



Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

9075th meeting

Thursday, 23 June 2022, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Hoxha (Albania)

Members:

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China	Mr. Zhang Jun
France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
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United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Alhefeiti
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Kariuki
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Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2022/485)

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22-39857 (E)



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

Expression of sympathy in connection with the earthquake in Afghanistan

The President: On behalf of the members of the Security Council, I would like to convey my condolences to the people of Afghanistan and to the families of the victims following the powerful earthquake that struck Afghanistan yesterday near the city of Khost. More than 1,000 have been reported killed or injured, and that tragic toll might continue to rise. We reiterate our sympathy and solidarity and wish a speedy recovery to those injured.

May I ask those present to now rise and observe a minute of silence for those who have lost their lives?

The members of the Security Council observed a minute of silence.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2022/485)

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: Mr. Ramiz Alakbarov, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan; Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Ms. Yalda Hakim, journalist; and Ms. Yalda Royan, consultant for VOICE Amplified.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2022/485, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

I now give the floor to Mr. Alakbarov.

Mr. Alakbarov: I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the opportunity to address the Security Council today from Kabul as Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). As you noted just now, yesterday a deadly earthquake struck Afghanistan in the early hours of the morning as people were sleeping. So far, as of the latest information we have received, nearly 800 people have been confirmed killed and more than 1,400 injured, many of them seriously, with several thousand homes destroyed or damaged. Search-and-rescue operations are ongoing, and it is expected that the number of casualties will further increase over the coming days, along with the number of affected communities.

In the aftermath of the tremor, humanitarian actors mobilized an immediate response alongside their counterparts from the de facto authorities, where the Ministry of Defense is leading efforts by dispatching ambulances and providing medical equipment, trauma kits, medicine, mobile health teams and emergency supplies, including tents, blankets, plastic sheeting and food assistance. Inter-agency assessment teams were deployed within hours and remain in place helping to coordinate and inform the humanitarian response.

In the next 48 hours, I will be visiting the affected areas to meet with families and first-hand responders, including women's civil society groups that are working to ensure that assistance reaches women and girls, and to support overall relief efforts. I will be there with the heads of United Nations agencies, delivering aid directly to the communities and the people of Afghanistan, working together on the ground with relief agencies from civil society and the international community. Their efforts are impressive and commendable, and I appreciate their heroic efforts over the past two days.

I am sure everyone will agree that yesterday's earthquake was yet another tragic reminder of the myriad dangers facing the Afghan people at this time. My heartfelt condolences go out to the people of Afghanistan, to the families and to loved ones of those who have lost their lives, and we wish those injured a speedy recovery.

My briefing today, however, will focus on other emergencies the population in Afghanistan face today. Wednesday's earthquake is but one such emergency. I will focus on four — the human rights situation, the

economic crisis, the ongoing humanitarian emergency and the need for continued engagement with the de facto authorities.

Let me begin with the human rights situation in Afghanistan, which remains precarious. Despite the adoption of a general amnesty and repeated assurances by the de facto authorities that it is being respected, UNAMA continues to receive credible allegations of killings, ill-treatment and other violations targeting individuals associated with the former Government of Afghanistan. UNAMA also continues to receive credible allegations of violations committed by the de facto authorities against individuals accused of affiliation with the armed opposition and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP). More needs to be done by the de facto authorities to prevent such violations and demonstrate that, when they are perpetrated, violators are held accountable.

The de facto authorities have increasingly restricted the exercise of basic human rights, such as by restricting the freedom of peaceful assembly and the freedom of opinion and expression, quelling dissent and restricting civic space in the country. Those restrictions continue to be aimed particularly at the rights and freedoms of Afghan women and girls, limiting their involvement in social, political and economic life.

Those restrictions include, most prominently, the ban on secondary schooling for girls and the decision to impose a face covering on women, on which Council members have been briefed in detail by former Special Representative of the Secretary-General Deborah Lyons. The costs to the economy of those policies are immense. The psychosocial costs of being denied education, for example, are incalculable. And women are collectively being written out of society in a way that is unique in the world.

Nevertheless, let me assure the Security Council that UNAMA will remain a vocal and visible voice for safeguarding the human rights of the people of Afghanistan, specifically those of women and girls.

The second issue I want to address is the ongoing economic crisis, which is perhaps the single-most important issue in Afghanistan as a potential driver of conflict and misery. The Afghan economy has contracted an estimated 30 to 40 per cent since August; output and incomes have been reduced by 20 to 30 per cent, while there has been a 50 per cent decline in the number of households receiving remittances. It is

possible that unemployment could reach 40 per cent this year — up from 13 per cent in 2021 — and some projections indicate that poverty rates may climb as high as 97 per cent by the end of 2022.

Even more alarming, 82 per cent of households are now in debt, while the deteriorating economy offers few chances to climb out of that debt. And the coping resources that helped many families get through the winter's difficulties and the humanitarian emergency that we experienced have unfortunately been depleted. If the economy is not able to recover and grow meaningfully and sustainably, then the Afghan people will face repeated humanitarian crises, potentially spurring mass migration and making the conditions ripe for radicalization and renewed armed conflict.

At the same time, Afghanistan remains highly vulnerable to future climate change and geopolitical shocks. That comes on top of the extreme poverty and backwardness of Afghanistan's rural areas, where productivity is low and education and health services are often non-existent.

Let me be very clear: those problems are at the root of all the socioeconomic and political dilemmas that Afghanistan has faced in the past and is facing now. They need to be addressed if different social and economic outcomes are to be achieved in Afghanistan at any given time. Currently, Afghanistan is experiencing its second drought in successive years, while other emerging threats — such as floods and disease outbreaks, outbreaks of locusts and livestock diseases that impact agrarian communities and households, and natural disasters such as the recent earthquake — are deepening and aggravating pre-existing vulnerabilities.

No matter what we do, Afghan rural areas must be given priority attention, with a focus on agricultural and food systems to prevent cycles of hunger. We must help drive a grass-roots economic recovery that is anchored in the creation of value chains and developing linkages between farmers and food producers and local markets. That in turn will reduce child labour, improve health outcomes and create an enabling environment for social development and change.

It will also pave the way for substitution agriculture to replace poppy cultivation, allowing us to capitalize on the de facto authority's recent ban on poppy and narcotic cultivation. While doing so, we need to continue to provide adequate attention to the clearance of the widely unexploded ordnance of war. That bottom-

up approach to economic recovery is shared by the de facto authorities and would help the most vulnerable.

Already, the United Nations country team is implementing such approaches in rural areas through an area-based approach that channels technical and financial support directly to local communities and small enterprises, restores local small infrastructure and provides basic income support for some of the most vulnerable in society. However, funding for those types of economic recovery activities is minimal so far. We need the Council's support.

When I and other members of the United Nations senior leadership team travel around the country and meet with vulnerable affected communities, the conversations leave a lasting impression. Let me share some of them.

Afghan families are humbled and grateful for the lifeline provided by the humanitarian response. However, during the most recent episode of what has been a 40-year-long crisis, they all have three straightforward, simple and sincere requests. They want jobs to generate more income, just so they can afford to survive on their own. They want a longer-term response to the economic crisis — one that provides them with a dignified means of survival and an opportunity to look to the future. They want safety, not only for themselves but also for those they love, and that safety means freedom of movement for all, including both men and women on an equal basis. Achieving that, even in the current operational environment, should be within our reach.

With the generous support of donors, the humanitarian community has coordinated a response of unprecedented proportions to Afghanistan's massive humanitarian crisis. Between January and the end of April, humanitarian partners reached 20 million people with at least one form of assistance, including 19.3 million vulnerable people with humanitarian needs and nearly 250,000 cross-border returnees, 75,000 refugees and 95,000 people affected by floods and other weather-related events.

More than 19 million people were provided with food; more than 5 million people were provided with health care; 3 million children under 5 years of age and pregnant and lactating women were treated for acute malnutrition; 3.3 million people received access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene; 374,000 children were provided with education support; 1.2 million

people were provided with shelter and household items; and more than 2 million people were provided with protection services — all thanks to the international community's generous assistance.

Despite those achievements, the humanitarian crisis persists and will require sustained support over the course of 2022 and 2023. The Council will receive a more detailed briefing on the humanitarian needs later this morning from Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Fourthly, despite all the difficulties I have sincerely described, we continue to firmly believe that a strategy of continued engagement and dialogue remains the only way forward for the sake of the people of Afghanistan, as well as for the sake of regional and international security.

In that regard, let me welcome the appointment by the Secretary-General of Ambassador Markus Potzel of Germany as the new Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Political Affairs, who will be responsible for leading the political engagement strategy.

A few elements are important to note.

The Taliban continues to hold power almost exclusively. The emergence and persistence of an armed opposition is in large part due to political exclusion. The overall security environment is becoming increasingly unpredictable. We are seeing clashes between the forces of the de facto authorities and the armed political opposition, specifically in Panjshir and Baghlan provinces, as well as improvised explosive device attacks and targeted assassinations against de facto authority targets by both armed political opposition and ISIL-KP. Armed opposition attacks against the de facto authorities doubled in May compared to April. The number of ISIL-KP attacks has generally decreased over that same period, but their geographic scope has widened to 11 provinces where previously it was six. We cannot exclude the possibility of increased instability if people's rights are denied and if they do not see themselves included in the Government. Our strategy for the months ahead is aimed at promoting political consultation and inclusion in the longer term. In the meantime, we are engaging with the de facto authorities to increase predictability in our relationships.

Even as the international community and the Taliban remain far apart on questions of human, women's and political rights, there are some areas in which we can cooperate better to improve the lives of Afghans and make progress on issues of common concern, such as countering narcotics and taking action on mines. Establishing an agenda of common interests will help to build confidence and reduce misunderstandings. That includes types of assistance that directly support basic human needs while moving beyond pure humanitarian delivery, where possible, into sustaining livelihoods for ordinary Afghans, in accordance with the basic human needs I described earlier in the briefing.

The challenges ahead are significant and will require greater patience, but we must endure. It is the least that the Afghan people deserve. We continue to believe that it is the only way forward for their benefit and that of the international community.

The President: I thank Mr. Alakbarov for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Griffiths: Let me join the members of the Council in expressing our condolences to the families of those killed and otherwise affected by the terrible earthquake yesterday.

I would like to start by firmly associating myself with Mr. Alakbarov's remarks throughout his useful and unusually broad statement, in which he very clearly outlined the problems that he and his team and the people of Afghanistan are facing. Tellingly, I think, he ended on the issue of the need to engage with the de facto authorities on behalf of the people of Afghanistan, as increasingly difficult as that is becoming. Hats off to Mr. Alakbarov.

As Council members may know, I myself have visited Afghanistan twice — unlike Mr. Alakbarov, who lives there — to engage with the Taliban, who are the de facto authorities, and to see somewhat first-hand what Afghans must contend with every day. We shall no doubt hear more on that from our civil-society briefers. During my most recent visit, in March, I was reminded of how desperate the situation remains. I had the terrible experience, like many others, of visiting a hospital in Kabul — not even beyond the city — and seeing malnourished babies there, a sight I will not easily forget, despite a lifetime of those experiences. It was truly shocking.

As Mr. Alakbarov said, Afghanistan's worst drought in almost 30 years has affected three quarters of its provinces, in addition to everything else the country is enduring, meaning that crop production is expected to be below average this harvest. Most rural households, as we have said on other occasions, will use up their food stocks dangerously early this lean season. The economy — again as we heard from Mr. Alakbarov — continues to be the primary driver of humanitarian need across Afghanistan. There are now 25 million people living in poverty, which is more than double the number in 2011. Poverty is the most common reason people are leaving their homes in Afghanistan, while a lack of money is the main barrier to accessing basic services such as health care and electricity. Today, the average household spends almost three quarters of its income on food alone. Scaling up the humanitarian response has allowed us to avoid a potential famine, and Mr. Alakbarov provided figures on the people who have been reached in the early months of this year, throughout the winter. But we cannot afford to be complacent. Today 19 million people, or nearly half of the population, are food insecure, including 6.6 million — a staggering number — at emergency levels. That is the highest number in any country in the world at risk of famine-like conditions.

I am speaking here partly in the context of the humanitarian exception approved by the Council through its adoption of resolution 2615 (2021) in December. Its swift implementation by Member States has been critical to ensuring that humanitarian partners continue to be able to receive funds and do their work. Currently, there are more than 190 partners in Afghanistan delivering essential aid to millions of people every day. The scale-up in the humanitarian response, as we have heard, has so far reached 20 million people across all of the country's 401 districts, although clearly with varying impact depending on the district. That operation spans all sectors, with food assistance being the largest, but also including shelter, health, nutrition and more.

