forcibly disappeared Afghan women. Where are they?

We are deeply troubled by the reports from Mazar airport, where women trying to leave Afghanistan have been detained by the Taliban, who refuse to release them until they are collected by male relatives — the operative word being “collected”.

We call on the Taliban to release all those unjustifiably detained. We also call on the Taliban to recognize their human rights. Women’s rights, let us remember, are human rights.

Finally, I thank you, Mr. President, for the update on the dialogue that took place earlier this week, convened by your own Government. The centrality of Afghan women in the talks, advocating directly for themselves, is welcome. Ireland has consistently emphasized that inclusive dialogue, with the full, equal and meaningful participation of women, is the only mechanism by which Afghanistan can have the truly representative and participative democracy and Government demanded by its people. No path that excludes Afghan women, can lead to the peaceful, stable future that the Afghan people deserve and seek. Any halfway house — any claims otherwise — will not fool the international community.

We need to be clear-eyed that the worst fears expressed by many — not least Afghan women — about what would happen under the Taliban is happening. We are judging the Taliban by their actions, not by their words. The international community must stand resolute. There can be no dialogue, no solution, no path forward that does not include women and the realization of their rights. To quote what Ms. Seraj said earlier, we have a “tremendous responsibility”. It is clear that we have an obligation not to look away.

**Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield** (United States of America): I thank you, Prime Minister Støre, and I thank the Secretary-General for his sobering remarks and assessment of the situation in Afghanistan. I thank Special Representative Lyons. We appreciate her briefing and her team’s unflagging commitment to its mission. I thank Ambassador Tirumurti for his briefing in his capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011).

We are so grateful to hear Ms. Seraj’s insights and her voice concerning the challenges facing the people of Afghanistan. I commend her courage. I know she will not stop until Afghan women enjoy the universal rights to which they are entitled. And I thank her so much for her recommendations to us, and I hope we heard her clearly that our delegations to meet with the Taliban must include women, and we must insist on the inclusion of Afghan women.

Today I would like to address three aspects of the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the situation in Afghanistan: the humanitarian crisis, the economic crisis and our expectations for the Taliban.

First, as Afghanistan’s humanitarian crisis worsens, UNAMA’s work in support of the people of Afghanistan could not be more important. In coordination with UNAMA, we all have a role to play in helping the people of Afghanistan in desperate need. For our part, the United States remains committed to providing life-saving support to the Afghan people. On 11 January, the United States announced an initial contribution for the year of more than \$308 million in humanitarian assistance for the people of Afghanistan. That funding will support aid that provides food and nutrition, assistance support for health care, winterization programmes and logistical support to ensure aid workers and critical relief supplies can make it to the parts of Afghanistan that are hardest to reach. It will save countless lives.

In tandem, the United States has moved rapidly to ensure any sanctions imposed by it and the international community to support security and stability in Afghanistan do not impede humanitarian activity. In December, our Treasury Department issued three new general licenses that expand upon existing authorizations to facilitate the continued flow of vital humanitarian assistance and basic needs for the Afghan people. The United States also introduced a draft resolution at the Security Council last month to establish a humanitarian exemption in the Taliban sanctions regime of resolution 1988 (2011). The Council’s unanimous adoption of resolution 2615 (2021), which establishes the carveout, sends a clear message of support to the Afghan people.

The United States remains the single-largest provider of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan but, like all of the major challenges facing the international community today, the scale of the crisis

demands a global response. Much more support from the international community will be required to meet the extraordinary level of need the Afghan people are experiencing.

Secondly, the United States is particularly sensitive to Afghanistan's liquidity crisis and how it is worsening the humanitarian emergency. To that end, we continue to examine various options to ease the liquidity crunch. Ultimately, a functioning Afghan economy will require an independent and technically competent central bank that meets international banking standards. While Afghan central bank reserves held in the United States are subject to ongoing litigation, we recognize calls to examine making available reserves to help the people of Afghanistan.

Thirdly, and finally, the international community's expectations for the Taliban have not wavered. We continue to expect the Taliban to allow unhindered humanitarian access to people in need and free movement for aid workers of all genders; ensure that humanitarian personnel can operate under safe conditions; and permit assistance to be provided independently to all vulnerable people, regardless of their identity. Those are basic humanitarian principles, and we — as I know Council members do too — expect the Taliban to abide by them.

We also expect the Taliban to take concrete steps to demonstrate fidelity to its counter-terrorism commitments, allow for safe passage and show respect for human rights and inclusivity. Let me be clear: We are unequivocal that women and girls must be able to fully participate in political, economic and social life in Afghanistan. We could not agree more with Secretary-General Guterres's assertion that no country can thrive while denying such rights to half of its population. We welcome the announcement by the Taliban that secondary schools throughout the country will be opened to girls in March. We will monitor the roll-out of that process, but we must continue to press for post-secondary schools and all sectors of employment to be opened as well.

We are deeply concerned about the reported abductions and detention of women protesters and other civil society activists and reports of reprisals, including harassment and intimidation, against former members of the Afghan security forces and former Government officials and their families. Freedom of expression is a universal human right. If the Taliban wants support

from Afghans and the international community, that freedom needs to be respected.

We heartily welcome the work of Special Representative Lyons and UNAMA to reinforce such expectations in their engagements with the Taliban, as well as to keep the international community apprised of the Taliban's progress, or lack thereof, against those expectations. Together, let us support the Afghan people in their time of need and carefully watch the Taliban to ensure that its actions truly live up to its words.

**Mr. De La Fuente Ramírez** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Secretary-General António Guterres, Special Representative Lyons and Ms. Seraj for their insightful briefings, which not only informed us but in particular warned us. We also thank the Ambassador of India, in his capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), for his briefing.

Some 24 million Afghans require humanitarian assistance in a country that also faces enormous economic, humanitarian and social challenges and is at a complex international crossroads. We hope that the humanitarian exemption agreed last December will facilitate conditions for continuing to provide that vital assistance to millions of Afghans. The exemption resolution 2615 (2021) was adopted to prevent an even greater crisis. That must be made very clear.

We acknowledge Norway's valuable efforts to facilitate a dialogue between the Taliban and some of the main humanitarian aid providers, as well as to bring about effective engagement with Afghan civil society. It is clear that if we wish to prevent a humanitarian tragedy, to which we would be jointly responsible witnesses, we need a seat at the table with those in power in Afghanistan. We will therefore closely follow the outcome of the Oslo meetings, and we hope that they will continue to make progress so that the aid arrives and the commitments made are fulfilled.

In addition to the humanitarian issue, allow me to briefly highlight three other matters.

First, respect for and the promotion of the human rights of all Afghans, including women, young people and minorities, must be a *sine qua non*. To date, as Ms. Seraj said, no real commitment has been shown to upholding and preserving basic rights, such as education for girls and the right of women to return to work, or to demands for the formation of an inclusive Government.

The international community must present a united front if we want that message to get through and the Taliban to implement policies that protect and benefit the Afghan people, without predetermined exclusions.

Secondly, the threat posed by the resurgence of terrorism, which is genuine, must be urgently addressed in a comprehensive manner with full respect for international law, particularly international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Afghanistan cannot again become a haven or platform for terrorists. If that were to happen, we all would have failed.

Thirdly, it is increasingly clear that the increase in criminal activity is a reflection of the precarious economic situation, a lack of opportunity and the imminent collapse of public services. That phenomenon must be urgently dealt with. That would also help to prevent the radicalization of the most marginalized groups, which would lead to further cycles of violence.

Finally, Mexico reiterates its appreciation to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and all the agencies on the ground for their essential work in support of a peaceful, prosperous and inclusive Afghanistan.

