



# Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

Provisional

## 9277

th meeting

Wednesday, 8 March 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

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<i>President:</i>	Mr. Fernandes . . . . .	(Mozambique)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania . . . . .	Mr. Hoxha
	Brazil . . . . .	Mr. De Almeida Filho
	China . . . . .	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
	France . . . . .	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
	Gabon . . . . .	Mr. Biang
	Ghana . . . . .	Mr. Osei-Mensah
	Japan . . . . .	Mr. Ishikane
	Malta . . . . .	Ms. Gatt
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Ms. Evstigneeva
	Switzerland . . . . .	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mrs. Nusseibeh
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
	United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Wood

## Agenda

### The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2023/151)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

### **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/2023/151)**

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; and Ms. Zubaida Akbar, Afghanistan Programme Officer, Freedom Now.

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/2023/151, 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 Ms. Otunbayeva.

**Ms. Otunbayeva:** Today is International Women's Day, but I have few comforting messages to the women and girls in Afghanistan. The bans against women working, studying, travelling without a male companion and even going to parks or baths remain in place. The Taliban claim to have united the country, but they have also severely divided it by gender. At a moment when Afghanistan needs all of its human capital to recover from decades of war, half of the country's potential doctors, scientists, journalists and politicians are shut in their homes, their dreams crushed and their talents confiscated. Afghanistan under the Taliban remains the most repressive country in the world regarding women's rights.

The Taliban tell us that this gender segregation is not a significant issue and is being addressed. They say they should be judged on other achievements. The reality is that the 20 December ban on higher

education and the 24 December ban on women working for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have serious consequences for the Afghan population and for the relationship between the Taliban and the international community.

Funding for Afghanistan is likely to drop if women are not allowed to work. NGOs run by women, for example, have had to cease activities. If the amount of assistance is reduced, then the amount of dollar-cash shipments required to support that assistance will also decline. Discussions on providing greater development-style assistance, including with regard to small infrastructure and policies to mitigate the effects of climate change, as well as planned political engagements, have halted as a result of those bans. We understand that the Taliban have a highly different worldview than any other Government, but it is difficult to understand how any Government worthy of the name can govern against the needs of half of its population.

Our focus has always been on the Afghan people. Indeed, our support for women's rights, human rights and girls' education is because that is a clear expectation of the Afghan people. They rightly expect that their country should not be the most retrograde on the planet regarding women's rights. They understood by the assurances that the Taliban gave during the Doha negotiations that those rights would not be curtailed. Some women have told us that they even welcomed the Taliban coming to power because it ended the war, but very soon they began to lose hope. They say their elimination from public life is no better than fearing violent death.

The Afghan people continue to suffer deeply in other ways. Afghanistan remains the largest humanitarian crisis globally. Two thirds of the population, 28 million people, will need humanitarian assistance this year to survive. That will cost \$4.62 billion, the single-largest country appeal ever. Almost half of the population, 20 million people, are experiencing crisis levels of food insecurity. Six million are one step away from famine-like conditions.

Our humanitarian action is challenged by an increasingly complex access and security environment. The bans against women working for NGOs are not the only serious obstacles to reaching vulnerable populations, but we are also concerned that national women staff working for the United Nations will also be banned. To date, we have seen efforts by the Taliban to

prevent female staff from going to United Nations offices in five provinces. NGOs experience such restrictions to a much greater degree. In some provinces, we have had to temporarily suspend providing assistance because local officials have placed unacceptable conditions on its distribution. In general, there has been a recent deterioration of the humanitarian space.

In 2022, before the constraints were put in place, the United Nations and NGO partners were able to reach 26.1 million people, in large part thanks to greater access to the country due to improved security situation. I fear that, in 2023, the bans on women and other restrictions that the Taliban have wilfully applied will hinder future access. December 2022 witnessed the highest number of access constraints. With the Taliban ban on women's NGO employment in place, our humanitarian workers are forced to make uncomfortable and imperfect compromises in order to continue to save Afghan lives. The absurdity of this situation requires no comment.

Our ability to deliver is also affected by growing concerns about the looming threat posed to our own security and that of our NGO implementing partners by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan. We are grateful for the security provided so far, but are concerned that the de facto authorities do not have the capacity to fully address emerging threats. Mitigating those threats will require more concerted and more united Member State attention and is clearly an issue that the international community has in common with the de facto authorities.

Apart from the constriction on the rights of women and girls, we are also witnessing an erosion of other human rights. The Secretary-General's report (S/2023/151) notes ongoing extra-judicial killings, arbitrary arrests, detentions and torture carried out by the de facto authorities against former Government officials and security forces. Those are violations of the Taliban's amnesty decree. There is no transparency regarding investigations of violations, and violations appear increasingly allowed to occur.

We have also seen the continued implementation of the instruction by the Taliban leader calling for judicial corporal punishments, often carried out in public. According to international law, those acts constitute a form of torture and ill-treatment.

There is also greater stifling and repression of the media sector and civil society. Any society needs the voices of its citizens and constituencies to find compromises through dialogue, not intimidation and repression.

One year ago, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) proposed to the Security Council that the end of the general conflict in 2021 was an opportunity to build positive peace. Our initial engagements with the de facto authorities were relatively constructive and gave us reason for cautious hope. We began devising a pathway that would build confidence and clarify to the Taliban the international expectations regarding their stated desire to rejoin the international community.