A key component of the Council's humanitarian exception was enabling the transfer and payment of funds and economic resources necessary for humanitarian programming to public entities such as line ministries, health facilities and the State-owned electrical company. I can assure the Council that the humanitarian groups delivering assistance in Afghanistan take the monitoring of programming and financial transfers

very seriously. A formal risk mitigation unit is being established under the leadership of Mr. Alakbarov himself, and a task force composed of organizations working in the country has already been set up. Most importantly, humanitarian organizations have doubled up on their own systems to minimize the risk of funds and economic resources being misappropriated or diverted. Those measures include spot checks, data reconciliation, photo verification, project completion certificates and complaint mechanisms, procedures that have been culled from experiences around the world but are particularly relevant, important and essential in Afghanistan today. Prior to transactions, agencies ensure that partners and suppliers are first checked against the Security Council consolidated list. Despite the difficult circumstances, agencies and partners try to ensure during distributions that community representatives and department officials are also present to monitor delivery. Of course, as elsewhere, United Nations operations also involve post-distribution monitoring. But while we are reaching record numbers of people, as Mr. Alakbarov reminded us, we still have a large hill to climb. In that regard, I would like to mention three areas where I believe there are impediments.

First, the formal banking system continues to block transfers due to excessive de-risking, which affects payment channels and causes breakdowns in supply chains. Around half of the organizations that responded to the latest monitoring survey of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported difficulties in transferring funds into Afghanistan, so while that does remain a problem, the number of respondent organizations that said the same in October last year was 87 per cent. The direction is therefore positive, but the figures remain alarming. While the situation has improved, challenges persist. Around 80 per cent of organizations are facing delays in transferring funds, with two thirds reporting that their international banks continue to deny transfers, which is exactly what the exception was designed to avoid. More than 60 per cent of organizations cite a lack of available cash in-country as a programmatic impediment.

Despite efforts to create a temporary solution to the failure of the banking system through a so-called humanitarian exchange facility, we have seen limited progress, owing to resistance, I should point out, by the de facto authorities. That issue is not going to fix itself. Under the leadership of the United Nations Assistance

Mission in Afghanistan, the underlying causes of the breakdown in the formal banking system will have to be addressed, and I know the Mission is doing all it can to do so. In the interim, we need that humanitarian exchange facility to allow for transfers that we see are still challenged.

The second impediment we face relates to engagement between humanitarian organizations and the Taliban de facto authorities. I am sorry to say that national and local authorities increasingly seek to play a role in the selection of beneficiaries and in channelling assistance to people on their own priority lists, while citing an almost universal level of need, exactly contrary to the promises made to my colleagues and me last September, as you, Mr. President, may remember.

We are also seeing more demands by the Taliban for data and information on budget and staffing contracts. That is a long-standing issue that has plagued our relationship with the Taliban for decades. Non-governmental organizations in particular face continued difficulties as they try to hire Afghan women in certain functions.

There are more instances of interference today than in previous months, most of which are resolved through engagement with the relevant de facto authorities. However, for every issue that is resolved another one emerges, sometimes in the same location with the same departments. There is now a much more palpable frustration felt by aid organizations, local communities and local authorities. Interference cause delays in programming and, of course, compromises access to services.

The situation of women and girls remains as concerning now as it has ever been — in fact, it is worse than ever before. The de facto authorities' announcement in March that secondary schools for girls above sixth grade would not reopen affects more than 1 million secondary schoolgirls. That announcement was a major mistake at the time, and it has not been rescinded. In no other country in the world has a Government banned girls from secondary school. That is once again contrary to the letter and spirit of the promises made to the United Nations last year.

Other announcements, including the requirement that women travel beyond certain distances with a *mahram*, or chaperone, further constrain women's ability to access life-saving assistance and services.

The third impediment is that we simply do not have enough funding. Mr. Alakbarov was absolutely right about the generosity of Member States; it has been considerable. However, only one third of the resources needed for this year's humanitarian response plan has been received. We have a response plan of just over \$4 billion. We have received just one third of that amount, despite pledges made of approximately \$2.4 billion at our launch in March. Many of those pledges have not yet turned into receipts.

We face a \$3 billion funding gap for the last six months of this year. Afghanistan is perhaps in as difficult a situation in terms of the gap between funding and needs as any other place in the world. I would like to associate myself again with the points made by Mr. Alakbarov. Now is not the time for hesitancy. Without intervention, funding, humanitarian assistance and basic services, it will be another winter of discontent, trouble and pain for the people of Afghanistan. Drought will persist — we almost forget it — wreaking havoc on crop yields and putting those 6.6 million people in Afghanistan on the edge of a catastrophe.

I think that the aid community in Afghanistan has managed extraordinary achievements over the past year, but much more needs to be done, and much more can be done. We must address economic and banking paralysis. We must expand and improve the footprint around the country. We must continue advocacy for rights but, more important, this is also where we, including Mr. Alakbarov, need to engage. Now is not the time to disengage and leave Afghanistan to a bleak future. Now is the time to redouble our engagement.

The President: I thank Mr. Griffiths for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Hakim.

Ms. Hakim: My name is Yalda Hakim, and I am an international correspondent and news presenter for BBC News.

As mentioned, in the past 48 hours there have been terrible developments in Afghanistan, with an earthquake in the east of the country leaving more than 1,000 dead. Hundreds of families are now homeless, and there are reports of people remaining trapped under the rubble.

I come here today not as an activist or policymaker but as a journalist and someone who has been reporting from Afghanistan for the past 15 years. I also come here today as a daughter of Afghanistan. I have a very

personal and deep connection with the nation. It is the country of my birth.

In my remarks today, I hope to share some of my observations drawn from my years of reporting on Afghanistan. I also hope I can convey to Security Council members some of the questions that I am often asked by Afghans, in particular the women and girls in Afghanistan, whose voices are especially important and should be heard at this time.

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan on 15 August of last year has had a transformative impact on the position of women and girls in Afghan society. Today marks 279 days since the Taliban banned teenage girls from school. As Mr. Griffiths said, Afghanistan is now the only country in the world in which girls are prevented from receiving an education. They are locked out of their classrooms simply because of their gender. Millions of Afghan girls across Afghanistan have been forced to contemplate a life without formal education.

During my last trip to the country, in December 2021, I met 42-year-old Sheila Dost. Sheila held back tears as she told me about the day she took her two young children to demonstrate against Taliban restrictions on girls' education. She relayed to me how she explained to her children that they were risking their lives for the protest, but it was a price worth paying if it helped to allow girls to return to school.

Before the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan, the mother of three was a teacher at a secondary school. However, like millions of other female Government workers, Sheila was ordered to stop going to work. She now sits at home alongside her 12-year-old daughter, Mursal, who has been banned from attending school.

Sheila was a teenager when the Taliban first came to power, in the 1990s. She told me she does not want her daughter to be deprived of an education like she was. Sheila had many hopes for her daughter's future and the future of her students. But now she feels that she has betrayed them for telling them to have big dreams. Like so many other brave and fearless Afghan women, this mother of three refuses to be erased from public life and told me that she will continue to fight for the rights of Afghan girls and women. It is that steely determination that gives Sheila and a small band of women the courage to take to the streets in protest — risking beatings, arrest or worse.

Some of the female protesters to whom I spoke told me they have had Taliban gunmen point weapons at them, pepper spray them and shout insults. We have also been hearing disturbing reports that the Taliban abduct and detain some of those female protesters. Those disappearances have sent a chill across Afghan civil society. One activist, Marzia, told me that she continues to receive threatening phone calls and now has no choice but to move from safe house to safe house.

Just last month, on 9 May, the Taliban ordered women and older girls to cover their faces when in public and avoid being outside at all, if possible. Punishments for violating the decree would be inflicted on their male family members. On 21 May, the Taliban's Ministry of Vice and Virtue ordered all women television presenters to cover their faces, stating that the decision was final and there was no room for discussion.

In response, male presenters at several major news channels in Afghanistan wore masks on air in solidarity. Female news presenter Farida Sial of *TOLOnews* told me that every day she feels a part of her is dying and that the face covering makes it extremely difficult to speak and breathe, especially for long periods of time while broadcasting.

As a journalist, I have covered many war zones. I have seen bloodshed and devastation caused by conflict. However, what is happening in Afghanistan is unique. To the best of my knowledge, it is the most sudden and significant change in the position of women to take place anywhere in the world in modern history. One year ago, Afghan girls went to school. Afghan women held positions of authority across Afghan society. All of that has been overturned with exceptional speed.

I am also here in my capacity as a philanthropist. In 2018 the Yalda Hakim Foundation was created, and for three years it sponsored scholarships for female students from the American University of Afghanistan and supported them in obtaining higher-education placements at Georgetown University in Qatar and Oxford University in the United Kingdom. Today the Foundation is continuing its work to create education opportunities for Afghans, especially girls and women. The demand for education among young Afghans is greater than ever, but the opportunities are dramatically fewer. The questions that I hear most often among young Afghans are whether the international community can provide more scholarships and how

technology can be leveraged to help Afghans who cannot leave Afghanistan continue to learn.

I am grateful to the Government of Albania for the invitation to speak to the Council today. However, the question that Afghan women and girls repeatedly ask me is if they have been forgotten. Does the outside world care, and if so, what is it prepared to do? I would ask Council members to ask themselves the answer they would give to the women and girls of Afghanistan when they ask that question.

The President: I thank Ms. Hakim for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Royan.

Ms. Royan: I am Yalda Royan from Afghanistan, the worst country in the world for women and the only country where girls are not allowed to attend school beyond the sixth grade. I represent VOICE Amplified, a feminist humanitarian organization, and I am a founding member of the Afghan Women's Advocacy Group. My heart goes out to my people hit by the earthquake. The pain of digging countless graves in a single day is devastating, and we have experienced it time and again.

Afghan women warned the Security Council that the Taliban's promises to respect women's rights were not true. We were ignored, and now we are paying the price for the negligence of the international community, including everyone sitting at this table. Under the Taliban, we have witnessed vicious atrocities, severe hunger and the suppression of our human rights. Activists and journalists have stopped working out of fear of retaliation. Since August, the Taliban has announced more than 30 policies that are systematically eliminating women from public life and only some of which have made international headlines.

The Taliban is imposing these edicts through intimidation and violence. For example, in April the Taliban brutally tortured and killed a young midwife in Mazar-e-Sharif. They amputated her legs, stabbed her and then shot her 12 times, simply because she was a woman and a Hazara. Yet Afghan women continue to risk their lives by protesting against such violations of their human rights by the Taliban. In addition, hundreds of former officials, as well as anyone who resists Taliban rule, have been targeted, tortured or killed. Tajiks in Panjshir, Baghlan and Takhar provinces continue to be arbitrarily arrested, killed, tortured or forcibly displaced. On 10 June, the Taliban arrested

Zamanuddin, a Tajik student, along with his brother in Panjshir. They asked him to reveal the location of the National Resistance Front's bases. When he said he did not know, the Taliban cut off one of his ears, shot him in the eye and threw him off a mountain. His brother was also killed. That is the true face of the Taliban, which is seeking the Council's recognition and legitimacy.

According to local activists, since March the Kuchis have attacked Hazaras in Behsud, Malistan, Jaghori, and Shaikh Ali districts, killing and injuring 31 people, burning hundreds of houses and taking 21 people hostage, most of whom are still missing. Hazaras were also targeted in eight explosions in April alone, but the condemnation by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) of those attacks did not even mention the victims' ethnicity. I want to ask the Security Council how many more Hazaras must be killed for such acts to be recognized as the crime of genocide, committed with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, in whole or in part?

In March, the Council took an important step by renewing UNAMA's mandate and putting human rights, including women's rights, at the core of its work. While UNAMA has failed us in the past, it now has the potential to meaningfully serve the Afghan people going forward. Despite the numerous shocking violations such as those I just detailed, UNAMA had not publicly reported those atrocities until now, and neither has it published a regular report on the protection of civilians since July 2021. In many instances, the numbers reported by UNAMA have also been vastly undercounted. For instance, UNAMA reported 10 extrajudicial killings of individuals accused of being affiliated with the National Resistance Front in the past five months, while local communities found 10 bodies in the Panjshir river in the past two weeks alone. In addition, many Afghans believe that UNAMA has lacked neutrality when engaging with the Taliban and has whitewashed their atrocities. UNAMA should resume regular public reporting immediately, and all its reports should provide accurate and unvarnished information that reflects the realities on the ground.

The Taliban has not formed a representative Government. We have so far seen no meaningful efforts by UNAMA to facilitate inclusive dialogue among Afghans, the Taliban, and the international community in order to put Afghanistan on a path to peace. In order to be credible in the eyes of Afghans,

UNAMA must prioritize the participation of diverse Afghan women's organizations and politicians in exile. It cannot engage solely with Taliban leaders in any future political process.

UNAMA is required to coordinate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all Afghans without discrimination. Yet the Taliban continues to manipulate aid distribution, making sure that its followers and regions benefit from that assistance while households headed by women and marginalized ethnic groups do not, and demonstrating why respect for human rights cannot be secondary to humanitarian concerns. If UNAMA fails to ensure accountability for the diversion of aid, the Taliban will continue its terrorist activities using United Nations aid.

While the members of Afghan civil society are deeply sceptical of the Council's commitment, they wanted me to tell Council members that condemning the Taliban's abuses will be successful only if it is backed up by action. It is not just the security and stability of Afghanistan that is at stake. Under the Taliban, our country is once again fast becoming the shelter of choice for terrorist groups whose activities will not stop at our borders. I therefore call on the Council to take the following action.