**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): We have heard from the various speakers, whom I thank for their briefings, starting with the Secretary-General, that the situation in Afghanistan continues to be extremely worrisome. Since mid-August, there has not been any respite for the Afghan people on either the humanitarian or the security front. They also have to fight for respect for their basic rights. As this year marks the centenary of Franco-Afghan relations, France, alongside the United Nations and its partners, will continue to stand by the Afghan people amid the challenges that they must overcome.

The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. Poverty is widespread. Malnutrition is increasing exponentially, with more than half the population facing a food crisis this winter. Epidemics, including polio, measles and the coronavirus disease, continue to spread. It is therefore crucial that humanitarian aid, including vaccines, be urgently delivered.

The Security Council acted by adopting resolution 2615 (2021) to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid, in accordance with humanitarian principles and without any kind of diversion by the Taliban. That aid

aims to meet the basic needs of the most vulnerable. France contributed €100 million to respond to the Afghan humanitarian crisis. In a joint operation with Qatar on 2 December, we also delivered nearly 40 tons of medical equipment, food and winter supplies. The European Union and its member States also raised more than €1 billion to help the most vulnerable Afghan populations. The humanitarian crisis across Afghanistan requires that we all step up our efforts.

The Afghan population also faces a significant security challenge. The risk of terrorism remains owing to not only Da'esh but also Al-Qaida. As the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pointed out in its most recent report (S/2021/486), the Taliban has not broken its ties with terrorist groups, including Al-Qaida, but, on the contrary, has integrated them into its interim Government. Upon taking power, they bolstered their allies and their affiliates.

Given the global reach of those terrorist organizations, the terrorist threat emerging from Afghanistan is of a transnational and cross-border nature. France will continue to make the fight against terrorism a priority. Here, too, the international community must shoulder its responsibilities, namely, by continuing to demand that the Taliban cut all ties, direct or indirect, including financial ones, with terrorist groups.

The third challenge facing the Afghan people, in particular women and girls, is ensuring respect for their fundamental rights. Women are under increasing pressure; they are excluded from universities and girls from secondary schools; and they are forced to wear the hijab. They are forbidden from travelling more than 72 kilometres from their homes if they are not accompanied by a man. Afghan television channels have been banned from broadcasting shows featuring women; the protests that they organize are suppressed; and human rights or media activists, particularly those fighting for women's rights, receive constant threats. Some of them have been arrested and executed.

France, alongside its partners, once again calls upon the Taliban to respect their commitments and to uphold resolution 2593 (2021). Failure to meet those demands will place the Taliban at risk of international isolation.

Finally, we continue to call for the formation of an inclusive Government that is representative of all Afghan society, including all its ethnic groups, religions and genders.

By way of conclusion, I wish to recall France's determination to strive for Afghanistan's stability through an exacting dialogue with the various stakeholders concerned. The challenges facing them are massive, and France, as in the past, will stand shoulder to shoulder with the Afghan people to meet them.

**Mr. Polyanskiy** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We welcome your personal participation in this meeting, Mr. Prime Minister. I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his assessment of the situation in Afghanistan. We also thank the Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Ms. Deborah Lyons, for her comments and her vision of the situation on the ground. We are grateful to the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), Ambassador Tirumurti, for his analysis of the sanctions track. We also listened closely to the representative of civil society, Ms. Mahbouba Seraj.

We are pleased that representatives of the countries of the region are able to participate in the discussion of issues that are so important to them. Today it has been five months since the Taliban acceded to power in Afghanistan. As rightly noted by the Secretary-General and Ms. Lyons, the situation of the country is subject to a constant dynamic.

We note that certain steps have been undertaken by the new authorities to tackle social, economic, humanitarian and human rights issues, and to mitigate challenges related to terrorism and drugs. We proceed from the understanding that those actions are only the beginning. We continue to expect the Taliban to take serious measures to ensure the real ethnic and political inclusivity of the Government, eliminating terrorist and drug threats and ensuring respect for basic human rights.

Our common priority is maintaining stability in Afghanistan, which we are convinced will benefit everyone — the Afghan people, the region and the world as a whole. It is clear, however, that in the absence of the necessary potential and resources, including financial resources, the new authorities will hardly be able to independently, rapidly and effectively deal with the accumulation of old problems and new challenges. Success here will depend, *inter alia*, on comprehensive international assistance to Afghanistan.

On 22 December 2021, the Security Council adopted resolution 2615 (2021), aimed at providing

humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan in the context of the 1988 sanctions regime. We hope that this will make it possible to step up humanitarian assistance involving all interested parties, including the United Nations, its humanitarian agencies and key donors.

At the same time, unfortunately, those efforts are not sufficient. With imminent economic catastrophe looming over Afghanistan, the current humanitarian steps are just a drop in the ocean. The paralysis of the banking system, the liquidity crisis and unemployment reduce to naught prospects for post-conflict recovery, as we have heard from representatives of the humanitarian community.

The unfreezing of assets is a serious matter. Failing that, Afghanistan simply will not be able to emerge from the crisis in the long term. We call on the United States and other Western donors to return funds to the country. Those funds belong to the Afghan people and cannot be used as a bargaining chip or to punish Afghans for the new realities in the country.

At the end of the day, the consequences of a collapse would be far graver and inevitably lead to an increased number of refugees and more terrorism and drug production, resulting in even greater instability, including in the region and beyond. The threat of the infiltration of militants and drug dealers into the region, including under the guise of refugees, cannot but concern our Central Asian partners.

We maintain regular contacts with all five countries of Central Asia. It is vital to continue to cooperate within the framework of regional organizations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (SCTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), including the SCTO working group on Afghanistan and the renewed mechanism of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group.

We would like to underscore that, in the current conditions, attempts to pursue dialogue with the new Afghan authorities in the language of ultimatums and pressure rather than diplomacy while using assistance in the recovery and socioeconomic development as leverage would be counterproductive. We must draw lessons from previous mistakes and miscalculations. We have said on many occasions that maintaining a political dialogue will provide effective answers to current issues. To quote an example of such successful cooperation, we refer to the extended "Troika" that promotes a peaceful settlement in the country.

The situation in Afghanistan as it develops will inevitably affect the future of UNAMA, whose mandate expires on 17 March. We hope that in his forthcoming report, the Secretary-General will provide balanced assessments, recommendations and proposals as to what to include in the mandate based on the new circumstances.

**Mr. Zhang Jun** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I welcome you, Sir, as you preside over today's meeting. This meeting is very timely and crucial. I also welcome and thank Secretary-General Guterres, who made time in his busy schedule to attend this meeting. I endorse his assessment of the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan and support the United Nations in its focus on saving Afghan lives, preventing economic collapse and ensuring the establishment of trusted interactions. I also thank Special Representative Deborah Lyons; Ambassador Tirumurti, Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011); and Ms. Mahbouba Seraj for their briefings. I also welcome the presence of the representatives of Uzbekistan, Pakistan and Iran.

This winter is the first war-free winter in Afghanistan in 20 years. However, for the people of Afghanistan this winter seems even colder and harder. After the hasty withdrawal of foreign troops last August, the Afghan economy has been in freefall, and the Afghan population is experiencing a humanitarian crisis of the worst kind.

We have seen that with the sudden withdrawal of foreign troops, in the past five months, the Afghan people have been experiencing an unfolding nightmare in terms of humanitarian aid, on which many people rely for their survival, simply disappearing overnight forever. Some 95 per cent of Afghan families are without food and clothing. More than a million children are suffering from malnutrition, and 23 million people are suffering from severe famine.