Yet a year ago, the Taliban leadership began consistently taking decisions that negated that stated goal. The accumulation of those decisions has been a form of Government that is simply unacceptable to the international community — something that could not have surprised the Taliban. Our collective statements of condemnation and the imposition of sanctions have not had an effect; they may have hardened certain Taliban positions. On the other hand, I believe that there is a faction within the Taliban leadership, and across the movement, that does not agree with the current direction the leadership has taken. That faction understands that attention must be paid to the real needs of the people. Perhaps it can eventually execute a change of direction, but time is running short. Global crises are proliferating. Demands on donor resources are multiplying as the availability of those resources diminishes.

I see those dynamics with growing concern. I fear history repeating itself, with Afghanistan taking decisions that increase its isolation. Unlike in the 1990s, however, the world is much more focused on Afghanistan. UNAMA's strategy is to preserve whatever political space exists for honest and straightforward discourse between the Taliban and the international community, both the region and donors. We are at a moment of political impasse where trust is in short supply.

UNAMA is in Afghanistan on the Council's behalf, engaging every day with the de facto authorities, with the local political opposition, with civil society, with private sector actors and, increasingly, with Afghanistan's youth, who will inherit the future now being shaped. Our field offices carry out road missions reaching all corners of the country, not only to provide assistance but to remain connected with the people to provide the Council with the best possible information regarding the situation on the ground. That situation is extremely complex, and sometimes there are greater grounds for hope than it appears. But there is no doubt

that the larger and most visible trends are worrisome and negative. They make it harder to preserve that necessary space for dialogue.

The international community, inside the region and without, has called for the decrees to be reversed for the sake of the international community. That is a clear and unified position. We hope that the Taliban will give greater consideration to the fact that this is in their interests and, above all, in the interests of the Afghan people. At the same time, the international community must begin building an agenda for discussion with the de facto authorities that includes issues that matter to the Taliban. Those two elements can form the basis of a process that can help build confidence and lead to a mutually acceptable outcome.

Finally, in order for UNAMA to play its part in implementing that approach on behalf of the Council, we hope that we will be given a mandate for another year. As I mentioned in my previous briefing (see S/PV.9227), UNAMA commissioned an independent review of its mandate, led by a former Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General. The general conclusions are that UNAMA's current mandate is sufficiently robust, balanced and comprehensive for the current situation. Despite the setbacks I described, we continue to assert that there is no alternative to unified, patient and principled engagement that puts the needs and rights of the Afghan people first.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Akbar.

**Ms. Akbar:** I am Zubaida Akbar, a woman human rights defender from Afghanistan. I deliver my statement today on behalf of Freedom Now, an organization that defends human rights and works directly with 20 grass-roots, mostly women-led, movements inside Afghanistan.

It is my honour and responsibility to brief the Security Council today, on International Women's Day, on the worst crisis for women's rights in the world. As the Council is aware, since the Taliban seized power in August 2021, the rights of Afghan women and girls have been decimated. Through over 40 decrees, the Taliban have sought not only to erase women from public life, but to extinguish our basic humanity. Let me share with members a few examples of what life is like for Afghan women today.

It has now been 534 days since teenage girls could go to school, and 78 days since women were banned from universities, making Afghanistan the only country in the world where women are prohibited from accessing most forms of formal education, which will be catastrophic for generations to come.

The Taliban have done everything they can to curb women's freedom of movement and expression. Women cannot travel more than 75 kilometres without a male guardian. Women are banned from public baths, restaurants and parks. Even the Deputy Secretary-General and the Executive Director of UN-Women were told by the Taliban on their recent visit to Afghanistan that they should not be there without their *mahrams* and that it was *haram* for them to sit with the Taliban. They experienced a fraction of what the Taliban is imposing on millions of Afghan women every single day.

The total collapse of the legal system — and the exclusion of women from what remains of it — means that women facing domestic violence have no access to justice.

Most recently, Taliban fighters prevented the sale of contraceptives. In a country that already has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, women will not only have little choice about whether to have children, but will risk their lives to do so.

A variety of restrictions have been placed on women's right to work. The recent decision to ban women from working for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has led to more than 100 civil society organizations being unable to fully function. While some have resumed work in health and education sectors, it is clear that nothing less than an immediate and unconditional reversal of the ban will ensure that the 28 million Afghans depending on humanitarian assistance, especially women and girls, are able to survive. I want to underline that point.

We keep hearing the international community say that it confronts a dilemma in Afghanistan — to save lives, or to call out the Taliban for its violations of women's rights. But I ask members: whose lives are they saving? And at what cost? Pursuing humanitarian action without women, or delivering aid that does not reach women, serves only to further eliminate women from society. Humanitarian action must be rights-based and without discrimination. I urge the Council to remember that, while it may save lives now, it is not a substitute for finding a durable solution to the current crisis.

Women inside Afghanistan tell me they feel suffocated and hopeless. Young girls talk to me about ending their lives. That cannot continue.

There is one term that appropriately describes the situation of Afghan women today: gender apartheid. Afghan women and experts — and even Secretary-General Guterres — have condemned the systematic discrimination against Afghan women and girls as gender apartheid. Furthermore, the Taliban's human rights violations on the basis of gender amount to gender persecution, a crime against humanity for which United Nations experts have called for the Taliban to be investigated and held accountable.

Outspoken international condemnation is critical, but it is not enough. Such flagrant violations of international law, including the provisions on equality and non-discrimination as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, require a proportional, coordinated and meaningful international response that makes clear that violations of women's rights are intolerable and unjustifiable and that the Taliban will face consequences. If members do not defend women's rights here, they have no credibility to do so anywhere else.

Since August 2021, there have been two narratives about Afghanistan — one of the Taliban's return, but another about women's resistance. Grass-roots, women-led movements have been the most visible and vocal civic opposition to the Taliban so far and risk their lives daily to advocate for the human rights of all Afghans. In the words of one protester, those women are our ambassadors of freedom.