It should end all exemptions for sanctioned Taliban leaders if there is no progress on women's rights in 60 days. On Monday, the Council renewed travel exemptions for 13 Taliban leaders. While removing Said Ahmed Shahidkhel and Abdul Baqi Basir Awal Shah and shortening the duration of the exemption were positive steps, Afghan civil society was deeply disappointed that the Security Council did not send a stronger message to the Taliban that their utter disregard for human rights closes the door on any further dialogue. If Afghan women cannot move freely, why should the Taliban be able to? Over the next 60 days, the Council should closely monitor the Taliban's policies on women's rights. If it fails to reverse its recent policies violating women's rights, including the ban on girls' education and restrictions on women's movement, dress and right to work, or enact any further restrictions, the Council should not renew travel exemptions or lift asset freezes for any Taliban leader. The Council should also end exemptions for Abdul-Haq Wassiq, General Director of Intelligence, and Fazl Mohammad Mazloom, Deputy Minister of Defence, who are responsible for human rights violations that include the arrest, detention and repression of human rights defenders and journalists.

The Council should call on UNAMA to prioritize facilitating an inclusive intra-Afghan dialogue as soon as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General has been appointed. The Doha process, which the Security Council endorsed, was deeply flawed because it was negotiated without Afghans at the table. But an inclusive, intra-Afghan dialogue, which the Council has called for, is the only viable path to peace. UNAMA must ensure the participation of all Afghans, including women, and all ethnic groups. Leaving Afghanistan in the hands of a dangerous and incompetent dictatorship will only perpetuate poverty and violence.

I also urge Council members to support all efforts to hold the Taliban accountable for its past and ongoing abuses. The Council should support and provide full resources for the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan and ensure he has full access to all parts of the country. It should support the establishment of a fact-finding mission or other investigative mechanism to monitor, collect evidence and regularly report on human rights violations and abuses committed by all parties. If the Council wants the Taliban, or anyone else, to take it seriously, its members must follow through on their words of support for women's rights. The Council must hold UNAMA accountable for implementing its mandate and impose costs on the Taliban for its horrendous treatment of women. It must stop patronizing Afghan women with awards and empty words of praise. Together, and individually, the members of the Security Council have incredible power and resources. I urge them to use them to take real action and restore the dignity and rights of all Afghans.

The President: I thank Ms. Royan for her briefing.

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

Ms. Heimerback (Norway): Allow me first to express our condolences to those affected by the devastating earthquake that struck eastern Afghanistan yesterday. This catastrophe heaps even greater suffering on civilians already hit hard by a humanitarian, economic and human rights crisis, and safe and unhindered humanitarian access must be ensured.

I would also like to thank Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Alakbarov for their useful updates on the situation in Afghanistan and the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in accordance with its new mandate and the delivery of

humanitarian assistance and support to basic human needs. We also offer heartfelt thanks to Ms. Royan for her strong message, including on the importance of respect for the universal human rights of Afghan women and girls, and to Ms. Hakim for sharing her insights and perspectives.

Since the last regular meeting on Afghanistan in March, the Council has convened two extraordinary meetings to discuss the continued deterioration of the human rights situation in Afghanistan, especially the detrimental decisions taken by the Taliban to restrict girls' education and women's participation in public life. In a united voice, the Security Council called on the Taliban to swiftly reverse these policies and practices, including the restrictions that limit access to education, employment and freedom of movement for women and girls. These restrictions not only demolish Afghanistan's chances to respond to and recover from a difficult humanitarian and economic situation, but they also diminish hope for stability and peace in Afghanistan. When the Security Council today discusses how the international community can ensure delivery of humanitarian assistance and support to address basic human needs in Afghanistan, we must again also urge the Taliban to do more to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and do less to aggravate the human rights crisis.

Norway welcomes the recent visit by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan. We echo his concern with regard to reported attacks, killings and disappearances of former Governmental officials, members of the security forces, prosecutors and judges, journalists and media workers, and other reprisals against those who speak up in a society ruled by fear, not law. It is the responsibility of the de facto authorities to end all arbitrary arrests and detentions, including incommunicado detentions, as well as torture and extrajudicial executions. We also urge the de facto authorities to initiate investigations of disappearances, including that of Alia Azizi, the head of Herat Women's Prison, who disappeared in October.

The protection of civilians and human dignity is a prerequisite for reconciliation and peace. Norway is alarmed at the escalated violence in certain areas of Afghanistan and the frequent terrorist attacks targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, often in ethnic- or religious-minority communities. We also call on all parties to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. And we underline the

importance of UNAMA's mandate to monitor, report and engage with parties to undertake commitments and measures to end and prevent violations and abuses against children. The Security Council has given UNAMA a clear mandate to engage with all relevant Afghan political actors and stakeholders, including the Taliban, to facilitate inclusive dialogue and promote representative governance.

The international community must continue to support Afghanistan. This means that we must also engage with the *de facto* authorities who bear the main responsibility to respond to the needs of the Afghan people and to deliver on their promises. Otherwise, we will lose our most important avenues for influencing the current worrying trajectory towards Afghanistan's future.

Mr. Tirumurti (India): At the outset, I express our deepest condolences to the victims and their families and to all those affected by the devastating earthquake in Afghanistan. India shares the grief of the people of Afghanistan and is ready to provide assistance and support in this hour of need.

I thank the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ramiz Alakbarov, and the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths, for their briefings. I also thank Ms. Yalda Hakim and Ms. Yalda Royan for their briefings.

As a contiguous neighbour and long-standing partner of Afghanistan, India has direct stakes in ensuring the return of peace and stability to the country. Therefore, given our strong historical and civilizational linkages to the Afghan people, we are deeply concerned about the recent developments in the country, especially the deteriorating humanitarian situation.

India supported resolution 2615 (2021), which provided for humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, while ensuring that the Security Council would continue to exercise its oversight to guard against any possible diversion of funds and misuse of exemptions from sanctions. We note the briefing by the Emergency Relief Coordinator on the working of the resolution and the concerns he has expressed. We hope that the humanitarian carveouts provided for in this resolution are fully utilized by United Nations agencies and their aid partners and that the aberrations are addressed. In this context, we reiterate that humanitarian assistance should be based on principles of neutrality, impartiality

and independence. The disbursement of humanitarian aid should be non-discriminatory and accessible to all, irrespective of ethnicity, religion or political belief. In particular, the assistance should reach the most vulnerable first, including women, children and minorities.

In response to the humanitarian needs of the Afghan people, India has dispatched several shipments of humanitarian assistance consisting of 30,000 metric tons of wheat, 13 tons of medicines, 500,000 doses of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccine and winter clothing. These humanitarian consignments were transferred to the Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital in Kabul and to specialized agencies of the United Nations, such as the World Health Organization and the World Food Programme (WFP). To ensure fair and just distribution of India's wheat assistance, the Government of India signed an agreement with the WFP for the distribution of 50,000 metric tons of wheat within Afghanistan. The dispatch of this wheat to Afghanistan has already commenced. Moreover, to oversee the utilization of India's medical and food-grain assistance and to further assess the humanitarian requirements of Afghan people, an Indian team visited Kabul recently — on 2 and 3 June — and met with the representatives of the international organizations involved in the distribution of the humanitarian assistance. In addition, the team also visited places where Indian programmes and projects are being implemented, such as the Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital, Habibia High School, the Chimtala subpower station and the World Food Programme wheat distribution centre. We are now in the process of shipping more medical assistance and food grains to Afghanistan. We also gifted 1 million doses of India's Covaxin COVID-19 vaccines to Iran to administer to Afghan refugees in Iran. In addition, we have assisted UNICEF by supplying almost 60 million doses of polio vaccines and two tons of essential medicines.

Our approach to Afghanistan, as always, will be guided by our historical friendship and our special relationship with the people of Afghanistan.

The expectations of the international community on the way forward in Afghanistan have been clearly set forth in resolution 2593 (2021) and reiterated subsequently, including in resolution 2626 (2022). They relate to ensuring that the territory of Afghanistan is not used to launch terrorist attacks against other countries; the formation of a truly inclusive and representative Government; combating terrorism and

drug trafficking; and preserving the rights of women, children and minorities.

India is closely monitoring the security situation in Afghanistan and is actively engaging with the international community to ensure a consensus on the issues of security, peace and stability. We strongly condemn the terrorist attack on Gurudwara Dashmesh Pita Sahibji in Kabul on 18 June. The terrorist assault on places of worship of minority communities and the targeting of the innocent civilian population continues to be a serious concern.

The recent findings contained in the report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) indicate that the current authorities need to take much stronger action to fulfil their anti-terrorism commitments. There has been a significant increase in the presence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) in the country and its capacity to carry out attacks. ISIL-K, with its base reportedly in Afghanistan, continues to issue threats of terrorist attacks on other countries. The report further noted that the Taliban is yet to dissociate itself from other terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida, which remains active. The linkages between groups listed by the Security Council, such as Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, as well as the provocative statements made by other terrorist groups operating out of Afghanistan, pose a direct threat to the region. There are therefore serious concerns that need our immediate attention and unified action to ensure that the Afghanistan does not become a haven for other terrorist organizations, including ISIL-K, Al-Qaida, Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba. We need to see concrete progress in ensuring that such proscribed terrorists, entities and their aliases do not get any support, tacit or direct, either from Afghan soil or from the terror sanctuaries based in the region.

On the political front, India continues to call for an inclusive dispensation in Afghanistan that represents all sections of Afghan society. A broad-based, inclusive and representative formation is necessary for both domestic and international engagement.

We are deeply concerned about recent developments in Afghanistan, which directly impact the women and girls of Afghanistan. There has been an increasing attempt to remove women from public life in Afghanistan. We join others in calling for ensuring

the protection of the rights of women and children and to ensure that the long-fought-for gains of the last two decades are not reversed.

Peace and security in Afghanistan are critical imperatives that all of us need to collectively strive for. India will continue to play its role towards the pursuit of that objective. The interests of the Afghan people will continue to be at the heart of our efforts in Afghanistan.

Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland): At the outset, I, too, should like to express my deepest condolences to the people of Afghanistan following yesterday's devastating earthquake. Our thoughts and prayers are with all those affected, and Ireland is certainly joining in the urgent humanitarian response.

I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Mr. Alakbarov for their briefings, which were extremely informative if sobering. I want to welcome to the table Yalda Hakim and Yalda Royan. Their place is with us here at the table. We are very grateful that they came, and we will not forget their messages or the women and girls of Afghanistan.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2022/485) could not be clearer on Afghanistan under the Taliban. Afghanistan is not a more stable and secure country under the Taliban. The last week alone has demonstrated the reach and impact of armed organizations around the country, with attacks perpetrated against a Sikh temple in Kabul, at a crowded market in Nangahar and against a mosque in Kunduz province. Afghanistan is not more stable.

The stark reality is that there is no safety or security for the millions who are members of minority communities in Afghanistan. Nor is there safety or security for the millions of women and girls in Afghanistan, women and girls who have no freedom of movement, forced behind closed doors and denied their independence.

On 7 May, the Taliban issued another decree aimed at the silencing and the erasure of Afghan women. That was a decision that demonstrated that the Taliban believe that women's rights are a matter for their discretion. Where are the universal human rights that Members of the United Nations — including Afghanistan — have recognized for decades? Ask the Taliban.

The reality is that the women of Afghanistan are under siege, targeted, intimidated, abused, policed and effectively eliminated from public life. We heard that in

graphic terms from Yalda Hakim and Yalda Royan here today. I found that very hard to listen to.

The shameful toll of denied education for Afghan girls continues to grow. Today marks 279 days of deprivation. We often hear how women are still permitted to work in Afghanistan in certain circumstances, for example, as doctors. But I would ask, how many Afghan girls will have the chance to work as doctors in future if they cannot even access education today? We all know what the objective is, and we cannot accept it.

Despite the Taliban's efforts, women and girls in Afghanistan continue to have a strong, powerful and undeniable voice. Courageous women such as Ms. Royan make sure of that. As Ms. Hakim told us today, women with steely determination act and protest, at real risk to themselves, their families and communities. Ireland will continue to stand with the women of Afghanistan. We will continue to raise their voices and work to vindicate their rights.

The immense challenges facing Afghanistan simply cannot be solved without Afghan women fully and meaningfully participating in public life. The damage being caused to Afghan society and its economy by that ugly repression is already evident. Afghanistan cannot succeed or develop with one half of its society locked behind closed doors — one hand tied behind its back.

As we have heard, humanitarian needs in Afghanistan are great and a scaled-up response clearly required. Ireland remains deeply concerned at the catastrophic food-insecurity situation in the country. The detection of Integrated Phase Classification 5 conditions in Ghor province calls out for our attention. We heard it today from both Martin Griffiths and the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General: people will die of starvation, and malnutrition will undermine the future of millions of Afghan children. Yesterday's earthquake will only magnify the level of need.

Against that backdrop, we condemn reports of continuous humanitarian aid interference by the Taliban. The humanitarian assistance being provided by the United Nations country team and international non-governmental organizations should not and cannot be subject to political interference and diversion. Taking food from the mouths of those in need is reprehensible. It is an abuse.