At this rate, by the middle of the year, 97 per cent of the Afghan population will be impoverished and will not be able to afford to live on two dollars a day. Rahmati, a mother in the Harathi refugee camp, sold her right kidney and two daughters to get her family through the winter. This is a human tragedy that is happening right now.

Secretary-General Guterres has made repeated and urgent appeals about the situation in Afghanistan and said that it is a race against time to help the country's

people. Unfortunately, without massive emergency action, it looks like we will lose this race.

The Council adopted resolution 2615 (2021) last month affirming that humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan does not violate the Council's sanctions measures, clearing any legal obstacles that may exist. Unfortunately, there has been no fundamental change in the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

Clearly, the key issue is not a legal obstacle but a political one — the politicization of the humanitarian issue. Humanitarian aid is being used as a bargaining chip, a political tool that is being leveraged, and that tool is playing games with the lives and well-being of 38 million Afghans in dire need of relief. This is morally unacceptable and strategically short-sighted and dangerous.

The more fundamental challenge facing the Afghan population and international humanitarian agencies is that the Afghan economy has not yet returned to normal functioning. Unilateral coercive measures have not only frozen more than \$9 billion in Afghan assets abroad, but also severely hindered Afghanistan access to international financing, leading to an economic liquidity crunch and stifling Afghanistan's potential to resume economic development on its own.

China welcomes the efforts of the World Bank and other international institutions aimed at exploring financing support for Afghanistan, but without a full injection of liquidity or the restoration and development of the domestic market and foreign trade, the efforts of international institutions will only be a drop in the bucket. In the current situation, unilateral sanctions have the effect of freezing, not only Afghanistan's financial assets, but also the hopes of the Afghan people to survive. The unilateral sanctions are no less lethal than military intervention. They are starving and killing the Afghan people. We once again urge the immediate lifting of the assets freeze and unilateral sanctions against Afghanistan.

The international community is generally united in its expectations for the future of Afghanistan. We hope that the country will adhere to a broad and inclusive political orientation, implement moderate and prudent internal and external policies, effectively protect the rights and interests of ethnic minorities, women and children, resolutely combat terrorism and develop good-neighbourly cooperation. China's position in

this regard is clear, and we have always been working actively to this end.

We need to increase engagement with the interim Afghan Government in a rational and pragmatic manner, enhance mutual trust and exert positive influence. The Norwegian Government invited an interim Afghan Government delegation to Oslo for talks. We believe that such engagement and dialogue are useful.

At present, the international community should make it its most important and urgent priority to help Afghanistan alleviate the humanitarian crisis and stabilize its economy. Adhering to the principle of Afghan-led and Afghan-owned solutions certainly means respecting Afghan ownership and leadership of economic resources.

It is essential to safeguard the rights of Afghan women and children, which also means providing them with much-needed humanitarian help. If they cannot even have food or survive, then talk of education, employment and political participation will become empty words.

The international community shares the goal of preventing Afghanistan from once again becoming a hub for terrorism. But if the humanitarian and economic situation in Afghanistan is allowed to continue to deteriorate, the only ones that will benefit from it are such terrorists as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Al-Qaida and the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement.

China calls for a stronger sense of urgency from the international community and more humanitarian and economic assistance for Afghanistan so as to bring warmth and hope to the Afghan people. Countries that have caused the current predicament in Afghanistan should more than others abandon their politicized approach and take urgent action to shoulder their primary responsibility.

As a neighbour and partner of Afghanistan, China has always made positive contributions to the peaceful development of Afghanistan. At the moment, China is stepping up efforts to deliver ¥200 million in humanitarian aid for the country. Supplies of all kinds are arriving in Afghanistan, in particular, the local provinces and cities of the country. Meanwhile, we have already opened the air corridor and resumed exporting Afghan pine nuts to China so as to alleviate the livelihood difficulties of the Afghan people.

China supports the active work done by UNAMA. At the moment, the most important task is to follow the advice of Secretary-General Guterres and encourage the international community to provide urgent humanitarian assistance and help the Afghan people overcome their current difficulties. We support a continued important role for the United Nations in the peaceful reconstruction of Afghanistan and look forward to the reports and the recommendations of the Secretary-General.

We are ready to stay in close touch with members of the Security Council and countries of the region so as to make viable and appropriate arrangements for UNAMA's mandate that will meet the current actual needs and respect the will of the Afghan people.

**Mr. Agyeman** (Ghana): Let me begin by commending you for Norway's very able leadership of the Security Council this month. We also warmly welcome the remarks by the Secretary-General and the briefing by the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), Ambassador Tirumurti.

We also welcome the briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Ms. Deborah Lyons, and pay tribute to the entire UNAMA team for the incredible work they are doing under difficult circumstances and in a very challenging environment. We also thank Ms. Mahbouba Seraj, Executive Director of the Afghan Women Skills Development Centre, for her valuable perspectives. I also acknowledge the participation in this meeting of the representatives of Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Ghana remains committed to a stable, secure and peaceful Afghanistan. We are convinced that a resurgent Afghanistan is in the best interests of the international community. We believe that, if it is actively and constructively engaged, Afghanistan can return to the international stage as a bona fide member of the comity of nations, but only if it fully and effectively utilizes the resourcefulness and ingenuity of all of its citizens to spur national development.

In that regard, I would like to highlight the need for the international community to remain steadfast in the provision of all the support required to eliminate the needless suffering of the Afghan people. The Security Council and, indeed, all regional and international

actors, including Afghanistan's partners and neighbours, can contribute positively to help Afghanistan overcome its multilayered political, humanitarian, economic and security difficulties.

Last month, the Council unanimously adopted two important resolutions on the Afghanistan situation. It is worth noting that the adoption of resolution 2615 (2021) determined, in paragraph 1, that "humanitarian assistance and other activities that support basic human needs in Afghanistan" will not constitute a violation of sub-paragraph (a) of paragraph 1 of resolution 2255 (2015), of 22 December 2015, which prohibits the provision of funds, financial assets or economic resources to individuals listed under the 1988 Afghanistan sanctions regime.

While we acknowledge that resolution 2615 (2021) is a commendable step in tackling the tragic humanitarian catastrophe engulfing the country, we are clear in our minds that, given the sheer size and scale of the humanitarian needs, it is not enough to get Afghanistan out of the woods. The fact that more than 20 million Afghans, according to reports by the United Nations, remain food insecure and a staggering 8.7 million of the Afghan population are on the brink of starvation, should be disconcerting for the Council.

The plain truth is that time is running out for the international community to avoid an already dire humanitarian situation from spiralling out of control. The risk of a catastrophic outcome is real because, as we speak, millions of Afghans are being threatened by hunger and destitution.

In the face of this unfolding monumental humanitarian catastrophe, the Council has a responsibility to be united on what must be done in order to comprehensively address the challenges. It is imperative now, more than ever, to adopt swift and consequential decisions that will resonate positively on the lives of the Afghan people.

Ghana would like to make several recommendations in that regard.

First, Ghana firmly supports and echoes the Secretary-General's call for Afghanistan's assets to be unfrozen and immediately channelled into funding emergency social and health services for the Afghan people. It is quite paradoxical for a country with enormous financial resources locked up in foreign banks, including \$9.6 billion in international financial

assets belonging to the central bank of Afghanistan, to be on the brink of starvation and economic collapse.

Secondly, we urge the de facto authorities to open up the country to humanitarian agencies by removing all restrictions placed on humanitarian operations, including the acceptance of women humanitarian workers. The Taliban should choose the path to be a force for good by cooperating unconditionally and facilitating the unfettered delivery of humanitarian assistance to every Afghan, without discrimination, in line with international humanitarian law.