The Taliban's response to peaceful protests has been violent attacks, imprisonment and torture. Nargis Sadat, a woman protester, was arbitrarily arrested mere weeks ago, on 12 February; her fate remains unknown. Tamana Zaryab Paryani and Parwana Ibrahimkhil were abducted and disappeared after protesting in Kabul, and held for weeks in detention. Nayera Kohistani was arrested, along with her child, and has detailed abuse and torture in a Taliban prison. Hazara women who protest are treated even more harshly.

The brave civic resistance of Afghan women urgently needs the Council's support. They need the Council to say their names and take up their cases in their engagement with the Taliban. They need the Council to demand their release. They need it to grant them asylum. They need members to fund them. And they need them to hold the Taliban accountable when

they are detained, tortured, disappeared or killed for demanding their rights. The lack of consequences only emboldens the Taliban to expand their crackdowns with total impunity.

The Taliban's all-male, majority Pashtun caretaker Cabinet signals that they have no intention of forming an inclusive Government that represents either the ethnic diversity of Afghanistan or women, or protecting marginalized ethnic and religious groups.

The Taliban have not only failed to investigate or punish attacks on the Hazara community, they have been directly responsible for mass killings of Hazaras, which may amount to war crimes. In November 2022, the Taliban raided a village in Daikundi province and killed 11 Hazaras, including children. Other groups, such as the Sikh community, have been forced to abandon their homes due to targeted attacks, and members of Tajik, Uzbek and Turkmen communities continue to be forcibly displaced and to have their lands redistributed to Kuchis and Taliban members. Women in Daikundi and Jawzjan also tell me that the distribution of aid in their communities has been unequal.

The Taliban's brutal return to extrajudicial killings, public floggings and executions is clear evidence that they have not changed since they were last in power. They have no respect for the rights or aspirations of the Afghan people. And they have no plans to change. They are imposing an extremist, patriarchal interpretation of Islam that relies on the repression of women and marginalized groups.

This is not the path to peace — this is the road to another civil war, one that will not be contained in the region. I therefore call on the Security Council to take the following actions.

The Council should demand that the Taliban respect the human rights of all Afghans, including women, girls, LGBTQI+ people and all other marginalized groups, and end all restrictions on women's rights. That means not only ending the bans on education and working for NGOs, but all restrictions on women's rights that violate Afghanistan's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The Council should be clear that there will be no unconditional engagement with the Taliban unless these basic conditions are met. That includes no high-level visits by the United Nations to Afghanistan without a



clear objective informed by the priorities and concerns of Afghan women. I urge the Council to continue not to grant the Taliban formal recognition of any kind, including a seat at the United Nations.

The Council should renew the current mandate for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) as outlined in resolution 2626 (2022), without any changes, for one more year. UNAMA is already required to address key dimensions of the crisis that are critical for Afghan women and girls, but it has so far not met the expectations of the people of Afghanistan in fulfilling that mandate. The focus must now be on ensuring that UNAMA fully implements all aspects of that mandate, including on monitoring human rights and prioritizing women's rights throughout its work. I urge all United Nations leaders, especially the Special Representative Otunbayeva, to be outspoken advocates for our rights and ensure that, in her case, her briefings to the Council prioritize reporting on the situation of women and marginalized groups.

The Council should ensure that the full, equal and meaningful participation of diverse Afghan women civil society and other marginalized groups is front and centre in any decision-making regarding the future of Afghanistan, including the Council's own.

The Council should continue to regularly issue strong statements and resolutions condemning the Taliban's abuses against women and girls, and ensure that there are no exemptions to travel bans for Taliban leaders. If Afghan women are imprisoned in their homes, the Taliban should not be able to travel.

The Taliban have violated the rights of my people for over a year with no consequences. I therefore urge the Council to support initiatives to strengthen accountability for human rights violations, including all forms of gender-based violence, as well as attacks against ethnic and religious communities and other marginalized groups.

The people of Afghanistan deserve their human rights regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation. If the Taliban are allowed to continue down this path, it will be generations before Afghanistan recovers. As members of the Council deliberate on the future of my country today, I urge them to think of their own daughters, wives and sisters, and ask themselves: why do the women of Afghanistan deserve anything less?

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

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

**Mr. Ishikane (Japan):** I thank Special Representative Roza Otunbayeva and Ms. Zubaida Akbar for their briefings.

Japan is deeply concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation that the Afghan people, especially women and girls, are facing. We strongly condemn the Taliban's measures to restrict the rights of women and girls. Unfortunately, since seizing control, the Taliban have not been fulfilling their commitments to either the people of Afghanistan or the international community. The Afghan people are losing hope for the future and are continuing to flee the country due to the Taliban's repressive policies.

We are also seriously concerned about the dire economic and humanitarian situation. With over 28 million Afghans estimated to require humanitarian assistance in 2023, the international community must not be idle. Our assistance to the Afghan people should continue to enable them to not only survive, but to have lives whereby they can receive medical care and education, obtain jobs and rebuild their livelihoods in a sustainable manner. Otherwise, the humanitarian crisis will persist. Youth will become radicalized in despair. And we will see history repeat itself.

The Security Council must continue to urge the Taliban to reverse their repressive human rights policies. But at the same time, it is important to avoid isolating the Taliban, as was done in the 1990s when Afghanistan became a hotbed of terrorism. What is required of us is not only to condemn the Taliban's actions, but also to continue our engagement to change their course.