For almost one year, we have sat here and heard that this is a different Taliban, only an interim Taliban Cabinet, that inclusive governance will happen, that education for girls will come at a future time, that decrees against women's rights should not be of concern.

We said in August (see S/PV.8831 and S/PV.8848) that we would judge the Taliban by their actions, not by their words. Well, their words have been proven hollow time and time again, and their actions speak volumes. Human rights have been eroded, women have been erased, minorities are under attack and journalists are being targeted, with an economy in free fall, humanitarian aid diverted and commitments broken. That is the Taliban's Afghanistan.

Here in the Chamber, it is not good enough to tell ourselves that things are better than they might have been, that we need to give the Taliban time. Already this week, the Council recognized that we cannot pretend it is business as usual. By amending the 1988 travel ban exemptions, we showed that business as usual will not stand. As Ms. Royan asked, if women cannot travel freely, why should the Taliban be able to? The people of Afghanistan are suffering now. Lives are being lost and futures destroyed.

The international community and the Council have a responsibility to respond on the basis of respect for human rights, humanitarian principles and inclusive and representative participation, with women in the room and at the table, rather than accepting the status quo. We just need to find the political will to do that.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): Let me begin by expressing my delegation's condolences to the people of Afghanistan, especially the bereaved families, for the loss of lives and the destruction of property and economic livelihoods as a result of the earthquake that took place in the eastern parts of the country yesterday.

Today's meeting on the latest report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2022/485) and its implications for international peace and security therefore provides yet another opportunity for the Council to take stock of the important work being undertaken by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in order to help bring lasting peace and stability for the benefit of the people of the country. UNAMA remains a vital component of our collective efforts towards ensuring the sustained recovery and reconstruction of Afghanistan. We must therefore continue to firmly convey, with a unified

voice, the Council's unalloyed commitment and support for the mandate of UNAMA.

In thanking Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNAMA Officer-in-Charge Ramiz Alakbarov, journalist Yalda Hakim and Yalda Royan of VOICE Amplified for their pertinent briefings, we wish to take a moment to pay tribute to Deborah Lyons, the previous Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNAMA, for her dedication. Her work and appreciation of the competing geopolitics in the region undoubtedly helped build international consensus for the Afghan people over the past two years. We commend her for her work and look forward to working with her replacement. The appointment of another competent woman will certainly be a clear and undisputed message from the international community to the Taliban that women — for that matter, Afghan women and girls — are not a distraction, but legitimate stakeholders in the political, social and economic development of Afghanistan.

Against the backdrop of the worrisome humanitarian, political and security situation prevailing in Afghanistan, Ghana wishes to make the following three points.

First, the latest calamity will undoubtedly compound the situation of millions of Afghan citizens, who are confronted by acute food shortages, are internally displaced and lack basic services, including access to drinking water, health care and education. We therefore urge humanitarian agencies to scale-up their interventions in order to bring much-needed relief to the population, in particular women, children and vulnerable groups, who are currently bearing the brunt of the harsh living conditions. We equally appeal to the donor community and partners to remain committed to their pledges and to continue supporting relief efforts in Afghanistan, since it is critical to averting a humanitarian catastrophe.

Secondly, we are deeply concerned about the lack of progress on the political front in terms of substantive dialogue among the Afghan parties in the search for national reconciliation and an inclusive Government. In that regard, we deplore the unwarranted actions of the de facto authorities, especially in the past few weeks, which have been everything else but encouraging. The imposition of draconian restrictions on sections of the population, particularly the suppression of the rights

of women and girls, including attempts to exclude them from participating fully and meaningfully in the governance process, is unacceptable. We urge the Taliban to put a stop to all forms of discrimination and immediately remove all restrictions in place in order to give all Afghan citizens equal right to participate freely in civil and civic life.

Ghana remains of the view that it is not the case that the de facto authorities are being called upon to do the extraordinary. To the contrary, the Taliban is simply being asked to commit to upholding the fundamental freedoms and liberties of every Afghan citizen, without discrimination, and to provide them with equal access to basic human services, as well as access to a fair judicial system, employment, the freedom of expression and movement and to guarantee girls full access to education. That is the minimum standard expected of every responsible member of the international community, and it is what all Governments are enjoined to assure. We continue to hope that the de facto authorities will continue to act in good faith and support global efforts to bring lasting relief to the Afghan people, many of whom require urgent humanitarian assistance.

Lastly, the spectre of terrorist attacks targeting civilians and religious sites have brought into sharp focus the fragile security situation and the urgent need to ensure that the population receive protection. We urge the de facto authorities to prioritize maintaining security and institute appropriate mechanisms to hold accountable perpetrators of terrorist attacks and crimes against civilians and civilian infrastructure. Ghana firmly condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and will continue to support multilateral approaches to effectively counter radicalization, violent extremism and terrorist acts.

In conclusion, we acknowledge that the interests of the Afghan people must remain front and centre of global efforts to stabilize the situation in the country. The international community can be successful in that endeavour only if we encourage enhanced and sustained cooperation between UNAMA and the de facto authorities. Ghana once again reiterates its commitment to a stable, resurgent and secure Afghanistan living peacefully with its neighbours.

Ms. Saha (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alakbarov for their briefings. I also thank Ms. Royan and Ms. Hakim

for their valuable perspectives. We welcome the work of civil society organizations to improve the lives of Afghans in need, and of the journalists who shine a light on the challenges they face.

Our hearts go out to the victims of yesterday's horrific earthquake in Paktika and Khost provinces. This disaster is a devastating blow to a population that is already suffering gravely, and we call for urgent donor assistance to relief efforts.

This is a perilous moment for Afghanistan. As Ms. Royan and Ms. Hakim indicated, space for members of the media to do their work is shrinking, while threats facing members of religious and ethnic minority groups are on the rise. We have been alarmed by the resumption of fighting and reports of abuses against civilians in various parts of Afghanistan, including in Panjshir. And the Council has had to meet twice since our last public meeting (see S/PV.8997) on the situation in Afghanistan in order to address the actions that the Taliban has taken to restrict the rights and freedoms of Afghan women and girls.

I thank Ms. Hakim for elevating the voices of women like Sheila, Marzia and Farida. Afghans from all walks of life, Islamic scholars and ordinary people all over the world have decried the decrees the Taliban has issued depriving women and girls of their dignity. The United States joins those voices in its unequivocal condemnation of the Taliban's announcement on 23 March forbidding girls from returning to secondary schools throughout most of the country, and of the decree of 7 May imposing further restrictions on women and girls.

When the Taliban takes steps to fulfil its commitments, we will welcome those actions. For example, we welcome the Taliban's ban on narcotics as a positive first step towards the establishment of a lawful agricultural sector — recognizing, of course, that follow-through will be key.

But the Security Council has been clear and unanimous: if the Taliban wants to normalize its relations with the international community, it needs to reverse the steps it has taken to exclude women from social, political and economic life — immediately. Our expectations are simple and grounded in the founding principles of the United Nations system. All Afghans should be able to speak, practice their faith and learn without fear. Each and every one of them is

entitled to equal access to education, employment and participation in public life.

I thank Ms. Royan for sharing the stories of those who could no longer share them and speak for themselves. Allowing Afghans to enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms is not only what the Afghan people deserve and part of what the Taliban needs to do to gain legitimacy and recognition from the international community; it is also a prerequisite for a stable, prosperous Afghanistan.

Afghan history has also made it clear, as the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General mentioned, that ruling by decree in an exclusionary fashion is a recipe for instability — and yet the Taliban still has not embraced other Afghan constituencies in its approach to leadership. It is no wonder then that Afghans' humanitarian needs remain severe, even if the international community's support has helped stave off the worst of humanitarian disasters over the past year.

That is why the United States remains the world's leading humanitarian donor in Afghanistan and source of funds for United Nations operations in Afghanistan more broadly. As part of our commitment to the humanitarian response in Afghanistan, we have spearheaded a variety of additional steps to facilitate the flow of humanitarian assistance to, and commercial activity in, Afghanistan.

We are proud to have championed resolution 2615 (2021) last December, which established a humanitarian carveout to facilitate the critical delivery of aid to support the basic needs of the Afghan people. We have also clarified that financial institutions, non-governmental organizations, international organizations and private sector companies can engage in wide-ranging financial transactions and economic activities to benefit the people of Afghanistan, while still complying with United States sanctions.

But food insecurity in Afghanistan remains grave. As Under-Secretary-General Griffiths noted, nearly half the population remains food insecure. The United Nations 2022 humanitarian response plan has been only partially funded. Yesterday's earthquake highlights the vulnerability of the Afghan people and underscores the dire need for continued humanitarian assistance. We have announced more than \$720 million in humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan since August 2021, and we urge others in the international community to do their

part in stepping up to provide the assistance needed to meet the dire funding shortfall.

In concert with the international community, we also urge the Taliban to follow through on its stated commitments relating to counter-terrorism and safe passage. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continues to play a crucial role, as always, in support of the Afghan people's many and varied needs. We thank the team at UNAMA for its ongoing work and commitment to implementing its mandate. And we would like to take the opportunity to applaud and recognize the leadership and dedication of Ambassador Deborah Lyons upon the conclusion of her service as Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNAMA.

The United States remains ever-committed to supporting the people of Afghanistan.

Ms. Bongo (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): Let me begin by expressing my delegation's condolences to the people of Afghanistan, in particular the bereaved families, following yesterday's tragic earthquake. The devastating material and, especially, the human toll of that earthquake has exacerbated the fragility of Afghanistan and increased the need for solidarity on the part of the international community.

We thank Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ramiz Alakbarov and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths for their clear briefings on the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the situation in the country. I would like to welcome the presence of Mr. Yalda Hakim and Mr. Yalda Royan. We listened closely to their briefings.

Afghanistan is indeed facing a growing number of challenges, particularly in terms of fundamental rights and freedoms, but also in terms of security and humanitarian issues.

The successive announcements of the dissolution of several entities that were involved in building the rule of law in Afghanistan, such as the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, the Independent Commission for Oversight of the Implementation of the Constitution and the High Council for National Reconciliation, attest to the radicalization of the de facto authorities.

In the same vein, the elimination of the Department of Political Parties, making the registration of political

parties impossible, is another measure that runs counter to the plurality and inclusiveness of the Afghan political landscape, as called for by the international community.

We also note and condemn the fact that, despite numerous calls from the international community, in particular the Security Council, the Taliban continues to restrict freedoms and violate the hard-won rights of women and girls. The impact and positive role of women in society is well established. Their contribution to Afghan society is vital for the recovery and restoration of peace and stability in the country. We urge the de facto authorities to revoke their restrictions and respect the assurances given to the international community regarding the rights of women and girls. Their commitment and credibility are at stake.

I recall that human rights are universal and cannot be denied under any pretext. We call on the de facto authorities to comply with international standards and to ensure their respect.

The security situation in Afghanistan is volatile. Increased attacks by armed groups opposed to the Taliban; the proliferation of terrorist activity, including by the Islamic State; and growing tensions with neighbouring States are serious cause for concern. Moreover, civilians continue to suffer the disastrous consequences of the use of improvised explosive devices. We condemn all such attacks and call on the de facto authorities to step up their efforts to combat terrorism and protect the population, for whom they are responsible.

The increasing tensions along the Afghan border with Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as along the border with Iran and Pakistan, have led to clashes resulting in civilian casualties and are likely to further destabilize the region. We call on all parties to exercise the utmost restraint.

The briefings we just heard remind us that Afghanistan is undergoing a humanitarian crisis of rare violence. It is the result of the breakdown of its economic, social and financial systems, as well as years of conflict. Furthermore, drought has contributed to increased poverty, hunger and the displacement of people. The country is facing unprecedented food insecurity.

We call on donors to continue their efforts in support of humanitarian assistance. In that regard, we welcome the World Bank's resumption of work on

projects focusing on health care, agriculture and means of subsistence.

We echo the Secretary-General's call for dialogue with the de facto authorities. The dialogue should include the national stakeholders, the United Nations and the international community in order to achieve lasting peace for Afghanistan and the entire region.

Finally, I would like to reiterate our full support to UNAMA and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for their efforts on the ground.

Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by expressing our condolences for the loss of life and damage caused by the earthquake in Afghanistan yesterday. We are also grateful for the ongoing efforts of the United Nations and the rest of the international community.

Regrettably, that tragic event is only one of the many obstacles from which the country is already suffering, including the humanitarian situation, an economic collapse, an uptick in terrorist attacks and the human rights crisis.

Bearing in mind what was said by Mr. Alakbarov and Mr. Griffiths and recognizing the presence of Ms. Hakim and Ms. Royan, whom I thank for their valuable briefings and whose messages have been heeded, I will focus my statement on the following five points.

First, the fragile optimism of some members of the international community about the possibility of interacting on the basis of trust has eroded. In the past 10 months, there has been an effort to wipe women off the map and to exclude minorities, while the fight against terrorism has been weak, to say the least. While it is frustrating to reiterate calls for promises to be respected and fulfilled, the Security Council can and must shine a light on certain issues and must therefore insist on them.