Thirdly, we are deeply concerned about the alleged and reported cases of violations of the human rights of vulnerable persons within Afghan society, in particular the suppression and erosion of the rights of women, girls and children and their access to education. Ghana believes that Afghan women and minorities are legitimate stakeholders of Afghanistan and must be given every opportunity and support to protect and enhance their effective participation in the country's reconstruction and future growth and development. Precluding any group from the political process is counterproductive and denies the country the contributions of all its citizens.

Fourthly, the Taliban authorities have a responsibility to ensure that reports of extrajudicial killings, particularly against former members of the Afghan security forces, are swiftly investigated and that the perpetrators are held to account. That duty extends to guaranteeing the safety of all civilians and humanitarian workers within Afghan territory.

Lastly, we note that the events of August 2021 created a new situation in Afghanistan. We therefore keenly look forward to the Secretary-General's report at the end of this month on the strategic and operational recommendations for the UNAMA mandate, which is due for renewal in March 2022. We believe UNAMA should be vested with the necessary capacity to enable it respond effectively to the profound changes that have taken place in Afghanistan.

Let me conclude by saying that, now more than ever, we must collectively and constructively work to keep the focus on a coordinated, comprehensive and balanced approach in resolving the complex issues of Afghanistan, devoid of geopolitical considerations and interests. It should be clear to everyone that there is no alternative to Council unity on the vexing matter of Afghanistan. The Afghan people have demonstrated

resilience and fortitude and will require the full support of the international community in order to pull out of the cycle of war and internal conflicts as they forge a common vision of an Afghanistan that accommodates the various perspectives of their rich society and unique past.

**Mr. Kariuki** (United Kingdom): I also thank the Secretary-General, Special Representative Lyons and Ms. Seraj for their sobering briefings today, and I am grateful to Ambassador Tirumurti for his update on the work of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011).

The situation in Afghanistan remains of deep concern. More than 20 million people — half the population — are in need of urgent assistance. The risks of a humanitarian catastrophe are real, and urgent action is needed to avert economic collapse.

The work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and United Nations leadership remains crucial. The United Kingdom welcomes the launch today of the One-UN Transitional Engagement Framework, a whole-of-United-Nations system approach to the provision of life-saving assistance and support for basic human needs. Saving lives requires an adequately resourced, prioritized and coordinated United Nations-led international response. We pledge our support.

It also requires constructive engagement by the Taliban on delivery under humanitarian principles. We welcome a positive trajectory in the ability of female humanitarians to deliver assistance to the most vulnerable.

The United Kingdom has shown our commitment to the Afghan people by doubling our aid for Afghanistan this financial year to £286 million. Importantly, we have disbursed £163 million of that money. We encourage others to support the Organization's appeal to release their generous commitments without delay.

We recognize that humanitarian assistance can go only so far, as we must also address the liquidity crisis. We strongly support the efforts of the United Nations and the World Bank to find creative solutions.

We also welcome ongoing discussions between the World Bank and donors on repurposing a portion of the remaining \$1.2 billion Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, in addition to the \$280 million already released, in order to support essential health services and food security and nutrition.

This week's conference in Oslo has been an important opportunity for the United Kingdom, other donors and civil society to communicate expectations directly to the Taliban — expectations set by the Council in resolution 2593 (2021).

We are deeply concerned in particular by reports of an increase in reprisals against former security forces and Government officials, as well as attacks against minority groups and detentions of civil society members, particularly female activists. We call on the Taliban to respect the amnesty they issued in August for all Afghans and to carry out transparent investigations into all allegations of human rights abuses.

As we heard clearly from Ms. Seraj and others today, women's rights have also been sharply restricted, with many women unable to work and girls kept away from school. The Taliban's assurances that girls will be able to return to school on 21 March is welcome. The international community will be watching closely. Schools were already segregated under the previous Government and many parents want to see their daughters educated. Sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan will rely on politics that reflect Afghanistan's rich diversity and we continue to call for inclusive governance.

With regard to terrorism, we welcome the Taliban's commitments to tackle terrorist groups and urge its members to ensure that Al-Qaida, Islamic State and other terrorist groups can never again organize, raise funds or plan attacks from Afghan territory. We took careful note of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Lyons' remarks in that regard and we will continue to calibrate our approach towards the Taliban according to its actions — not just its words — against those core priorities.

It is vital that we in the Council continue to speak with one voice in support of the United Nations work in the months ahead.

**Mrs. Nusseibeh** (United Arab Emirates): We thank Secretary-General António Guterres, Ms. Deborah Lyons, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and Ambassador Tirumurti, in his capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), for their thorough briefings. We also welcome the civil society briefer, Ms. Mahbouba Seraj, and thank her for her very valuable insights today.

Since August 2021, the United Arab Emirates has followed developments on the situation in Afghanistan with great concern, particularly the continued deterioration of the humanitarian and economic conditions on the ground. Our meeting today offers an important opportunity to consider the best way to achieve stability and security in Afghanistan, as well as how to fulfil the aspirations of the Afghan people.

It is important for tangible and measurable progress to be made with respect to the challenges facing Afghanistan, specifically with regard to forming an inclusive Government, protecting women's rights, combating terrorism and supporting humanitarian and development needs. Security and stability in Afghanistan cannot be achieved without addressing those issues.

I will start with our key priorities.

First, ensuring and protecting the rights of women and girls in all aspects of society must remain a priority, including their right to equal access to education. We also affirm the need for Afghan women and girls to have full, equal and meaningful participation in all fields, as that is an essential element of development, peace and security on the ground in Afghanistan. In that context, we must reject the exploitation and distortion of religion or culture as an excuse to deprive women and girls in Afghanistan of their basic rights. There is no religious basis for that in Afghanistan or indeed in Islam. In fact, the opposite is true.

The international community must show its solidarity with the Afghan people by providing them with the necessary life-saving humanitarian aid as they face one of the fastest-growing humanitarian and economic crises in the world. We reiterate the importance of contributing to the United Nations humanitarian response plan, which seeks to provide relief to the 22 million people in need in Afghanistan today. We also call on the Taliban to continue to facilitate and allow United Nations organizations and humanitarian actors to enjoy safe and unhindered humanitarian aid access to the areas and groups most in need.

We welcome the consensus adoption of resolution 2615 (2021), which decided that humanitarian assistance and other activities that are in support of basic human needs in Afghanistan are not in violation of the assets freeze imposed by the 1988 sanctions regime.

The United Arab Emirates continues its support for international efforts to build a more resilient and sustainable future for the Afghan people. In August 2021, we launched an air bridge, which to date has carried more than 485 tons of humanitarian aid, including medical and food supplies. We have also assisted in the evacuation of more than 40,000 individuals from Afghanistan who requested that support or whose Governments requested it. That is of course not sustainable and we must work collectively to stabilize the situation on the ground and the liquidity crisis as well, in a robust and accountable way.

The United Arab Emirates will continue to provide assistance through its humanitarian institutions, while at the same time coordinating its approach to Afghanistan as a proactive member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). We welcome Special Representative of the Secretary-General Lyons' update that she is closely cooperating with the OIC Special Envoy for Afghanistan as an important step in that direction.

The United Arab Emirates also joins the international community in expressing its deep concern about the threat posed by terrorism to the security of Afghanistan and neighbouring and regional countries. Over the course of the recent period, we have witnessed violent terrorist attacks in Afghanistan that have claimed the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians.