Japan has been conducting dialogues in Kabul with Taliban leaders to deliver messages from the international community. In that regard, the bridging role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is critically important to promote inclusiveness through dialogue with the people of Afghanistan. Japan has continuously supported the efforts of UNAMA in addressing the complex challenges faced by the Afghan people. At the same time, we hope that UNAMA will play its part in moving the political process forward in Afghanistan. We need to be ready to support UNAMA's efforts.

As co-penholder on Afghanistan, we appreciate the constructive engagement of Council members in the ongoing negotiations on the renewal of the UNAMA mandate. We look forward to expressing our unity towards our common objective for a secure, stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

**Mrs. Nusseibeh** (United Arab Emirates): At the outset, I would like to thank Special Representative Roza Otunbayeva for her updates, as well as and today's briefer, Ms. Zubaida Akbar, for her powerful testimony.

The Security Council last met in this setting in December (see S/PV.9227). While in the Chamber, we received news of the Taliban's decision barring girls from attending university. Restrictions on the employment of Afghan women by national and international non-governmental organizations swiftly followed that announcement. We unreservedly condemned those decisions then, and we condemn them now. They systematically deprive women and girls of their fundamental human rights simply because they are women and girls. I want to say again here that those decisions have nothing to do with Islam or Afghan culture and risk further entrenching the country's international isolation.

In the 19 months since the Taliban's takeover, the hope of a stable, secure and prosperous future for Afghanistan has been hanging in the balance. Since that meeting in December, Council members and the broader international community have been on a quest to identify the most effective ways to respond to this deterioration in Afghan society. It is against that backdrop that we are considering the renewal of mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which is due to expire in a little more than a week from now.

Around this table and during consultations, by myself and the co-penholder, it is clear that we all strongly support UNAMA and the robust and comprehensive work it is tasked with, as configured by resolution 2626 (2022). It provides the space for the Mission to work with stakeholders on the ground in an attempt not only to alleviate suffering, but also to improve lives. There is no doubt that the Mission is delivering to the best of its ability in what is a highly challenging political and security environment.

Nonetheless, it is undeniable that the overall situation in Afghanistan is worsening. There has been little to no progress in terms of the expectations

set out by the Council on human rights, inclusive governance and counter-terrorism. The Secretary-General's latest report (S/2023/151) points to increasing humanitarian needs, shrinking political space and the continued presence of foreign terrorist fighters. The report of the Special Rapporteur describes in grim detail the deterioration of the human rights situation in the country, due in large measure to the systematic discrimination against women and girls — "among the most draconian in the world" (*A/HRC/52/84, para. 14*).

As members of the Security Council, we bear the responsibility for ensuring that the international approach supports a more prosperous, more self-sufficient Afghanistan that is neither a threat to its people nor its direct neighbourhood or beyond. With that in mind, our support for UNAMA should be unwavering and must remain the centrepiece of the Council's engagement on Afghanistan.

But what we have been hearing over the past two months from within the United Nations and from individual countries, and what the developments since August 2021 have borne out, is that we lack a political strategy for Afghanistan. And that sentiment is echoed in the discussions that I have had with many Afghan women, including this week during the session of the Commission on the Status of Women, asking us not to abandon the fate of Afghan women to those forces. Today, on International Women's Day, there is no better time to express our solidarity in that respect with the women of Afghanistan. We must do more than that.

Often in times of crisis, we mistake activity for good policy, when what we actually need is a strategic reassessment of the way forward. As co-penholders, we believe the Council needs to reconsider and initiate a more strategic overview of international engagement in Afghanistan. We need to articulate a well-defined pathway that serves to advance the well-being of all Afghans. The ultimate objective of that process would be creating the forward-looking, unified and integrated international approach that we so clearly lack today.

What is certain is that, when it comes to Afghanistan and its people, we are too often trapped in a cycle of re-litigating the past, when we should be creating a new path to move forward. UNAMA is the face of the international community on the ground and deserves our continued support. However, by not taking action and not seeking to change the current course, the Council is failing to live up to its responsibilities and

failing the Afghan people. The situation in Afghanistan is exceptional, and it demands an exceptional response. We can acknowledge that and work on coalescing the international community's integrated and coherent approach, coordinate our efforts and reinforce UNAMA; or we can proceed with business as usual, to the detriment of Afghanistan and its people.

**Mr. Biang** (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council (A3), Ghana, Mozambique and my own country, Gabon.

I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva for her informative briefing, and I listened closely to Ms. Akbar's statement. The report of the Secretary-General under consideration (S/2023/151), on the situation in Afghanistan and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), gives us an opportunity to consider the most recent developments in the political, security, economic and humanitarian situations in Afghanistan.

On the political front, we take note of the developments in the restructuring of the State apparatus and the Taliban's establishment of institutions. A decree issued on 13 December 2022 re-established the National Procurement Commission, which the Taliban Government had previously abolished. On 10 January, the de facto authorities confirmed the completion of the transfer of authority from the de facto Ministry of Justice to the de facto Supreme Court, in line with an order by the leader of the Taliban Government issued on 13 October. On 29 December, the de facto Ministry of Interior announced the establishment of 25 additional districts across the country, bringing their total to 419, according to the de facto authorities, with the stated intention of improving access to services.

We have taken particular note of the call by elements of the political opposition inside and outside the country for an intra-Afghan dialogue, and of the announcement on 16 January by the Commission for Return and Communication with Former Afghan Officers and Political Figures that 475 individuals had returned to Afghanistan thanks to the opposition's efforts. Despite the various measures taken, the diversity of the Afghan people continues to be underrepresented in the political landscape, with very little progress at either the ethnic or social level. Above all, the inclusion of women in governmental structures remains a major challenge of

its own. We strongly encourage the de facto authorities in Afghanistan to positively respond to the calls for an intra-Afghan dialogue from various elements of the political opposition both inside and outside the country and from the international community. We believe firmly that it will lead to wider participation by all political actors in Afghanistan, which is in the interests of all Afghan people.