Secondly, the willingness and ability of the international community to support Afghanistan also depend on who is in power and whether they are committed to their people. The dismantling of institutions, a dysfunctional justice delivery system, restrictions on women in public life and a lack of representation of other ethnic groups in key Government positions simply do not correspond to the aspirations of the Afghan people.

Thirdly, Mexico firmly believes that dialogue is the best option to support the Afghan people. The Security Council also expects to see concrete results. At a minimum, there should be a substantial shift towards a system of participation and inclusive governance within a transparent political-legal framework that regulates State activities and daily life in Afghanistan, as well as access to justice mechanisms that reflect international obligations and commitments.

Fourthly, my country has made its views clear regarding the fact that humanitarian aid cannot be subordinated or made conditional based on political considerations. We said that when the Council decided to create a humanitarian exemption in December through resolution 2615 (2021), and we stand by that today. However, with the increasing levels of food insecurity, unrestricted and non-discriminatory humanitarian access to Afghanistan is essential. In the face of the withdrawal of international funding as a result of the actions of the Taliban, it is more urgent than ever to create sustainable sources of employment and livelihoods. Here the question arises as to how the Afghan economy will ever recover if half of its workforce cannot work.

Fifthly, in March, we collectively decided that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General would implement their mandate in close consultation with all Afghan political actors and stakeholders, as well as the relevant authorities. Such interactions are a critical element, and we therefore hope that UNAMA will be granted direct access to those with decision-making power, especially regarding the regrettable measures preventing girls' access to the classroom and establishing many restrictions on women.

We advocate for creating synergies among the sectors that should be involved in addressing the multiple challenges facing Afghanistan. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate my Government's support for the work of the United Nations on the ground and to thank Ms. Lyons for her years of service as Head of the Mission. We trust that the messages from the Council, from regional organizations such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and from those who have direct dialogue with the Taliban will elicit the response we are waiting for.

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank all of our briefers today for their presentations. On behalf of France, I too would like to join others in expressing our condolences to and solidarity with the families of the victims of the violent earthquake that struck south-eastern Afghanistan yesterday and left hundreds dead or injured.

Once again, the situation as evoked by our briefers is extremely bleak. We heard about the gravity of the humanitarian situation, as described by Mr. Martin Griffiths. Mr. Ramiz Alakbarov alerted us to the lack of progress in almost all areas where the Taliban has made commitments to the international community. Its latest decisions, as well as the dramatic situation described by Ms. Yalda Hakim and Ms. Yalda Royan, show that the Taliban has not changed.

The international community has been mobilizing since August to ensure the survival of the Afghan population and the restoration of stability and security in Afghanistan. I would first like to recall the continued commitment of France and the European Union to responding, without delay or conditions, to the serious humanitarian crisis. The European Union has contributed more than €335 million since 2021, in addition to facilitating the delivery of aid with humanitarian airlifts. In its national capacity, France has contributed more than €123 million in humanitarian aid since September. We supported the adoption of resolution 2615 (2021) in December with a view to ensuring that nothing would stand in the way of the delivery of aid needed by the thousands of men, women and children who are suffering daily in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, no effort must be spared, as has been mentioned previously, in strengthening risk-management mechanisms to prevent the Taliban from diverting that aid in any way. The Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) recently granted travel-ban exemptions for 13 members of the Taliban, enabling them to participate in international discussions in order to bring Afghanistan out of the isolation imposed by the Taliban itself.

The international community has been clear. There are five conditions that the Taliban must respect for the current isolation to be lifted. For the record, they are the constitution of a representative Government; the safe departure of Afghans who wish to leave the country; respect for the fundamental rights of all, particularly women; unhindered access for humanitarian aid; and the complete and concrete severance of ties with

terrorist groups. To date, none of those conditions have been fully met. The recent decisions taken in violation of the rights of women and girls are unacceptable, including the decision on 23 March to exclude girls from secondary school. Trust has been broken, and those decisions show that the Taliban's promises are empty. For that reason, the 1988 Committee revoked the travel-ban exemptions for the two education ministers. We are also disappointed with regard to the security commitments made by the Taliban. As evidenced in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/485), its links with terrorist groups have not been severed. The announcements on drug trafficking may be encouraging, but at this stage they are nothing but promises.

Finally, I want to recall that the increase in serious human rights violations is unacceptable. Afghan women are the primary victims. As Ms. Hakim and Ms. Royan so eloquently described, their freedom has shrunk on a daily basis as they have become prisoners in their own country. However, Afghanistan can have no future without its women, who have already contributed so much to their country's development in the past 20 years. Respect for human rights, in particular those of women and girls, cannot be a variable in our discussions or in the United Nations response to the crisis in Afghanistan. It is a key principle enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations that we must all defend and promote. The mandate that the Council has given the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) provides it with the means to do so, and we expect the Mission to carry out its task in full.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate France's full support for the Afghan people, as well as our readiness to participate in the necessary efforts to alleviate their suffering and our full cooperation with the United Nations, including UNAMA.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): At the outset, let me join my colleagues in conveying our sincere condolences to the people of Afghanistan in the wake of the suffering caused by the devastating earthquake. As my Ministers have said, the United Kingdom stands ready to support them at this difficult time. The United Kingdom is one of the largest donors of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and we are already working with teams on the ground, including the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, to get assistance to those who most need it. Let me also thank Deputy Special

Representative Alakbarov and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings, and in particular our civil-society briefers for their powerful and moving testimonies.

The humanitarian and economic situation in Afghanistan remains critical. More than 24 million Afghans are in need of humanitarian support and nearly 20 million are facing acute food insecurity. Urgent action is needed to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe and economic collapse. Strong United Nations leadership remains crucial in coordinating the international community's support and negotiating effectively with the Taliban to ensure principled humanitarian access across the country.

The United Kingdom remains committed to the Afghan people. Our Foreign Secretary co-hosted the United Nations humanitarian pledging conference on 31 March, raising \$2.4 billion. Nationally, we have committed \$380 million in aid this financial year to supporting humanitarian and basic human needs. We strongly support the sanctions regime of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) as a key tool for promoting peace and security and stability in Afghanistan. The humanitarian exception ensures that the regime poses no obstacle to the provision of humanitarian assistance and other activities that support basic human needs.

Economic stability and the delivery of basic services are essential to ending the cycle of humanitarian need and suffering. We support the leadership of the United Nations in that respect and stress the need for the Taliban to stand by its commitments to both the Afghan people and the international community.

As we heard today from Ms. Hakim and Ms. Royan, women and girls in Afghanistan are facing unacceptable restrictions on their freedom of movement and dress, as well as access to education, jobs and services. Educated women and girls who are able to participate fully in society will contribute to economic development, peace and security. The United Kingdom is also deeply concerned about serious allegations of extrajudicial killings, detentions and disappearances of Afghans, including civil society activists, former security forces and Government officials. Reports of terror attacks have increased. Terrorist and narcotic threats from Afghanistan pose a great risk to regional security as well as to Afghanistan itself.

The role of the United Nations remains more important than ever. We pay tribute to the work of Deborah Lyons and look forward to working with the new leadership team. The international community must continue to speak with one voice to press the Taliban on its commitments and to advance shared objectives on human rights, humanitarian access, counter-terrorism and more inclusive Government.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Deputy Special Representative Ramiz Alakbarov for their briefings. I also listened closely to the remarks of the civil-society representatives.

Afghanistan is at a critical stage of transition from chaos to governance, and the Afghan people have a historic opportunity to truly control their own future and destiny. Since last August, the situation in Afghanistan has generally remained stable, with a marked decline in violent conflict, although there are deeply daunting challenges on the humanitarian and economic fronts. An earthquake struck eastern Afghanistan only yesterday, killing at least 1,000 people and injuring hundreds, and the numbers of casualties continue to increase. China mourns the victims and extends its condolences to the bereaved families and the injured. We will provide emergency humanitarian assistance based on Afghanistan's needs. We call on the international community to step up its support and on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to act urgently in support of Afghanistan's earthquake relief efforts. Afghanistan still has a long way to go to achieve peace and development, and the Afghan people should not be forgotten. It is incumbent on the international community to provide more support and assistance.

First, constructive engagement must be strengthened to support Afghanistan in realizing autonomous and effective State governance. The lessons of the past 20 years have shown that military interventions and foreign models do not work in Afghanistan. All parties should truly implement the principle that this work must be Afghan-owned and Afghan-led, be pragmatic in strengthening their engagement with the interim Afghan Government, patiently guide and support national reconciliation and domestic unity in Afghanistan and explore a governance model suited to the country's conditions. It should be an internally driven and progressive process that requires a forward-looking attitude and the necessary patience.

A few days ago, the Afghan Taliban authorities held a first meeting of the Commission for Return and Communications with former Afghan officials and political figures and announced that it would hold the Loya Jirga. Those are all positive trends. It is hoped that all Afghan parties will maintain dialogue and consultations and enable political reconciliation, and the international community should facilitate those efforts.

China welcomed the continued extension of the travel-ban exemption for certain Taliban members issued by the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999) concerning Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities. It is in line with the practical needs involved in supporting the dialogue among the Afghan parties. We hope that Council members will remain united in that regard and refrain from arbitrarily linking that issue to others that are unrelated.

Secondly, resource imports should be increased to help Afghanistan overcome economic and livelihood challenges. The humanitarian and economic situation in Afghanistan took an abrupt turn for the worse in the wake of the precipitous withdrawal of foreign troops. According to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/485), 24.4 million people in Afghanistan, or nearly 60 per cent of the population, need humanitarian assistance. Some 19.7 million are facing hunger and 6.6 million are suffering from acute food shortages, the largest number in the world. Rising food prices and inflation have made the situation even more dire. To date only 30 per cent of Afghanistan's humanitarian response plan has been funded, a shortfall of \$3 billion. Other geopolitical developments have reduced the focus of major donor countries on Afghanistan. That is an extremely dangerous trend that could turn the current crisis into a greater catastrophe.

The various humanitarian assistance agencies in Afghanistan should all strengthen their coordination and synergy. In that process, the ownership of the interim Government in receiving foreign aid should be respected. That is a sine qua non for the effective delivery of aid. In April, dozens of independent United Nations human rights experts issued a joint statement underscoring that the United States' freezing of Afghanistan's overseas assets has worsened living conditions for Afghan women and children and calling for lifting the freeze as soon as possible. Regrettably, there has been no progress on that issue. At a time when the Afghan people are most in need of resources, it is

unreasonable, unjustifiable and unacceptable to freeze their sizeable overseas assets. The United States should respond to the appeals of the Secretary-General, human rights experts, humanitarian agencies and other parties by ensuring the unconditional return of Afghanistan's overseas assets as soon as possible, and UNAMA should actively promote it, in accordance with the mandate of the Security Council.

Thirdly, comprehensive measures should be taken to support sound development in Afghanistan. The issues related to insecurity, terrorism, narcotics and refugees that Afghanistan is facing are intertwined. We need to adopt a holistic approach and find solutions to their root causes. We must urge Afghanistan to eliminate the breeding grounds for terrorism and resolutely crack down on terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State and the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement. The Taliban's ban on poppy cultivation should be encouraged and Afghanistan should be supported in developing alternative crops so as to eliminate drugs. The rights and interests of women and children in Afghanistan should be fully guaranteed, including their right to education and employment, and sustained efforts are needed in that regard.

At the same time, all those goals cannot be achieved if Afghanistan does not maintain overall stability and gradually realize development and progress. A few days ago we marked World Refugee Day and the fact that for the first time in history, the number of refugees and displaced persons around the world exceeds 100 million. We should not forget the 11 million Afghan refugees created by the war in Afghanistan, with millions living in neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and Iran. According to recent data, since August last year, 90 per cent of applications submitted by Afghan refugees for entry into the United States have been rejected. It is hoped that the relevant country will earnestly fulfil its obligations under international refugee law, while providing more support to Afghanistan and other countries with a view to warding off a larger refugee tide.

China supports the United Nations in continuing to play an important role in helping with Afghanistan's peaceful reconstruction. Over the past two years, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Lyons led the work of UNAMA in complex circumstances and achieved positive results. China appreciates the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, who recently completed her assignment.

As a friendly neighbour of Afghanistan, China has always been committed to supporting peace, stability and development in that country. Since the beginning of last winter, the Chinese Government has provided ¥250 million in emergency aid to Afghanistan and will continue to implement the ¥1 billion of bilateral aid that it announced. China recently hosted the third meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Neighbouring Countries of Afghanistan, at which its neighbours were urgently called upon to come up with meaningful and practical initiatives and support peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan.

As we speak, many projects have already been implemented that will play an important role in promoting the peaceful and stable development of Afghanistan in the future. China stands ready and willing to work with the international community to contribute to a new and brighter future for Afghanistan.

Mr. Costa Filho (Brazil): First of all, Brazil would like to express its heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims of the earthquake that struck eastern Afghanistan yesterday. As we wait for more precise information about the full extent of the devastation and the number of victims, Brazil expresses its appreciation for the best efforts made by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), UNICEF and all United Nations agencies on the ground to quickly respond to the appeals for support. We stand in solidarity with all those affected during this difficult time.