We condemn those attacks in the strongest terms and call on the Taliban to take the necessary measures to combat terrorism in Afghanistan, sever ties with all terrorist groups worldwide and prevent such groups from using Afghanistan to threaten or attack other countries.

We stress here that terrorism in Afghanistan is an international threat, the fight against which requires regional and international support and cooperation. Supporting the social and economic development of Afghanistan will also significantly contribute to preventing the spread of extremism, as others have said earlier today. We also affirm the need to promote peaceful coexistence in Afghanistan and protect the full fabric of Afghan society, including religious minorities, who have been targeted in recent attacks.

We look forward to reviewing the Secretary-General's strategic and operational recommendations for UNAMA's mandate that will be issued at the end of this month. With regard to the developments that

Ms. Lyons mentioned on the positive engagement of the Taliban with UNAMA, we hope they will contribute to ensuring the success of the Mission in implementing its mandate.

We take this opportunity to stress the vital role that UNAMA and all United Nations personnel play in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan. We thank them for their work. The United Arab Emirates believes that, going forward, the situation will require a robust UNAMA mandate so that it is best able to contribute to maintaining international peace and security in Afghanistan.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates looks forward to supporting international efforts to achieve security and stability in Afghanistan and we hope to see positive developments in that direction so that the aspirations of the Afghan people for a dignified life and stable prosperous future can be met.

**Mr. Hoxha** (Albania): Let me also thank the Secretary-General for his evaluation of the situation and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Lyons and Ms. Seraj for the information they provided.

I also thank our colleague from India, in his capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), for his update on the work of the Sanctions Committee.

Six months after the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan continues to be at a crossroads. Every indicator is in the red and the world remains rightfully concerned about a wide range of key issues linked to the dire humanitarian situation, bleak economic prospects, poor governance, weak institutions, serious threats to the rights of women and girls, fear of terrorism, increasing internal instability and the mass exodus of refugees. With such prospects, it is not easy to find a glimmer of hope.

Let me make five key points.

First, calls for an all-inclusive Government in Afghanistan have so far not been answered. We support the people of Afghanistan in their hopes and expectations of peace, justice and development. The country needs to engage in an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process of national reconciliation. Only an inclusive and negotiated political settlement offers a sustainable future for all the Afghan people. We welcome the ongoing talks in Oslo.

The important gains achieved in the past 20 years are not only under serious and continuous threat but as we heard are being systematically dismantled. The Taliban must be clearly and firmly told that is the wrong course. It must understand that a responsible Government needs the full strength, talent and diversity of the Afghan people. We have seen it elsewhere and we also know from our own experience that the full, equal and meaningful participation of women is a prerequisite for social cohesion, political stability and meaningful progress.

Albania urges the Security Council to place a clear priority on women's involvement in the processes that shape their future. We owe that to the Afghan women, many of whom have given everything and risk their lives for peace and dignity, including those today who are unaccounted for and for whom the Taliban must answer. Ms. Seraj is just one among those courageous women who have not given up and are not afraid of men with weapons.

Secondly, it is impossible not to be alarmed by the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, especially during the winter. We applaud the tremendous efforts that the United Nations is making on the ground, despite various challenges, to alleviate the suffering of those in absolute need as much as possible. We urge the Taliban to facilitate full, safe and unimpeded access to humanitarian organizations and their personnel, regardless of gender.

Thirdly, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of the press, in Afghanistan should remain an important objective. Living in safety, security and dignity for all, including women and girls, young people, children and minorities, should not be a dream but a reality.

The Council needs to stand firmly in favour of the rights of women and girls to full and equal access to education, to health care, to freedom of movement in their own country and to participate fully in public life. Those are not gifts — they are universal rights. Women and girls in Afghanistan must be treated as equal citizens. Gender-based discrimination and violence against women and girls have no place in Afghanistan, or anywhere else in the world.

Fourthly, there is no doubt that terrorism remains a danger in Afghanistan. The country must never again become a haven for international terrorism, and its authorities must stand by the standards and norms of

international law. Afghan territory must not be used to threaten or attack any other country, to shelter or train terrorists or to plan or finance terrorist acts. The Taliban must unambiguously break ties with all international terrorist organizations.

Fifthly, Albania supports the vital role and activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in the country. We commend the work of the Mission on the ground despite the financial shortfalls, the logistical challenges and the increasingly complex geopolitical situation. We look forward to the Secretary-General's report and its recommendations and advocate for a stronger role and a strengthened mandate of the United Nations in Afghanistan.

*(spoke in French)*

The Council can and must do more to help the Afghan people. If we are to keep our promises, it is essential that we act with clarity, with determination and, most important, with unity. Albania will remain engaged in efforts aimed at helping the Afghan people to build their future. More than 2,000 Afghan refugees who have found shelter in Albania have seen their lives transformed. We would soon like to see similar prospects realized for all Afghans, including children, girls and women, in their own country. We must judge the authorities, as Special Representative Lyons rightly pointed out, not by their words but by their actions.

**Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil):** I thank the Secretary-General for his intervention and Ms. Lyons for her valuable information on the situation on the ground. I also thank Ambassador Tirumurti for his assessment as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) and Ms. Seraj for her presentation. I also welcome the delegations of Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The international community cannot turn a blind eye to the Afghan people in their time of need. The fate of millions of families facing hardships depends on a quick response to the worsening humanitarian crisis. I wish to express Brazil's support for the Afghanistan humanitarian response plan and the Afghanistan situation regional refugee preparedness and response plan. The United Nations must act urgently and with one voice to ensure that the Afghan people will not be abandoned.

In an effort commensurate with Brazil's humanitarian commitments and responsibilities, we have established a humanitarian visa policy to help those affected by the situation in Afghanistan, with a particular focus on women and girls. We have already authorized more than 600 such visas for persons in need, helping them to find refuge and dignity in our country with the support and solidarity of Brazilian civil society and host communities.

However, emergency humanitarian assistance will not be enough to stabilize the country. Brazil considers it essential to take measures that favour long-term development so that the scenes we witness today are not repeated in the future.

In December, the Security Council adopted resolution 2615 (2021), which determined that the provision of humanitarian assistance does not constitute a violation of the sanctions regime. We must go beyond that important step and address Afghanistan's urgent liquidity crisis. If Afghanistan is to have a chance at preventing a severe economic downturn and a dreadful rise in poverty and hunger, Afghan financial institutions must have access to its assets, which are currently subject to unilateral sanctions. We therefore appeal to the countries concerned to consider the issue in the light of Afghanistan's critical humanitarian situation.

Nevertheless, we must continue to demand that de facto authorities adhere to the provisions of the relevant Security Council resolutions. For Brazil, that includes four main issues: first, the formation of an inclusive Government, with the participation of women and ethnic and religious minorities; secondly, respect for women's right to work and girls' free access to education at all levels; thirdly, adherence to the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol II, on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Paris Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration, as well as the 2014 road map to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces; and fourthly, credible and decisive action against the use of Afghan territory by terrorist organizations.

The Afghan crisis poses a threat to the lives of millions of families in Afghan territory and neighbouring countries. Moreover, its continuation seriously jeopardizes regional peace and stability.

**Mr. Tirumurti (India):** I thank the Secretary-General for his insights and the Special Representative,

Ms. Deborah Lyons, for her briefing. I would like to express my delegation's appreciation for the work done by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in these challenging times. I also thank Ms. Mahbouba Seraj for sharing her insights with us.

As an immediate neighbour and long-standing partner of Afghanistan, the recent developments in Afghanistan — particularly the deteriorating humanitarian situation — continue to be of concern. India also shares the concern of the international community on issues related to providing immediate humanitarian assistance, ensuring the formation of a truly inclusive and representative Government, combating terrorism and drug trafficking and preserving the rights of women, children and minorities.