The announcement in December 2022 of the decision to suspend higher education and employment in national and international non-governmental organizations for women has further restricted the fundamental rights of women and girls. The issue of women and girls' education and their access to secondary and higher education is a vital prerequisite. The de facto authorities in Afghanistan have expanded the restrictions on women to include almost the entirety of social, political and professional life. If progress is to be made on the condition of Afghan women and girls, the international community must remain firm and demonstrate solidarity on that front. The country cannot be rebuilt without the education, qualifications and inclusion of Afghan women. The A3 has noted the announcement on 5 February by the de facto Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Lutfullah Khairkhwah, that work has begun on a strategy to find a solution for girls' higher education that conforms to sharia law.

(*spoke in English*)

On the security front, the situation on the ground remains fragile. Security violations related to the armed opposition and attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan are worrisome. The A3 condemns all the security incidents that have been observed, particularly in the western, southern and eastern regions, which accounted for 58 per cent of all recorded incidents. We encourage the de facto authorities to take concrete measures to prevent all forms of terrorism in the country. Illicit drug trafficking, coupled with frequent clashes between the opposition and security forces, the presence of foreign forces on Afghan territory and continuing border tensions, has increased the volatility of the situation on the ground. We commend UNAMA's work in combating the illicit trafficking, accumulation and diversion of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition, as well as explosive materials.

The continuing violence in Afghanistan is affecting the economic and humanitarian situation, which has continued to deteriorate. On the economic front,



although the de facto authorities, in continuing to focus on economic autonomy, have reported an increase in revenue collection, including through trade, most of the factors that have been adversely affecting the economy since August 2021 persist — the sharp reduction in development assistance and difficulties related to international financial transactions and their impact on the banking sector. The freezing of Afghan assets has contributed to a major financial crisis that is affecting the population. Those sanctions, coupled with mistrust on the part of donors and banking institutions, are increasing the precariousness of the people's situation, and we call on donors to continue their various efforts to rebuild the Afghan economy.

The worrisome humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is a result of the various sociopolitical, economic and security crises, but also of the consequences of climate change, which exacerbate vulnerabilities. A lack of medical supplies and inadequate salaries for health workers make it difficult for humanitarian personnel to act. At the same time, drought, food insecurity and malnutrition persist. The numbers speak for themselves. The humanitarian needs continue to rise. More than 28 million people will need humanitarian assistance in 2023, and the ban on aid workers has reduced or interrupted the activities of several organizations by as much as 70 per cent of their potential. The international community must continue its efforts to make the Taliban aware that the marginalization of women and girls has implications for humanitarian assistance, development and stability in the country. We note the approach of the de facto authorities to the people. They have been visiting the provinces and districts with the aim of promoting unity and discussing educational reform. The assessment of water sources by the de facto Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock in the country's northern provinces is to be welcomed.

The A3 welcomes the efforts of UNAMA, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations country team and Afghan and international non-governmental organizations. We support initiatives for dialogue with the de facto authorities aimed at promoting women's rights and their integration into society. UNAMA's participation, through its field offices, in more than 170 subnational advocacy meetings, in particular the pilot legal aid project in Bamyān and Herat provinces with the United Nations Development Programme, is

significant. We encourage the work undertaken by UNAMA, notwithstanding the challenges it is facing on the ground. Monitoring the situation in the country and interacting with the various relevant actors remain crucial to the promotion of peace and stability in Afghanistan. Accordingly, we support the extension of UNAMA's mandate for another 12 months and urge the international community to strengthen its political and financial support for the Mission's work.

We applaud the multiple meetings and advocacy efforts on Afghanistan that have been organized by countries of the region and by UN-Women, in particular those that have been held in Russia, Kazakhstan, Qatar and Indonesia, focusing on regional connectivity and economic cooperation, border security, counter-terrorism, drug trafficking, inclusive governance, women's and girls' rights and access to education for Afghan girls. We particularly welcome the 29 December call by the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Hissein Brahim Taha, on the International Islamic Fiqh Academy to launch a global campaign to unite scholars and religious authorities in the Islamic world against the decision by the de facto authorities to restrict female education.

In conclusion, we reiterate the demand for dialogue between the Afghan forces. We wish to reiterate that a stable, prosperous Afghanistan cannot be built without women or other sectors of society. As Secretary-General António Guterres said in Doha, Qatar, during the summit of the Least Developed Countries, of which Afghanistan is a member: "the countries with the least capacity need the most support". The international community must maintain its engagement in Afghanistan in support of the legitimate aspirations of the Afghan people for security and dignity.

**Mr. Kariuki** (United Kingdom): We wish to extend many thanks to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva for her briefing and for the work for her team. We also thank Ms. Akbar for her powerful account.

Recent months have seen a rapid deterioration in Taliban behaviour, with women and girls in particular facing unprecedented denial of their human rights: restrictions on their access to employment and education and to their freedom of movement, expression and dress. The Taliban have all but erased women from society.

The trajectory remains negative. So, what can the Security Council and the international community do?

First, we should remain unwavering and united in our expectations of the Taliban. The Council set these out in resolution 2593 (2021), including on honouring counter-terrorism commitments, respecting human rights and ensuring humanitarian access.

Secondly, as the Deputy Secretary-General said following her visit to Afghanistan, we should be clear on the consequences should the Taliban continue on this path: international acceptance of the Taliban will not be on the table.