Brazil thanks Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ramiz Alakbarov for their updates. We also thank Ms. Yalda Hakim and Ms. Yalda Royan for their insightful presentations. I welcome the representatives of Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Uzbekistan at this meeting.

The ever-growing humanitarian needs of the Afghan population in the difficult scenario of competing demands for international humanitarian assistance are alarming. Before the earthquake, 59 per cent of the population was in need of assistance, and only 31 per cent of the humanitarian response plan was funded. United Nations agencies and other humanitarian organizations were already struggling to provide their essential aid to the population in need. That scenario will probably just get worse under the impacts of this week's earthquake.

Brazil recalls that humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people does not, and should not, constitute a violation of the sanctions regime. We recognize that efforts have been made to address the difficulty that humanitarian organizations and United Nations agencies have been facing in sending financial resources to Afghanistan, but we once again appeal to all countries to continue to look closely into the issue. Humanitarian exemptions for any sanctions must be strictly observed to ensure that they do not undermine access to food, shelter and essential health supplies for those most in need. That understanding is applicable to Afghanistan, but also to other humanitarian crises.

The life-saving aid of the international community must continue to flow to alleviate the suffering of all those who are vulnerable in Afghanistan. But we all know that only long-term development measures will pave the way for a more prosperous and peaceful future for Afghanistan. In that regard, Brazil echoes the appeals for members of the international community to consider unfreezing the assets of Afghan institutions.

The Security Council must also continue to work for the protection and promotion of human rights in Afghanistan, especially the ones that seem to be the most affected: those of women and girls, children, human rights defenders, journalists and other media workers and persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities.

Our special gratitude goes to Ms. Deborah Lyons for her committed work as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan until 15 June. Brazil thanks Ms. Lyons for her continuous engagement with all relevant Afghan political actors and stakeholders to address the many challenges faced by the country and her tireless work in mobilizing humanitarian assistance and defending the promotion of human rights, especially the fundamental rights of women and girls.

Brazil reiterates its full support for the work of both the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in their mandate to support and promote gender equality, women and girls' empowerment and the full protection of their human rights, including to education and the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation, engagement and leadership of women at all levels and stages of decision-making, in line with resolution 1325 (2000) and related resolutions.

We have yet to see women's return to public life and girls' return to secondary-school classroom seats. Women and girls' rights must be respected not only because of Afghanistan's obligations under international human rights law, but also because women's participation in the economy is paramount for Afghanistan's economy, recovery today and future sustainable development. Afghan women's organizations that provide services to women and girls must also be allowed to continue to carry out their crucial work. The conditions necessary for that to happen must be guaranteed.

As the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, said last week in Geneva when describing the situation in Afghanistan, Afghans "are experiencing some of the darkest moments in a generation". The conclusions of the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/485) confirm this gloomy analysis. The earthquake adds a new layer of gravity to the already-serious humanitarian situation on the ground. We must continue to work together towards an inclusive democratic Afghan political process, with the full participation of women that promotes the cessation of hostilities, stability and national reconciliation.

Mrs. Toroitich (Kenya): At the outset, Kenya joins others in expressing its heartfelt condolences to the people of Afghanistan following the devastating earthquake in Paktika province. We commend the rapid mobilization by the authorities and humanitarian actors to provide emergency-response and search-and-rescue efforts.

I thank Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alakbarov and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings and updates on the latest developments in Afghanistan. I would also like to thank Ms. Yalda Hakim and Ms. Yalda Royan for their sobering messages.

Kenya is concerned about the fragile security situation in Afghanistan. We have witnessed an increase in terrorist attacks perpetrated against civilians, especially minority groups, which continue to undermine peace efforts. We expect the Taliban to renew its commitment to fighting terrorism and ensuring that Afghanistan is not a haven for Islamic State or Al-Qaida terrorist groups. Moreover, the Taliban must ensure that the territory of Afghanistan shall never again be used by those terrorist groups to export terrorism to other regions. That should be

conducted in a manner that respects basic human rights and upholds the dignity of the Afghan people.

We commend the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and other humanitarian agencies that continue to operate in an increasingly complex and challenging environment. Their versatility and ability to perform under these unique circumstances calls for enhanced and predictable support by the international community.

The bleak economic situation, fuelled by several internal and external factors, is pushing millions of Afghans into situations of dire need. As we discuss the economy, we cannot ignore the important contribution of women to economic development. Their underutilization and exclusion in the talent-and-labour force will continue to restrict economic growth in Afghanistan. Therefore, at the minimum, we expect the Taliban to engage women at all levels and incorporate their voices into mapping out non-discriminatory policies that address the political, economic and security challenges facing the country. To address some of the funding gaps, there is also an emerging need to consider how frozen Afghan assets can be deployed within an agreed framework for accountability into the ailing economy as part of efforts to revamp it.

Kenya deeply regrets that it has been almost 279 days since the Taliban suspended school for girls in sixth grade and higher. There is no justified excuse to discriminate against women and girls. As a country that hosts a large number of refugees, we further recognize, with praise, Afghanistan's neighbours for generously opening their borders over the last few months, especially during this difficult period. We therefore urge the international community to support their efforts through predictable funding.

On behalf of my delegation, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to Ms. Lyons for her work and dedication to UNAMA. We wish her all the best in her future endeavours.

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.

Mrs. Alhefeiti (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we join other speakers in expressing our deepest condolences to the families of the victims of the devastating earthquake that struck

south-east Afghanistan yesterday, and we wish a speedy recovery for the injured. The United Arab Emirates will always stand ready to alleviate the suffering of the Afghan people, including by starting to facilitate aid to help them in this disaster.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Mr. Ramiz Alakbarov and Mr. Martin Griffiths for their comprehensive briefings. We also listened attentively to the impressive statements by Ms. Yalda Royan and Ms. Yalda Hakim about the difficult conditions faced by Afghans, especially women and girls. I would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Lyons for her vital efforts and stewardship of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) during the period of her assignment.

The situation in Afghanistan is frustrating and alarming, especially given the lack of progress in the areas highlighted by the Security Council in resolution 2596 (2021) on Afghanistan, including establishing an inclusive Government, combating terrorism and upholding human rights, especially the right of women to work and girls to education, as well as their participation in all aspects of life. These are not simply expectations of the international community; they are, instead, the fundamental building blocks to economic growth, improved public health and the empowerment of women, with a view to achieving stability and sustained peace in Afghanistan.

I would like to focus on four important issues. First, it is imperative that we keep adequate attention on the worsening humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. While we may have managed to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe this past winter, poverty and hunger rates continue to rise, as noted in the most recent report of the Secretary-General on Afghanistan (S/2022/485). Sadly, Afghanistan is a case study of how rising food prices — as well as fertilizer and gas prices — are driving millions into food insecurity. The warning given in March by the Head of the World Food Programme, who said that food would have to be taken from the hungry to give to the starving, has already become a reality in Afghanistan. This situation is further exacerbated by the latest earthquake, which has had a devastating impact on the people in the areas it hit.

The United Arab Emirates welcomed the adoption of resolution 2615 (2021), which established a humanitarian exemption to the sanctions regime

established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), as an important step in facilitating the provision of relief aid and other activities that support basic human needs in Afghanistan. We believe that we can learn from the example of Afghanistan and consider whether a similar approach may be appropriate for other sanctions regimes, on a case-by-case basis. In this vein, we stress once again that the potential humanitarian consequences of sanctions should systematically be considered in the design of each and every sanctions regime. We also encourage all donors to make all possible efforts to ensure that individuals on the sanctions list pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) or with links to terrorists are not able to accrue benefits from any assistance intended for the people of Afghanistan.

Secondly, we reiterate that the access of women and girls to education and all aspects of public life is not optional. Afghanistan's chances of recovery are doomed if half its population continues to be marginalized. The Security Council must continue to demand that the Taliban's decision to exclude girls from secondary education be reversed and that women's full, equal and meaningful participation in society be reinstated.

Thirdly, UNAMA must continue to implement its comprehensive mandate to engage with the Taliban through structured dialogue, while conveying to it the messages of the international community. We encourage UNAMA to continue its active engagement with the Taliban vis-à-vis women's empowerment and girls' education, as well as all other aspects of its mandate.

Fourthly, the security situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate. The latest report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team indicates that the country witnessed multiple terrorist attacks over the past months and that some terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State-Khorasan Province, are strengthening their capacities and financial resources. This situation further exacerbates current challenges in the country in terms of maintaining security and controlling the activities of these terrorist groups, as we have witnessed in the attack that took place this month on a temple in Kabul and the explosion that targeted a crowded market in Nangarhar.

The most recent report of the Secretary-General underlined that the Taliban need to engage in a serious and meaningful counter-terrorism dialogue with the international community. The Security Council

must also send a unified message to the Taliban that Afghanistan cannot be a safe haven for terrorists.

In conclusion, I want to recall what Ms. Lyons noted before the Security Council many times: the road ahead, following August 2021, will not be easy. Despite the multiple roadblocks that we have removed since then, we have to redouble our efforts, scale up support to Afghans and keep up pressure on the Taliban. We cannot abandon the Afghan people during this difficult period.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We wish to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Martin Griffiths, and the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan, Mr. Ramiz Alakbarov, for their assessments of the situation in Afghanistan. Since August 2021, they have undertaken tremendous efforts on the ground which, we are confident, have saved the lives of millions of Afghans. We have also closely listened to the briefings by the civil society representatives. At the same time, we wish to note the following. Traditionally, we proceed from the following premise. If the Security Council invites representatives from civil society, then these people should be from Afghanistan. They should be aware of the realities on the ground, and they should be enduring those difficulties alongside the people. We are pleased that representatives of the countries of the region have once again been given the floor to discuss this issue, which is of great importance to them.

We wish to voice our genuine condolences to the de facto authorities and the people of Afghanistan in connection with the devastating earthquake, which claimed the lives of a thousand people.

We closely read the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the country (S/2022/485).

Six months have elapsed since the most recent comprehensive discussion of the Afghan issue in the Security Council (see S/PV.8954). Unfortunately, during that time, the humanitarian and socioeconomic situations have continued to deteriorate. Quality of life indicators have dropped by a third. The population of the country has been enduring one of the fastest-growing humanitarian crises in the world and is literally on the brink of survival. The country is beset by starvation, destitution and unemployment. Production

and manufacturing are in decline. The agricultural sector is suffering from drought, and there are acute shortages of seeds, foodstuffs and fertilizer. The spread of the coronavirus infection has also had devastating consequences first and foremost for the most vulnerable population groups, including women and children.

Against that backdrop, unfortunately, the donors conference on Afghanistan held on 31 March under the auspices of the United Nations did not rise to expectations. Therefore, what seems hypocritical are attempts by our United States and NATO colleagues to shift responsibility to the international community as a whole for the current crisis situation in Afghanistan and for the recovery of the country, as well as attempts to force the destitute Afghan people to pay for the 11 September attacks, which they had nothing to do with. Back in the times of the Soviet Union, more than 140 facilities were built in Afghanistan to form the backbone of its economy and, in the 20 years of NATO's presence in Afghanistan, not a single enterprise was built, with the Afghan economy directly relying on international financing.

We appreciate the efforts of those representatives of humanitarian agencies who are working on the ground. We take note of the selfless efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian agencies and their contributions to assist Afghanistan.

We welcome the fact that humanitarian workers now can access regions that they were unable to prior to 15 August 2021. We understand, however, that certain challenges remain. It will take time and patience to overcome them.

At the same time, a number of problems have remained unresolved for decades in Afghanistan. We are confident in that connection that the commitment of humanitarian agencies to maintain active dialogue with the de facto authorities will help to make significant progress in that regard.

We value certain steps taken by the international structures and financial institutions, including the World Bank, to alleviate the humanitarian situation. Unfortunately, those measures remain insufficient to improve the lives of ordinary Afghans in a lasting way. Humanitarian assistance from abroad has a limited effect on mitigating social tensions.

In December 2021, resolution 2615 (2021) was adopted. It was designed to provide a window of opportunity to step up immediate humanitarian assistance through all channels. The provisions of that resolution are a response to the oft-asked question about ways to provide unimpeded assistance under the sanctions regime pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). However, unfortunately, what we have seen is that a number of countries continue to misinterpret its content to justify the unilateral restrictions. The already precarious humanitarian situation is exacerbated by the Afghan economic collapse and the complete paralysis of the banking system.

Against that backdrop, we deem outrageous the attempts by certain States, under any pretext, to halt the resumption of work between Afghan financial operators and international banking systems and to indefinitely delay efforts to unfreeze Afghan assets. Such actions cast doubt on the sincerity of colleagues' statements about their interest in the stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan.

We urge Western donors to stop capitalizing on the Afghan issue, to return the country's resources and to begin to provide comprehensive assistance to normalize the socioeconomic and humanitarian situations without reservations or preconditions. Ultimately, those States bear the main responsibility for the outcomes of their 20-year presence in the country.

The maintenance of stability in Afghanistan is central to regional efforts towards a peaceful settlement. We believe that that needs to be the overriding priority for the entire international community, as any inaction now will have even greater negative global consequences in future. Destabilization will benefit only the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other groups, including the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Jamaat Ansarullah. The creation of additional hotbeds of tension will play into their hands. We all are well aware of ISIL's plans to create a caliphate and to expand its influence in the Central Asian region and then to the Russian Federation.