India's approach to Afghanistan has always been guided by its historical friendship with its people. Our special relationship with the Afghan people and the guidance spelled out in resolution 2593 (2021) will continue to guide India's approach to Afghanistan. We remain steadfast in our commitment to providing humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

In that endeavour, India has committed to provide the Afghan people with 50,000 metric tons of wheat, as well as life-saving medicines and 1 million doses of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccines. We have already dispatched three shipments of humanitarian assistance materials consisting of medicines, including COVID-19 medicines, which were handed over to the World Health Organization and the Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital in Kabul.

Last month, we joined other Council members in supporting the adoption of resolution 2615 (2021) in order to provide humanitarian assistance for the people of Afghanistan, while ensuring that the Security Council exercises its oversight to guard against any possible diversion of funds and misuse of exemptions from sanctions. We also supported the call of the international community for access to humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan to be direct and without any hindrance. We reiterate that humanitarian assistance should be based on the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence and that the disbursement of aid should be non-discriminatory and accessible to all, irrespective of ethnicity, religion or political belief. In particular, assistance should reach the most vulnerable first — including women, children and minorities. 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 humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

Terrorism continues to pose a serious threat to Afghanistan and the region. Resolution 2593 (2021) clearly outlines the international community's expectations on a range of critical and immediate issues. It lays down the requirements in terms of the fight against terrorism, while noting the commitment of the Taliban not to allow the use of Afghan soil for terrorism, including for terrorists and terrorist groups designated under resolution 1267 (1999). However, we need to see concrete progress in ensuring that such proscribed terrorist entities do not get any support — tacit or direct — either from Afghanistan or the terrorist sanctuaries based in the region.

Resolution 2593 (2021) also lays out the expectations of the international community in terms of the need for an inclusive and representative political settlement, with meaningful participation by 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.

Peace and security in Afghanistan is a critical imperative that all of us need to collectively strive for. The recent developments in Afghanistan will have a significant impact on neighbouring countries and the wider region, with global implications. India calls for an inclusive dispensation in Afghanistan that represents all sections of Afghan society. A broad-based, inclusive and representative formation is necessary for 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 look forward to receiving the report and believe that it should contain holistic recommendations from a strategic perspective. When the Council decides on the future of the UNAMA mandate in March this year, its focus needs to be centred on the welfare, well-being and expectations of the Afghan people.

**The President:** I wish to again remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order for the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

**Mr. Faiq (Afghanistan):** Allow me to begin by thanking Norway, as President of the Security Council, for organizing this high-level briefing on the situation in Afghanistan and for its continued peace mediation efforts while upholding and protecting human rights principles, including the rights of women and girls, promoting the women and peace and security agenda and advocating for the protection of civilians in Afghanistan.

I would also like to thank His Excellency the Secretary-General and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Lyons for their powerful and candid remarks about the ongoing situation in Afghanistan and the crucial role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) at this critical juncture.

I further wish to thank His Excellency Ambassador Tirumurti, Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), for his assessment, as well as Ms. Mahbouba Seraj for her insightful statement and presentation.

I speak on behalf of the people of Afghanistan, who have endured four unbearable decades of conflict, and on behalf of 28 million Afghans, including women and girls, who are suffering from hunger, poverty and the deprivation of their fundamental human and Islamic rights and who must not be abandoned.

I speak on behalf of Afghanistan's civil servants in different Afghan institutions, including career diplomats, who for the past two decades have worked with integrity for a common vision in implementing a republican system that would serve the national interests of Afghanistan and its people, in partnership with the international community.

I speak to legitimately represent the shared values and achievements made in Afghanistan and the blood and treasure sacrificed by our people and the international community since 2001 in order to voice before the Security Council the rightful demands and concerns of the people of Afghanistan over the uncertain future and the fate of our country.

I would like to underline that I do not represent the former Government of Afghanistan, led by Ashraf Ghani, which has lost its national and international legitimacy, and neither do I represent the interests of any political group.

For more than 40 years, my country's men and women have suffered from relentless wars and violence — and there is no end in sight to their pain, suffering and misery. I am almost the same age as the war going on in my country. As an Afghan who was born and raised in Afghanistan, I have experienced the adverse impacts of war at first hand.

The brutal conflict has caused bloodshed, poverty and the destruction of infrastructure in the country. I have seen how millions of Afghans, including women and children, have lost their lives, become disabled or been forced to leave their homes, their families and the country they love. Unfortunately, our aspiration to achieve peace remains no more than a dream.

The past five months have seen an intensification in the dire humanitarian, political, economic and social crisis in Afghanistan. That is happening in the aftermath of shared failure and inaction by all sides, but is largely due to the continuous disruption of intra-Afghan peace talks by former President Ashraf Ghani and his Government and, finally, their irresponsible and sudden flight from the country, which led to the collapse of the republic.

That event sealed the definitive failure of the peace talks, which could have achieved a negotiated political settlement supported by national, regional and international partners. That failure also enabled the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban and the disastrous consequences of destroying the common achievements of the past 20 years and the immediate hopes for a better future in Afghanistan.

As a result, more than half of the Afghan population, including men, women and children, are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance today and are faced with a lack of food, shelter and essential health services in the harsh winter. Politically, the Taliban de facto authorities have not been recognized by the international community, as they have failed to fulfil their commitments, including the formation of an inclusive and accountable Government to provide essential services to the Afghan people while ensuring respect for human rights principles, including the rights of women and girls and other minorities.

Against that backdrop, I would like to share the following points for consideration by the Security Council to save the Afghan people from the current situation.

First, I would like to underline the urgency of addressing the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan as a top priority. I would like to support and echo the call by the Secretary-General to find practical ways to rapidly inject cash into the Afghan economy to pay the salaries of public sector officials, teachers and health-care workers and to prevent the banking sector from collapsing. The delivery of humanitarian aid is crucial to saving the lives of Afghan people. It should be channelled and delivered to vulnerable Afghans based on transparent mechanisms.

Let me express our deep appreciation to the United Nations, regional and international donors for the great steps taken so far, including the generous humanitarian support provided and the hosting of Afghan refugees, evacuations and all other measures, such as the unanimous adoption of resolution 2615 (2021), which provides a humanitarian exemption, and the launch of the 2022 Afghanistan humanitarian response plan. I urge Council members to support the funding of the humanitarian response plan and to continue their humanitarian support for the sake of the Afghan people.

Secondly, while humanitarian aid delivery is key as a stop-gap solution, I would like to highlight the importance of channelling development aid to Afghanistan to avoid the regression of progress made so far and to resume economic development projects in order to create job opportunities and help further sustainable development. That will require the establishment of a legitimate State through the formation of an inclusive and accountable Government, based on integrity, competence and merit, with professionals, including women, who are committed to the national interests of Afghanistan. The international community's support for the formation of an inclusive and accountable Government in its engagements with the Taliban is imperative.

Third, the fundamental human rights and freedom of expression of all Afghan citizens, including women, girls and minorities, must not be compromised or negotiated. Unfortunately, there are concerns over reports from United Nations entities, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International that indicate serious violations of human rights by the Taliban in

Afghanistan, including gender-based discrimination against women and girls, the detaining of journalists, human rights activists and peaceful protesters and the torture and summary executions and forced disappearance of former Government officials and members of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces across Afghanistan.