Thirdly, the Council should ensure that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan retains its strong mandate. The United Nations must continue to engage the Taliban, not least to reinforce the Security Council's expectations, which include progress toward representative governance.

Fourthly, we should continue to make clear to the Taliban that their decisions are self-defeating. Afghanistan's economy will continue to suffer when 50 per cent of its population are excluded from society and the workplace. There will be no stable or durable peace when ethnic groups and large swathes of society are excluded.

Finally, as we navigate these challenges, we should hold firm in our solidarity with Afghan people. The United Kingdom is continuing to work closely with the United Nations and partners on the ground to ensure aid continues to reach those most in need, including women, while holding firm on the principle of neutrality and non-discrimination. We will not abandon the Afghan people.

**Mrs. Baeriswyl** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, I thank you for convening today's meeting, and I thank Special Representative Otunbayeva for her testimony on the worrisome developments in Afghanistan and for her valuable work. I also thank Ms. Zubaida Akbar for her briefing and for her commitment to and with those who struggle for human rights every day and who, as we have heard, often risk their lives.

It is a sad coincidence that today we are celebrating International Women's Day around the world, while women and girls in Afghanistan are the focus of our attention. Earlier this year, the Executive Director of UN-Women reminded us that

"Afghan women have left us in no doubt about their courage and their refusal to be erased from public life. They will continue to defend and fight for their rights, and it is our duty to support them in this endeavour."

The full, equal and meaningful participation of women was repeatedly called for in this Chamber during yesterday's open debate on women, peace and security (see S/PV.9276). Yet we cannot rely on words alone. Whether in Afghanistan or elsewhere in the world, making the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) a reality is our obligation.

In Afghanistan, women and girls see their human rights and fundamental freedoms violated on a daily basis. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/151) and the briefing of the Special Representative show us that the situation continues to worsen. The list of violent incidents against women and girls includes murders, honour killings, forced marriages and beatings that can lead to disabilities. At a time when their access to education and work is virtually non-existent, we call on the Taliban to immediately reverse the prohibitions against women and girls. Switzerland condemns all human rights violations committed by the Taliban, in particular violations of the rights of women, but also of children and ethnic minorities.

We are currently negotiating the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). Switzerland joins the Secretary-General in calling for an extension of the current mandate, which will allow the Mission to continue its vital activities for the Afghan people. In the near future, two areas of action seem to us to be priorities for commitment of the United Nations.

First, the Security Council and UNAMA must support all efforts aimed at promoting an Afghanistan where all of society participates in public life without discrimination or reprisals. The protection of human rights is essential to the stability of the country. Women and girls must have access to education, work, politics and social and economic life. We defend the right of women to participate in all decision-making processes. This is essential for immediate humanitarian needs, but also for economic and social development, as well as for building sustainable peace. The work of Afghan women in many non-governmental organizations on the ground is essential to achieving these goals.

Secondly, we must address humanitarian needs and find sustainable solutions to Afghanistan's endemic food insecurity. Decades of environmental degradation have increased desertification and worsened drought. The resilience of Afghans is stretched to the limit. Some 28 million people depend on humanitarian aid to survive.

But beyond the immediate delivery of aid, we must continue our long-term support. In the face of increasing challenges from climate change, the Afghan people must be supported to adapt their agriculture and make natural-resource management more sustainable. In addition, basic public services must be able to function, especially in the areas of education and public health. A stable economy is needed to create prospects for a dignified future.

Afghanistan is facing multiple mutually reinforcing crises that have plunged it into deep insecurity. We must rally around a common strategy and support the people in their efforts to regain security. However, these efforts can succeed only if the Taliban reverse their misogynistic actions and recognize the key role of women in society, the economy and politics. We call on them to rescind their recent decrees banning women from higher education and from working for non-governmental organizations. More generally, they must recognize the importance of inclusive Government and the rule of law. To support those goals, the United Nations must maintain its presence on the ground, in safety and security, through a strong mandate for engagement. We assure the Council of our continued support for this cause.

**Mr. Hoxha** (Albania): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva for her briefing, and I thank Ms. Akbar for her important information. We hear her call.

As the world comes together to celebrate International Women's Day while the Commission on the Status of Women is meeting to advance women's rights globally, today, sadly, Afghan women have little to celebrate. Their hard-won rights have been obliterated since the Taliban takeover. They are being denied the most fundamental rights that every human being is endowed with by virtue of their humanity. The de facto authorities are not only denying women's and girls' right to education, but they are also normalizing honour killings, forced marriages, child marriage and beatings, while severely restricting other basic rights, including freedom of movement.

Stubborn in their pursuit of undoing every achievement of the past two decades, the de facto authorities have decided to invest in ignorance, causing devastating psychological harm to women and girls and irreparable damage to the society. By doing so, they are also undermining the much-needed overall social

and economic development of the country, which will suffer greatly if half of the population is excluded from participating meaningfully. The Taliban are and will be responsible, because this is a catastrophe of choice. It is a predictable drive over a precipice.

We strongly condemn such policies and express our sincere and full solidarity with all Afghans, women and girls in particular, and support all action at the regional and global levels to lift all arbitrary restrictions. That includes lifting the absurd ban on female aid workers, which is severely affecting the delivery of vital aid to two thirds of the population in dire need, who are also victims of economic hardship and humanitarian disasters.

The obliteration of women's rights by the de facto authorities is part of a general deleterious policy of alarming reactionary measures that are driving the country backwards. Since the takeover, the Taliban have shown that they hate women, education, rights and freedoms, social progress and individual fulfilment. They are now tolerating extrajudicial killings and inciting corporal punishment, both strictly prohibited under international law. They are suppressing peaceful protests and progressively reducing the space for media workers and civil society, thus outlawing any form of democratic dissent.

The renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan is due in a few days. We strongly support its role and efforts to provide vital support to the people of Afghanistan despite the very challenging conditions. We encourage the United Nations team on the ground to continue to work constructively for the full implementation of the mandate, keeping a strong focus on the respect of human rights for all Afghans and continuing to prioritize the protection and advancement of women's human rights.

The Council and the international community must be united and coherent in asking the de facto authorities to comply fully with the relevant Security Council resolutions as the only way to bring security, peace and stability to the country and to normalize relations with the international community.

Finally, we once again call on the Taliban to honour their obligations, keep their promises and recognize that a stable Afghanistan can be built only with rights and freedoms and the participation and contribution of all, including women.

In our view, sustainable peace and security and the development and prosperity of the country can be achieved only through inclusivity, not exclusion and segregation, and through genuine national dialogue by establishing a constitutional order, with a representative and inclusive political system. Any other course will generate the worst scenario, lead to conflict and keep Afghanistan in the past and away from the future its people so desperately deserve.

**Mr. Montalvo Sosa** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am grateful for the information provided by Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and for the testimony of Ms. Zubaida Akbar, civil society activist and representative.

Every year, 8 March is a renewed opportunity to reflect on women's struggle for equality, justice and respect for their rights. On that date, as some countries pause to reflect on the coordination of public policies towards the achievement of that goal, we cannot but deplore the critical situation of women and girls in Afghanistan.

January's visit to Kabul by Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed did not yield the expected results in the face of the expectations generated by that plausible high-level management. In fact, Secretary-General António Guterres, just two days ago, at the inaugural meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women, reminded us that in Afghanistan "women and girls have been erased from public life".

As signatories of the statement of shared commitments of the women and peace and security agenda, my country therefore rejects the Taliban authorities' decisions, which severely limit women's access to work, justice, health services, public space and the education system, and leaves them in a situation of helplessness and hopelessness.

Continuing with the implementation of institutionalized policies of discrimination and the annulment of women is an attack on Afghan society, as a whole, and makes it almost impossible to imagine a future of peace and development. How can we envision such a future when more than half of the population is deprived of contributing to its realization? That is why my country commends the courage and resilience of Afghan women and girls in the face of this unacceptable situation.

In this stark situation, in which the need for humanitarian assistance is growing exponentially, Ecuador expresses its appreciation for the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and will support, in the coming days, the renewal of its mandate for 12 months, with a view to maintaining and strengthening its presence in the field, particularly in its efforts to promote an inclusive dialogue among all actors in Afghan society.

Given this critical humanitarian situation, we also commend the bilateral and multilateral cooperation initiatives promoted by countries of the region and by regional and international organizations, especially those aimed at providing funding for education for girls and boys, as well as job opportunities for Afghan women, as such initiatives convey clearly the sentiment of the majority of the international community with respect to the regressive policies of the *de facto* regime.

As a signatory to the Paris Commitments, the Paris Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration, Ecuador would like to express its regret for the grave violations perpetrated against Afghan children, who continue to be killed, maimed, abducted and victimized by improvised explosive devices and unexploded ordnance. Ecuador also unequivocally rejects the extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture and ill-treatment committed by the Taliban regime. These incidents are included in the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/151) and have also been relayed to us today by Ms. Otunbayeva.

It is deplorable to note that, since the installation of the *de facto* Government in August 2021, we see no signs for optimism. On the contrary, the information that we have received leads us to believe that all the factors further undermining the social fabric of the country — the growing humanitarian crisis, human rights violations and abuses, discrimination, isolation, impunity, violent extremism and terrorism — are converging in Afghanistan.

In conclusion, I express our conviction that the complexity and gravity of the situation in Afghanistan require coordinated and accelerated work among all the bodies of the United Nations system, as well as the genuine solidarity of the international community as a whole, so as to strengthen the strategies for building a sustainable peace architecture and comprehensive economic development for the long-suffering Afghan people.



**Ms. Evstigneeva** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We take this opportunity to congratulate all the women present in this Chamber, as well as the women of Afghanistan, on International Women's Day.

We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, for her assessment of the situation in the country. The Russian Federation supports the work of UNAMA under her leadership in the context of the Mission's mandated tasks. It is positive that the United Nations is committed to maintaining a presence and to providing the necessary assistance to the people of Afghanistan. We are ready to continue to engage constructively with all Security Council members with a view to renewing UNAMA's mandate as soon as possible.

We also listened carefully to Ms. Zubaida Akbar's briefing. We are glad that representatives of the region were also given the floor in this discussion. We took note of the Secretary-General's report on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2023/151). We would like to make the following points.

A year and a half ago, 20 long years of war in Afghanistan ended with the Taliban coming to power again and foreign troops hastily fleeing the country. The long-standing problems, unresolved for years by the corrupt Ghani regime, were compounded by new challenges. Instead of the long-awaited peace that had been promised, the Afghan people received sanctions, an unprecedented humanitarian and economic crisis, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and American weapons left behind, to the joy of terrorists.

At the same time, in their usual fashion, our American colleagues, with the support of their allies, hastened to apportion full responsibility for ruining the country and the consequences of their ignominious military campaign to the de facto authorities in Afghanistan. They continue to do that now, blackmailing the population with humanitarian aid and manipulating assistance on various far-fetched pretexts. Under the guise of a benefactor and a champion of the rights of women and girls, Washington conceals its true face. Under the threat of sanctions, the many war crimes committed by United States and NATO troops continue to be erased from the pages of history as if they never took place. The real reasons for being in Afghanistan for so long are being hushed up, not to mention the issue of stolen Afghan assets, which may now be used for other purposes in other conflict areas.