There are persistent acute issues related to narcotics production and smuggling. Afghanistan remains the world's leading opiate supplier, and we are aware of certain steps by the de facto Government authorities to curb that threat. However, those efforts alone cannot suffice. Clearly, Afghanistan requires comprehensive

assistance from the international community to develop alternative agricultural crops.

We attribute tremendous significance to the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. We trust that the Mission will continue to focus closely on the tasks specified in the mandate, namely, coordinating humanitarian assistance and facilitating post-conflict recovery in Afghanistan.

At the same time, it will be crucial for the Mission to have a constructive, trust-based dialogue with the de facto authorities; to provide assistance in capacity-building in order to create the conditions necessary to effectively resolve problems in a manner that takes account of regional and cultural specificities and that is based on the best practices of regional neighbours, including the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Russia, as a friend and neighbour of Afghanistan, has traditionally provided humanitarian assistance through the relevant United Nations agencies. Also bilaterally, we have been providing humanitarian goods, including food, warm clothes and medicine. We deeply regret the fact that the unlawful sanctions against our country are affecting, inter alia, our cooperation with humanitarian organizations, severing logistical and financial links. If necessary, we will stand ready to provide assistance to Afghanistan through grain supplies.

We stand ready to continue to contribute to the advancement of a peaceful settlement and national reconciliation in Afghanistan. We maintain regular cooperation with the de facto authorities, which have consistently focused on key issues facing the country, including the terrorist and narcotics threat, political inclusivity, humanitarian assistance and human rights, including those of women and girls.

The Afghan issue is also at the centre of our efforts in the context of the Moscow format and other regional mechanisms, as well as the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

We intend to continue to provide to the Afghan people and the de facto authorities of the country every possible means of support so as to mitigate the consequences of the socioeconomic crisis in the country.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Albania.

We join colleagues in conveying our deep condolences to the families of the victims of the earthquake and wish a speedy recovery to those injured.

I thank Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alakbarov for their detailed update on the dramatic situation in Afghanistan.

I thank Ms. Yalda Hakim and Ms. Yalda Royan very much for bringing such an important and needed perspective from that part of Afghan society, which is, unfortunately, shrinking dangerously. I thank in particular Yalda Hakim for continuing to be such a strong and, as an Afghan herself, credible voice for those who need to be heard — the Afghans.

What we have heard today leaves little room for hope. I was trying to find one single positive aspect to highlight. I am still searching. Since the takeover, as we have heard, the economy of the country has been in freefall. It has contracted by more than a third compared with the same period a year earlier. There is widespread unemployment. Food prices are rising by nearly 20 per cent a year. Families that were middle-class a year ago are now surviving on a single meal a day. As we heard from Under-Secretary-General Griffiths, more than half the country's population, nearly 20 million people, face acute hunger. Reports speak of such heart-breaking situations as families selling their children's organs just to put food on the table.

When it comes to the security situation, it is utterly troubling to notice a resurgence of Al-Qaida on Afghan soil. Despite efforts to the contrary, riven by factions and with loose control on some parts of the country, the Taliban have also failed to suppress the Islamic State-Khorasan Province. There have been persistent bombings and attacks on civilians, often against the Hazara minority. That raises the legitimate question of whether Afghanistan is again ripe for the wholesale export of terrorists, which must not be allowed.

When the Taliban took over, nearly a year ago, they promised peace and harmony. There would be no reprisals. They would show concern for the vulnerable, manage the economy and engage with other countries. Girls would be allowed to go to school, but they needed time to prepare.

As we heard here today from Ms. Hakim and Ms. Royan, the reality is different; the Taliban are

reverting to form. In March, teenage girls returning to class for the first day of the school year found the doors shut. Instead of teachers, they were met by armed men. Now private schools, the last islands of resistance in the area of education, are giving way under pressure.

In May, all Afghan women were ordered to cover themselves from head to toe outside of the home, basically shutting them out of public life. The Human Rights Commission was disbanded and minorities, particularly the Hazaras, are being deliberately targeted. All that is depressing; it is wrong; it is retrograde. It runs against the very basic human rights that we defend here. It contradicts what the Taliban themselves had promised.

While education has moved humankind forward, the Taliban have chosen ignorance. No free women in public life means half of the society left out of the country's contribution to the future. How could that possibly lead to development and prosperity for the Afghan people? How could that respond to people's needs and help them build a future?

Instead, it is a road map to the dark ages of obscurantism, bigotry and misogyny and a departure from civilization. When women's rights are constrained, the entire society is weakened. A system that excludes women and talent cannot succeed and will not move forward. The Taliban have a big problem with progress, but they have a bigger problem with truth. Most popular entertainers, singers, actors and comedians were forced to flee the country. One of them, Nabi Roshan, was watched by millions each week. Now he is living in Albania. The Taliban have decided that Afghans do not need information; they do not need entertainment; they do not need to laugh; they only need to listen and obey. But for how long?

Last month, the Taliban leader called on countries to engage with Afghanistan on the basis of mutual respect. That means formal recognition, the establishment of diplomatic relations, development assistance, trade and investments. But respect is not given, it is earned — first and foremost, by respecting commitments, not betraying them. It is earned with truth, not lies. Unfortunately, the actions of the Taliban go in the opposite direction — to the detriment of the people and the country.

It is not that the Taliban do not know. They have made a choice — a bad and a wrong one. It is therefore of paramount importance that the Council remain

united and speak loudly, telling the Taliban clearly and unequivocally that, if they do not reverse their course, the doors to the world will remain closed. They will not be welcome; they will remain the pariah they have chosen to be. Worse, they will be responsible for taking the country back into tension and conflict. That is why it is high time that a meaningful and inclusive political process be initiated in good faith and with goodwill, with women in the room and at the table.

Finally, we greatly appreciate the efforts made by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We must do all we can to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches those entitled to it, not strongmen with weapons. Despite major difficulties and renewed challenges, UNAMA must make every effort to continue to engage with the Taliban in implementing the mandate given by the Council — for the sake and on behalf of the Afghan people and for their future.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I would like to draw the attention of speakers to paragraph 22 of the latest note by the President of the Security Council (S/2017/507) on its working methods, which encourages all participants in Council meetings to deliver their statements in five minutes or less, in line with the Security Council's commitment to making more effective use of open meetings.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Faiq (Afghanistan): Let me start by congratulating you, Mr. President, on your able leadership of the Security Council for the current month and for convening us today.

I would like to thank Mr. Alakbarov and Mr. Griffiths for their briefings. I also wish to thank Ms. Hakim and Ms. Royan, two brave and powerful Afghan women, for their strong, loud and clear messages. They truly exemplify the might and capabilities of Afghan women.

I also wish to take this opportunity to convey our gratitude and appreciation for the support and expression of condolences and sympathy towards the families of those affected by the earthquake in the southern provinces of Afghanistan, who desperately need an urgent humanitarian response and assistance, as well as for underlining the need for continued engagement to support the people of Afghanistan,

particularly vulnerable groups such as children, women, girls and minorities.

I thank donor countries and countries of the region, the leadership and personnel of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as other United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), for their sustained efforts to deliver life-saving assistance to the Afghan people and Afghan refugees in the face of such difficult times.

Let me also take this opportunity to express the deep appreciation of the Afghan people to former Special Representative of the Secretary-General Deborah Lyons and her Deputy Special Representative, Mette Knudsen, for their tireless and dedicated efforts to support the people of Afghanistan in their quest for peace, stability and prosperity in tough and challenging times. I also congratulate the designation of Mr. Markus Potzel as the new Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and wish him all the best.

As we convene today, Afghans are confronted with increasingly multifaceted challenges, including natural and human-made disasters — causing further devastation, misery, uncertainty and desperation in their current and future lives. Political instability, insecurity, economic downturns, record-breaking droughts and protracted conflict have ravaged Afghanistan's economy. Those challenges have worsened since the collapse of the former Government and the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan by force in August. Our nation's staggering political, economic and security challenges have failed to improve. It is thanks to the diligent work and support of the United Nations, NGOs and donors that a total humanitarian catastrophe was narrowly averted. But despite the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance, Afghanistan is now no closer to stability, security or self-sufficiency. The growing number of people in need of humanitarian assistance, the influx of millions of refugees, the rise in unemployment and the estimated 95 per cent of the population that is facing poverty are all alarming and self-evidently problematic.

In the past 10 months, the Afghan people had hoped to see practical steps and changes in the policies, actions and decisions of the de facto Taliban authorities to address the current humanitarian and socioeconomic and political situation in Afghanistan, as well as efforts

towards reconciliation and trust- and State-building so as to ensure the rule of law, justice, safety and the protection of the social, political and economic rights of all Afghan citizens. However, so far, those efforts have fallen far short.

Despite calls from Afghans, the countries of the region and the international community for greater ethnic, political and geographic diversity, as well as respect for, and the protection of, the fundamental human rights of all Afghan citizens, including the rights of women and girls to work and education, we see that the Taliban have not showed flexibility in the protection of human rights and the formation of a representative and accountable national Government with professional staff, including women and minorities, to provide essential services to the people — a Government that can enjoy national and international legitimacy. In addition, efforts were made to strengthen the monopoly and rule over all male and Taliban-affiliated individuals, with religious ideologies incorporated into Government institutions and the systematic elimination of Afghanistan's human capital, in particular women.

We see the closure of girls' secondary and high schools, the further curtailment of fundamental human rights, forcing women to wear a hijab or burka, restricting the freedoms of speech, silencing the voices of critics and credible reports of arbitrary arrests, torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment of prisoners and extrajudicial killings. In addition, enforced disappearances of protesters, former national security forces and individuals accused of affiliations with national resistance forces, as well as the reported forced displacement of people in Panjshir, Takhar and Baghlan provinces, are contrary to the amnesty announcement and are clear violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, as well as Islamic guidance and principles. Those acts of intimidation and fear must be stopped.

Security concerns are also mounting owing to the emergence of armed resistance groups and the presence of Al-Qaida/Da'esh and foreign terrorist fighters in Afghanistan, as reported by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team. We are also witnessing a growing number of terrorist attacks and explosions targeting religious and educational centres, particularly of Afghan minorities, such as Hazaras, as seen in the recent attack on a Gurdwara Sikh temple. Those acts have caused a high number of civilian casualties and raised concerns and criticism at the national and

international levels. Those are serious concerns and threats to the people of Afghanistan and countries in the region.

Imagine what it is like to have your God-given freedoms and fundamental human rights suddenly taken away from you; to be banned from pursuing your personal aspirations, including the right to education and the right to work; and ultimately, as a citizen, to not be able to achieve your dreams of serving your country and enjoying a decent life. That is the life of women and girls in Afghanistan right now. However, that does not concern only women and girls. All young persons, both male and female, who hold or are pursuing university degrees are forced to leave the country owing to the lack of optimism and hope for a better future. The only day-to-day aim and objective in life is to find shelter, food and clothing to survive. Life is lived without goals or ambitions for the future. The situation for widows without a male figure in their household is even bleaker. Such is a typical life for all Afghans today.

Despite all the challenges, there is still hope and an opportunity to overcome the current challenges and avert Afghanistan becoming a pariah State and a safe haven for foreign terrorists or sliding back into conflict. To attain that goal, first, there is a need for national dialogue among all Afghans. The people of Afghanistan are tired of war and conflict; they do not want more war. The United Nations is well-positioned to use its existing tool kits, in the light of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, to organize and facilitate an intra-Afghan dialogue with the participation of credible Afghans from all walks of life residing in and outside Afghanistan, including the representatives of the Taliban and opposition groups, as well as regional and international partners, and to work on a national solution by establishing a road map or mechanism in through all Afghans can reach an agreement about core issues, such as their political, social and economic rights, including fundamental rights and freedoms of all citizens, particularly women, youth and minorities; their type of Government; their right to elect representatives; preserving the hard-won gains of the past 20 years and amending the Constitution. That requires the full support and engagement of the Taliban and regional and international partners.

Secondly, I urge the Security Council and international partners to remain focused on Afghanistan, even in the face of other pressing international crises. If Afghanistan is abandoned, we risk squandering the

progress made over the past 20 years. I would like to emphasize the role of neighbouring, regional and international partners, including the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and thank them for their efforts in hosting meetings on Afghanistan and their commitments to continue supporting Afghanistan and, as was emphasized in the Security Council, for sending a united message during their engagements.

Thirdly, the Afghan people are deeply grateful for the international community's humanitarian assistance since the collapse of the previous Government, but such aid is not sustainable. We hope that, through the consistent engagement, dialogue and support of regional and international partners, a transparent and accountable mechanism and benchmarks will be set up to resume the flow of development aid, provide job opportunities and improve economic and sustainable development.

Fourthly, we would like to underline the significance of a greater role and robust engagement by the United Nations in achieving enduring peace and stability in Afghanistan through tangible and innovative measures.