I call on the Taliban to put an end to such human rights violations, honour its general amnesty, allow women to work and open the doors of schools and universities to girls. I would also like to express my concern about the disappearance of two activists, Tamana Zaryabi Paryani and Parawana Ibrahimkhel, as well as Alia Azizi, a senior female prison official, who have been missing. I would like to call on the Taliban to provide information regarding their whereabouts and immediately release them.

Fourth, we must sustain the achievements of the past 20 years and not let the international investment go to waste. If the international community does not act to address the current crisis, Afghanistan will lose all those gains, especially its human capital through a brain drain and migration. Moreover, more than 70 per cent of the Afghan population is young, and there are no job opportunities. If there are no job opportunities and legitimate sources of income, there is a high risk of terrorist groups recruiting and misusing that young generation, which will promote extremism and fundamentalism and once again turn Afghanistan into a terrorist hub, posing a potential threat to the country itself, the region and the world. In addition, the influx of Afghan migrants and refugees into neighbouring countries will further overwhelm regional humanitarian capabilities.

Fifth, while we appreciate all the efforts of regional and international partners to convene conferences and address the situation in Afghanistan by hosting and facilitating dialogues between Afghans and the Taliban, we would like to request that the Council convene an international conference, led by the United Nations, for the holding of intra-Afghan talks to start negotiations among key Afghan stakeholders, including persons not involved in corruption and criminal cases, public figures with a good reputation and background, civil servants, career diplomats, civil society and human rights activists, to work on a political road map towards the formation of an inclusive and accountable Government, paving the way for the amendment of the

Constitution and enabling the Afghan people to elect their leaders and representatives through elections.

Sixth, I would like to request the freezing and confiscation of all Afghan assets illegally transferred to the accounts of former Government officials who were involved in corruption and the embezzlement of international aid for the Afghan people. They must be held accountable and tried. It is unfair that 28 million people starve and mothers sell their children to survive, while those corrupt former Government officials live in luxurious houses and villas in various countries around the globe. We also call on Member States and all international partners not to provide them with asylum and platforms to engage politically or speak about Afghanistan, as that will further hurt the feelings of Afghan people, harm countries' international interests and, ultimately, undermine the efforts of the international community and partners to achieve any future political settlement in Afghanistan.

Seventh, I would like to stress that the role of the United Nations in addressing the current situation in Afghanistan through the coordination and delivery of humanitarian aid in a political settlement is now more crucial than ever. We particularly applaud and support the important role being played by UNAMA, and look forward to a greater and more robust role for UNAMA in its mandate renewal in March.

Lastly, I call on the Taliban to comply with its national and international commitments and seek its national legitimacy from the Afghan people by ensuring safety, security and a dignified life for all Afghan citizens, without discrimination, where their social, economic and political rights are fully respected and protected. This is a time that demands that the Taliban act responsibly for the sake of the interests, well-being and rights of every single Afghan, including women and girls. To save Afghanistan from the ongoing crisis, the Taliban must prove its intentions and commitment through tangible actions to benefit the people of Afghanistan, leaving no one behind, regardless of gender or ethnicity. Otherwise, its inaction will exacerbate the current crisis and lead to a humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan.

I thank everyone for their statements and expressions of support to the Afghan people at today's meeting. The Security Council has at its disposal all the relevant tools to save Afghanistan.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Uzbekistan.

**Mr. Ibragimov (Uzbekistan):** First of all, let me commend Norway for convening this meeting on the situation in Afghanistan. Taking this opportunity, I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Deborah Lyons, Ambassador Tirumurti, Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), and civil society representative Ms. Mahbouba Seraj for their informative briefings.

For centuries, the Uzbek and Afghan peoples have lived side by side in a single cultural and civilizational space. Both countries are linked with each other through centuries-old bonds of friendship, a shared history, religion, customs and traditions. Therefore, Uzbekistan has always pursued a friendly policy towards that fraternal neighbouring nation based on the principles of mutual respect, equality, non-interference in internal affairs and consideration of mutual interests.

In Tashkent, we believe that today it is important for the international community to maintain a constructive dialogue with the new authorities in Kabul in order to engage and encourage them to honour their promises and international obligations, such as the formation of an inclusive Government based on a broad representation, ensuring the fundamental rights and freedoms of their people, including women and national minorities.

The Afghan nation is currently in a very difficult situation. The country is almost on the verge of a humanitarian crisis. Therefore, we believe that the international community should make the necessary efforts to prevent its further deterioration. For its part, last September and December Uzbekistan sent necessary humanitarian aid consisting of foodstuffs, daily necessities, clothes and coal to the Afghan people.

Currently, humanitarian aid not only from Uzbekistan but also from other regional countries and international organizations, including the United Nations, is being transported to Afghanistan through the Uzbek border city of Termez. In order to efficiently and effectively utilize the resources allocated by the international community and ensure the timely and targeted delivery of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan on a systematic basis, the Uzbek side recently proposed establishing a multifunctional hub in Termez city under United Nations auspices. One should note that Termez city has all the necessary infrastructure for such purposes — an airport, a railway and highways

connected with Afghanistan, as well as a large logistics terminal, the Termez Cargo Centre, located in close proximity to the border with Afghanistan, which has modern equipment and sufficient storage facilities. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Programme have already used the terminal for delivering humanitarian aid to Afghanistan.

In Uzbekistan, we believe that, in order to pull Afghanistan out of the current deep socioeconomic crisis, it is important to unfreeze the country's foreign financial assets, lift unilateral sanctions and encourage the more active participation of international institutions in financing various infrastructure projects in the country.

Uzbekistan supports the continued implementation of socioeconomic projects, including in the areas of energy and transportation. In particular, Uzbekistan is ready, jointly with the Afghan side, to implement two major projects — the construction of the Surkhan-Pul-e-Khumri power transmission line and the Termez-Mazar-e-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railroad. In addition, Uzbek specialists have recently completed work on resuming operations at the international airport in Mazar-e-Sharif.

At the same time, Uzbekistan remains convinced that the territory of Afghanistan should never again be used as a safe haven for various international terrorist groups. During our regular contacts with the new authorities in Kabul, the latter have given us assurances that the territory of Afghanistan will never again pose a threat to its immediate neighbours or to any other third countries.

In conclusion, I would like to echo the Secretary-General's statement earlier today that at this difficult time we should not abandon the Afghan people, who are facing their most challenging problems. We believe that the United Nations should continue to play a leading role in mobilizing and coordinating international efforts in rendering assistance to Afghanistan.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Mr. Takht Ravanchi** (Islamic Republic of Iran): Afghanistan is facing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Since the most recent meeting of the Security Council on this issue, in November 2021 (see

S/PV.8908), the situation has been deteriorating, with no sign of progress in sight.

According to United Nations reports, more than 24 million people need humanitarian aid, and half of the population faces acute hunger. Furthermore, more than 9 million people are displaced. If left unchecked, the situation could lead to the socioeconomic collapse of the country and to tragic impoverishment for the entire nation.

The Islamic Republic of Iran expresses its serious concern over the possible devastating consequences of that situation on the security and stability of the region, including neighbouring countries. During the last 40 years, Iran has done everything in its power to support the Afghan people. That has been the official policy of our Government, endorsed by our Supreme Leader. We have dispatched humanitarian convoys, including food, medicine and medical supplies, to Afghanistan.

After the Taliban's takeover last summer, we did not close our border with Afghanistan, and currently normal trade between the two sides is ongoing. During this winter season, it is crucial to continue the provision of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. Since last August, thousands of Afghans have been entering Iran on a daily basis. The overall situation inside Afghanistan has a direct effect on the decision of the population to stay or to leave the country for neighbouring countries and beyond.