Fifthly, my message to the Taliban is that earning national legitimacy requires winning the hearts and minds of all Afghans. I should underline that, while the Afghan people welcome the establishment of the Commission for Return and Communication with Former Afghan Officials and Political Figures as a positive step for confidence-building and reconciliation, it is contradictory to see the commission extend VIP treatment to some former high-level officials, despite serious allegations of corruption and embezzlement of public assets, while former civil, military and security officers are prosecuted and detained. That is counterproductive and contrary to justice. We therefore call on the Taliban to honour the amnesty, safety and security of all former Afghan Government officials, including professional civil and military cadres and soldiers, regardless of their ethnicity or gender.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the Taliban ultimately has the ability to determine Afghanistan's fate. I call on the Taliban to demonstrate willingness in the coming months to work towards the formation of a broad-based and accountable Government based on the will of the Afghan people; to reopen girls' secondary and high schools; to allow women to work and take part in the development of Afghanistan; to respect and protect the fundamental rights of all Afghans and

to honour national and international commitments to human rights laws and norms and, finally, to promote and strengthen co-existence and unity among all Afghans. A prosperous and stable Afghanistan is within their grasp. A nationwide consensus will require political will and real compromise by all parties. And it is the only way to free Afghanistan from a cycle of dependency and instability.

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

Mr. Takht Ravanchi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to begin by expressing our heartfelt condolences to the people of Afghanistan and the families of the victims of the recent earthquake in Khost. We stand with the people of Afghanistan at this difficult time and have already dispatched two aeroplane shipments of humanitarian aid to the earthquake-affected areas.

I thank the briefers for their briefings. We take note of the Secretary-General's recent report on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2022/485).

According to the report, in early 2022, humanitarian needs continued to rise, with 24.4 million people, or 59 per cent of the population, in need of assistance, up from 18.4 million at the start of 2021.

As a neighbour of Afghanistan, Iran has used its capacities and resources to help the people of Afghanistan overcome the challenges they have faced. We have been hosting millions of refugees, who have unfortunately received minimal international assistance over the past 40 years. The most recent example of our assistance to Afghan refugees has been the extensive vaccination campaign against the coronavirus disease for Afghans living in Iran. The neighbours of Afghanistan, including Iran, should not shoulder all the burdens associated with receiving Afghan refugees. Other countries should welcome the refugees as well.

We support the United Nations efforts to meet Afghanistan's expanding humanitarian needs, including the system-wide Transitional Engagement Framework to provide for basic human needs. We emphasize the importance of the international community's continued engagement with Afghanistan, particularly in supporting the people's humanitarian and development needs, and we urge the international community, particularly donor countries, to continue to provide all possible and necessary assistance to the Afghan people.

For our part, over the course of the past months, Iran has provided more than 30 consignments of humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

As we have already stated, Afghanistan's frozen assets belong to the Afghan people, and their release, which is crucial for helping the Afghan economy and saving lives, should not be politicized or conditional in any way. We highlight the need to take the relevant actions, such as reopening channels of financial and in-kind support and resources to the Afghan people, as well as to explore real alternatives for unfreezing Afghanistan's financial assets and improving access to lawful banking services.

Similarly, sanctions imposed by the Security Council on specific individuals and entities in Afghanistan must not impede humanitarian, economic or developmental cooperation with Afghanistan.

Attacks claimed or attributed to Da'esh or its affiliated groups have recently increased and spread in Afghanistan. We are deeply concerned by such terrorist activities. That trend underlines the international community's continued demand that the Taliban commit to fighting terrorism and ensuring that Afghanistan is no longer a safe haven for terrorist groups like Da'esh and Al-Qaida, which have been responsible for heinous acts of terror not only in Afghanistan, but throughout the region and beyond.

Equally critical are efforts to combat drug trafficking, which must be made a priority. Every year, Iran is directly affected by that menace and pays a high price for it. We welcome the Taliban's decision to outlaw all drugs. However, given the fact that the Taliban has not taken the necessary precautionary measures to confront this year's harvest, as well as the unavailability of information on the seizure of drugs and the arrest of drug traffickers, our concerns about the impact of the illegal drug trade remain strong.

The absolute need for the formation of an inclusive Government in Afghanistan that represents the country's multi-ethnic society is crystal clear. The people of Afghanistan from different religious and ethnic backgrounds, especially the younger generation who will lead Afghanistan in the future, must be assured that they have a say in their country's affairs. That will not be possible unless an inclusive Government is established and sufficient attention is paid to Afghanistan's political and social structures so

that they involve people from all walks of life, including people of all ethnicities, women and young people.

Despite repeated international calls, however, the Taliban has failed to make significant efforts to ensure the Government's true ethnic and political inclusiveness. The formation of an inclusive Government in Afghanistan is a prerequisite and a critical component for its international recognition.

The report of the Secretary-General indicates that many of the Taliban's decisions have weakened fundamental human rights, particularly those of women and girls. The Taliban should protect all human rights, particularly the rights of women and minorities, as well as the right to education. We continue to consult with Afghanistan's neighbours, as well as regional and international partners, including the United Nations, in order to assist Afghanistan in achieving long-term peace, security and stability.

Finally, we support the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan in accordance with its mandate.

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

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): We take note of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/485) and thank Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Deputy Special Representative Alakbarov for their briefings.

We heard from three Afghans in today's Security Council meeting. They represent themselves. The Security Council has not, however, invited those who actually control the country to participate. I believe that, while the Taliban is being called upon to act, the fact that the Council is not able to hear its representatives calls into question the credibility of the Council's consideration of the situation in Afghanistan.

We also thank the outgoing Special Representative, Ms. Deborah Lyons, for her constructive role as Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and express our expectation that her successor will maintain constructive engagement with the people and the de facto Government of Afghanistan.

Pakistan takes this opportunity to convey its deepest condolences over the loss of precious lives and extensive damage caused by yesterday's devastating earthquake in Afghanistan. We will provide all possible

assistance to Afghanistan at this tragic hour and urge the international community to do so as well.

The earthquake will further exacerbate an already dire humanitarian situation. While the worst humanitarian scenarios were avoided last winter due to the characteristic resilience of the Afghan people, as well as the excellent work carried out by the United Nations and its humanitarian agencies, human catastrophe could well happen unless steps are taken to address the underlying causes of Afghanistan's humanitarian and economic crisis. Its consequences would include massive human suffering, more Afghan refugees, the revival of internal conflict and an intensified threat from terrorist groups like Da'esh.

We are at another inflection point in Afghanistan's recent turbulent history. In our view, we must be clear about our objectives, the primary one being to achieve peace and stability in Afghanistan. My delegation, in its capacity as Chair of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Council of Foreign Ministers, has circulated a document to the Security Council outlining the pathway to peace and stability as envisaged by the States members of the OIC in their decisions at the past two ministerial conferences.

The OIC has called for sustained engagement by the international community with Afghanistan, including in the provision of all possible recovery, reconstruction, development, financial, educational, technical and material assistance. It has reiterated that Afghanistan's access to its financial resources will be pivotal in preventing a collapse and called for the exploration of realistic pathways towards unfreezing Afghanistan's financial assets and legitimate banking services. The OIC has also urged the Security Council in particular to ensure that existing targeted sanctions do not impede the provision of humanitarian aid or economic resources to Afghanistan.

The OIC has reiterated that development, peace and security, stability and human rights are interlinked, and it has underlined the importance of achieving sustainable peace and development in Afghanistan through regional economic and connectivity projects. It has also emphasized the importance of establishing inclusive governmental structures, while reaffirming the importance of ensuring that the territory of Afghanistan is not used as a platform or safe haven by any terrorist group, organization or individual.

The OIC has recalled the statement issued in New York on the right of Afghan girls to education, which called for respect for the right of all Afghans to education. It has reiterated the central role of OIC member States and Islamic scholars, as well as the Ulema, in continuing dialogue, engagement and exchange of best practices with the Afghan authorities on access to education and women's rights in Islam, including through the exchanges of respective delegations.

Finally, the OIC has called on the international community, in particular the Security Council, to support all such engagement efforts and to remove any practical or logistical hindrances to that end. We trust that the Security Council and UNAMA will take full account of those elements for normalization and stability in Afghanistan, as set out in the OIC's joint statement.

We look forward to working with UNAMA under the new Special Representative. We feel that UNAMA must focus, first and foremost, on helping to address the economic and financial crisis faced by Afghanistan, including by continuing to address the impact of bilateral sanctions, as well as working towards the unfreezing of Afghan assets.

We are encouraged that both the Under-Secretary-General and the Deputy Special Representative have advocated engagement. It is through economic and political engagement that concerns about human rights, including the rights of women and girls, political inclusivity and counter-terrorism, are likely to be satisfactorily addressed.

Pakistan remains especially concerned about the terrorist attacks emanating from Afghanistan, which are attacks against my country. They are sponsored and financed by our adversary. We will find effective ways to end such terrorist attacks against Pakistan and stop the disinformation campaign, which one member of the Security Council, a State sponsor of terrorism, has launched against my country.

Pakistan supports the efforts within the platform of the six neighbouring countries plus Russia to promote a pathway to peace and economic and political normalization in Afghanistan. We also believe that the extended troika of the United States, China, Russia and Pakistan can make a contribution to building an agreed pathway to peace and stability in Afghanistan, including ways and means to effectively address the threat of terrorism within and from Afghanistan.

Despite our mutual frustrations about the lack of progress on several issues — political inclusivity, women's rights, girls' education, counter-terrorism — in our view, the international community's engagement with the Afghan authorities has produced some tangible progress on several fronts. As compared to the past, there are not thousands of civilian casualties, as was the count then. The overall political and security situation in Afghanistan has remained relatively stable. The threat of a possible civil war or wide-scale reprisal killings or the mass exodus of refugees has been avoided thus far.

The international community should encourage all efforts that should be made by Afghans themselves to promote political reconciliation and inclusivity. We welcome some of the steps that have been taken, including the formation of a possible Loya Jirga.

We hope that we will consider the situation in Afghanistan from the proper historical and geopolitical perspective. We hope that, at this critical juncture in the history of Afghanistan, we will make the right choices that will steer the country towards peace and stability and help bring about an end to the four decades of suffering and war that the Afghan people have endured.

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

Mr. Ibragimov (Uzbekistan): At the outset, I would like to join fellow colleagues in extending sincere condolences to the people of Afghanistan on the lives lost as a result of yesterday's earthquake and in wishing a speedy recovery to all those injured. The Government of Uzbekistan has expressed readiness to help the people of Afghanistan in overcoming the consequences of that natural disaster.

I would like to start my remarks by commending the Permanent Mission of Albania for convening today's meeting on the situation in Afghanistan and by thanking all speakers for their informative briefings and statements.

For centuries, the Uzbek and Afghan peoples have lived side by side in a single cultural and civilizational space. Both countries are linked to each other by centuries-old bonds of friendship, shared history, religion, customs and traditions. Therefore, Uzbekistan would like to see Afghanistan become a peaceful, independent and prosperous State. Afghan soil should never again pose a threat to the countries of the region or to the international community as a whole.

We believe that the de facto Government needs some time for the practical implementation of its promises and international obligations. Exerting pressure or enforcing bans would only exacerbate the already dire situation in Afghanistan. The further worsening of the socioeconomic situation may lead to the radicalization of society, confrontations among various groups and strengthened positions of extremist forces. At the same time, we believe that the international community should continue to demand that the Taliban not renege on its promises to form an inclusive Government, ensure human rights, including those of women and national minorities, and provide access to education for Afghan girls.

Uzbekistan proceeds from the fact that, in the foreseeable future, Afghanistan will remain an important factor in regional security, which will directly affect the national interests of the countries of the region, first and foremost its immediate neighbours.

Uzbekistan welcomes the recent decision of the de facto Government of Afghanistan to ban the cultivation of opium poppy, as well as the production, sale, transport and smuggling of narcotic substances of all kinds. That decision could deprive various terrorist groups operating in the country of a source of income from drug trafficking. At the same time, to implement those steps, Afghan farmers should be given other alternatives to sustain their livelihoods. That issue has special importance given the critical humanitarian situation in the country.

In April this year, Uzbekistan provided the fraternal nation of Afghanistan with humanitarian aid, consisting of foodstuffs, clothing and medicines, including coronavirus disease vaccines and test kits. At the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan, His Excellency Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, we established in the border city of Termez a multifunctional transport-logistics hub, which is currently being extensively used by various United Nations agencies to deliver 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 more active participation by international institutions in financing various infrastructure projects in the country. Uzbekistan, together with the Afghan side, has started the implementation of two

major projects — the construction of the Surkhan-Pul-e-Khumri power transmission line and the Termez-Mazar-e-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railroad. The successful implementation of those projects will be conducive to transforming Afghanistan into a bridge between Central and South Asia, further advancing regional connectivity.

Given the importance of this matter, Uzbekistan has developed and submitted a General Assembly draft resolution, entitled “Strengthening connectivity between Central and South Asia”, and calls upon all Member States to co-sponsor it.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that today the international community should not abandon the Afghan people as they face their most challenging problems. We believe that the United Nations should continue to play a leading role in mobilizing and coordinating international efforts to render assistance to Afghanistan.

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 on the subject in closed consultations.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.