While the United States' inhumane sanctions have created tremendous difficulties for our Government and our people, various services, including education, health care and medical treatment, are being provided to the Afghan people living in Iran, with minimal assistance from the international community. Furthermore, concurrently with the vaccination programme of our population, we have also been vaccinating Afghan refugees against the coronavirus disease.

However, owing to the imposition of United States sanctions, our financial resources are restrained. Obviously, if the international community fails to provide sufficient assistance to the Afghan people living in Iran in a timely manner, we will be unable, on our own, to continue our support for Afghan refugees, a huge number of whom are seeking to go to Europe through Iran.

We once again call on the international community and in particular donor countries to live up to their

responsibilities and extend new and additional financial resources to Afghanistan's neighbours to help refugees and displaced persons. Moreover, the release of Afghanistan's frozen assets, which is essential to reviving Afghanistan's economy and saving people's lives, should in no way be politicized or conditional.

We support the commendable efforts made thus far by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and other United Nations agencies in Afghanistan and welcome in that respect the launch of the recent mechanism, namely, the One-UN Transitional Engagement Framework, as well as the virtual joint launch by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees of the humanitarian and regional refugee response plan. Those initiatives are important steps that need to be strengthened along with other efforts to address and meet the needs of the Afghan people and refugee-hosting countries.

We take note of the unanimously adopted resolution 2615 (2021), on the exemption of humanitarian assistance and other activities from the sanctions regime. We hope that the resolution can facilitate the timely provision of humanitarian aid to the people in need.

Along with humanitarian issues, other legitimate concerns such as the need for the establishment of an inclusive and representative Government in Afghanistan, should continue to be emphasized by the international community. Furthermore, efforts should be made to combat terrorism and organized crime in Afghanistan, and, equally important, the promotion and protection of the human rights of all Afghans, including women and girls, should be ensured.

To that end, Iran will continue its engagement with all parties in Afghanistan, including the Taliban. Recently we hosted a high-level delegation from the Taliban and exchanged views with them along the lines I have elaborated on, particularly on the need for the establishment of an inclusive Government in Afghanistan that truly represents the multi-ethnic Afghan society. 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.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

**Mr. Akram (Pakistan):** I would like to express my gratitude to you, Madam President, for having convened this debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and to the Prime Minister of Norway for his participation. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General and his Special Representative, Ms. Deborah Lyons, for their important briefings. I also welcome the powerful message that Ms. Mahbouba Seraj has conveyed, as well as the interesting statement by my dear brother from Afghanistan, Mr. Faiq.

We have listened to two citizens of Afghanistan. I believe that our debate would have been more interactive and more productive if we had also been able to listen to a representative of the interim Government of Afghanistan so that we could achieve some progress through these discussions.

Owing to the cumulative impact of conflict, drought, external dependency and sequestered assets, millions of Afghan men, women and children are, as the Secretary-General has described, in a race against time to avoid deaths from hunger amid a brutal winter. As the Secretary-General has himself put it, freezing temperatures and frozen assets are a lethal combination.

Without humanitarian assistance, chaos and renewed conflict could return to Afghanistan, with an exodus of refugees and an escalation of the terrorist threat. We commend the leadership of the Secretary-General in mobilizing international support for the Afghan people and the critical help being provided by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Food Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF, the World Health Organization and other United Nations bodies and non-governmental international organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, to the Afghan people.

We hope and trust that the international community will respond positively and generously to the United Nations humanitarian and refugee response appeals first launched by the Secretary-General on 11 January and today in the context of the One-UN Transitional Engagement Framework, which he has announced.

While there was never any doubt that the targeted sanctions against certain individuals and entities in Afghanistan should not prevent the provision of humanitarian, economic or development assistance to Afghanistan, the adoption of resolution 2615 (2021) has reaffirmed and clarified that understanding. Pakistan

believes that all actors can now undertake their actions in Afghanistan without fear of arbitrary censure or restraints. We welcome the release of some funds by the World Bank and urge that the rest of the allocations for Afghanistan be released forthwith. Above all, it is vital to unfreeze Afghanistan's reserves. There is no legal justification for depriving the Afghan people of their national assets. That money is critically needed to sustain, stabilize and revive the Afghan economy and to save the lives of millions of poor and hungry Afghan children, women and men. That would be the most effective and generous display of solidarity with the people of Afghanistan.

Pakistan is doing all it can to help our Afghan brothers and sisters. We have provided \$30 million in food and other assistance. We have established a land and air bridge for Afghanistan. We are helping to restore hospitals and other facilities. We have opened our borders for Afghans in need of medical support. And, of course, we will continue to care for the nearly 4 million Afghan refugees until they are able to return to their homes.

On 18 and 19 December 2021, together with Saudi Arabia, Pakistan hosted an extraordinary session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to mobilize support for Afghanistan. It has set up an OIC humanitarian trust fund and will help to revive the Afghan banking system. The OIC will work closely with the United Nations in that endeavour.

Pakistan supports the objective of an inclusive Government and respect for the human rights of all Afghans, especially those of women and girls. We are aware of the discussions that are taking place in various locations to promote such inclusivity. We hope that they will be a success.

We also know of the acting Government's assurances with regard to the provision of education for girls. We look forward to the reopening of girls' schools next month.

We are also aware of the assurances that have been provided that the instances of arbitrary arrests and violations of human rights will be investigated. We hope that they will implement those assurances.

Pakistan reaffirms the importance of combating terrorism in Afghanistan and ensuring that the territory of Afghanistan is not used as a platform or safe haven by any terrorist group or organization. We are glad that

the sponsors of terrorism against Pakistan have been obliged to exit from Afghanistan. It is important that the international community engage with the Taliban in order to develop appropriate modalities for cooperative action against terrorism from Afghanistan. That is a principal priority for Pakistan.

Pakistan believes that the international community should continue and enhance its engagement with the new Government in Afghanistan, utilizing all available formats — the extended troika, the six-neighbours platform, the OIC and other multilateral and bilateral consultations, such as those convened by Norway earlier this week in Oslo. It is only through dialogue and consultations and mutual persuasion that we will be able to achieve agreed outcomes. Coercion is not the road to peace in Afghanistan. It has not been for the past 20 years, and it will not be in the future.

We support the proposal of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to develop a pathway — I call it a road map — to stabilize Afghanistan. That should incorporate the expectations of the international community for inclusivity, human and women's rights and counter-terrorism, as well as the expectations that have been voiced by the interim Afghan Government for economic and financial support, an end to sanctions and eventual recognition.

UNAMA is playing an important role at this critical moment of transition. We welcome the close cooperation established between UNAMA and the new authorities. UNAMA will continue to have an important role in the future in coordinating and ensuring timely and expedited delivery of humanitarian and emergency assistance, supporting the revival of the Afghan economy and financial system, building the capacity of Afghan institutions and facilitating the revival and implementation of reconstruction and connectivity projects. We look forward to the report of the Secretary-General on the new UNAMA mandate, which should enjoy the endorsement and full support of the interim Afghan Government and respect Afghanistan's sovereignty.

As we meet today, there are reasons for concern, and we have heard them. But there are also reasons for optimism. We are encouraged that, after 40 years, there is no internal conflict in Afghanistan. There are no foreign forces in Afghanistan. There is one Government, which controls the entire country. Internal security has improved. And corruption has been curtailed. There

is an opportunity for sustained peace in Afghanistan, which can end the suffering of the Afghan people and enhance peace and stability in the entire region. Pakistan has a vital stake in realizing such a vision of peace and stability.

**The President:** There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I shall now adjourn the meeting so that the Council can continue its discussion in closed consultations.

*The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.*