Against that backdrop, the high-sounding rhetoric of our Western colleagues about the deteriorating situation in the country and the suffering of the Afghan people, as well as calls to take up the sanctions baton and increase political and economic pressure on the de facto authorities, seems immoral. They lack the courage to admit that their preferred methods are no longer effective. The consequences of such steps will only burden ordinary Afghans but will not change the situation on the ground. However, that approach does not surprise us. They also seem to realize that in Kabul, which is seeking its own path of independent development for Afghanistan without regard to Western assistance.

We share the Secretary-General's assessment as to the complex domestic political situation in Afghanistan. We are particularly concerned about the security threats posed by the terrorist activities of ISIL-Khorasan. We can see that, over a period of 20 years, terrorists have strengthened their influence in the country and are now deliberately destabilizing the situation by carrying out more attacks and spreading a climate of fear and despair. They target representatives of religious and ethnic minorities, including women and children. The safety of UNAMA staff and humanitarian workers on the ground may also be at risk. Unfortunately, the efforts made by the de facto authorities in that regard are not sufficient.

Related to terrorism is the drug problem. It is clear that, amid the widespread hunger and poverty, it will be difficult for Afghanistan to overcome the challenges by itself without comprehensive international and regional assistance. Support for Afghan farmers is now more important than ever.

We are closely following socioeconomic developments in the country. We note the efforts of the United Nations and regional organizations to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. We particularly commend the selfless work of humanitarian agencies and their staff, who are ready to remain on the ground in any circumstances to help Afghans. At the same time, we see that those steps are insufficient. Western donors continue to block United Nations efforts to expand assistance beyond basic needs. They categorically reject the possibility of providing assistance for development, the reconstruction of schools and hospitals and the building of roads to connect provinces and cities with agricultural areas.

Building long-term and sustainable peace in Afghanistan is not possible without ongoing tolerant and pragmatic engagement with the new authorities on a wide range of urgent issues, including political inclusiveness, combating terrorist and drug threats and respect for human rights, including those of women and girls. That comprehensive approach will also determine the effectiveness of UNAMA's efforts.

Russia has consistently supported promoting cooperation with Afghanistan on issues relating to a comprehensive settlement. Together with our regional partners, we are working to develop a common approach to the situation in the country. The Moscow format also serves that goal. Its most recent meeting took place in Moscow on 8 February.

We also note the potential of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)-Afghanistan Contact Group. The Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Commonwealth of Independent States also regularly serve as platforms for the alignment of positions.

We continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people and to promote cooperation on the socioeconomic track.

**Ms. Gatt (Malta):** Let me begin by thanking Special Representative Otunbayeva for her briefing. We also thank Mozambique for inviting Ms. Zubaida Akbar to brief us on the challenges, or rather the struggles and humiliations, with which women in Afghanistan have to contend on a daily basis. Her message on International Women's Day has special significance, and I assure her that Malta will remain committed to keeping the spotlight on this fundamental issue during its term on the Security Council and beyond.

Afghanistan remains the world's largest humanitarian crisis, with approximately 28.3 million Afghans in need of emergency humanitarian assistance. According to the United Nations, in just 18 months, Afghanistan's gross domestic product declined by approximately 30 per cent. The cost of a basic food basket rose by 30 per cent, and unemployment by 40 per cent. All that has tipped the country into yet another cycle of impoverishment.

Against that backdrop, Malta reiterates its full support for the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). Our focus remains on supporting the needs and rights of all

Afghans. We are pleased that the European Union has re-established its physical presence in Kabul to support humanitarian operations.

Malta deplores the Taliban's systematic gender persecution and discrimination against women and girls across all political, economic and social spheres. Their systematic aggression against women violates international law and contravenes fundamental human rights and gender equality norms, as well as the Charter of the United Nations itself. As the international community, we are obliged to respond to abuses of governance that institutionalize discrimination.

Afghan women and girls must be given access to education and work and be able to participate in political life without fear of reprisals. Afghanistan's economic recovery and development cannot be realized without women's full, equal and meaningful participation. Women are critical leaders for change. Without them, there is little hope for a brighter tomorrow in Afghanistan.

Malta is also deeply concerned about the restrictive edicts with which the de facto authorities targeted women in December 2022. They are not only reprehensible but threaten to undermine the crucial humanitarian operations across Afghanistan. As the Secretary-General states in his quarterly report (S/2023/151), those edicts have effectively put the development of the three-year Strategic Framework for Afghanistan on hold. We welcome the work of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in engaging with the de facto authorities to find new parameters and protocols for humanitarian operations in Afghanistan that will allow aid to continue reaching the people of Afghanistan without compromising the humanitarian principles of independence, neutrality, impartiality and humanity.

As the humanitarian and political crisis in Afghanistan continues, much progress has to be made in supporting the functioning of the Afghan economy and local markets, especially in the face of mass acute hunger. The Council must remain vigilant and united to respond swiftly to any further repressive measures by the de facto authorities. The latest report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan (A/HRC/52/84) illustrates the state of the shrinking space for civil society in the country. We

support the recommendations outlined in his report and call on the de facto authorities to implement them in full.

As the causes of the current crisis are multifaceted and diverse, we strongly support the renewal of UNAMA's mandate, which includes robust protections and advancements for the full spectrum of women's rights. We look forward to actively engaging with and further supporting the Mission in accomplishing its priorities.

**Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil):** Allow me to begin by thanking the briefers for their informative remarks and updates, which have enriched our discussions and enlightened our perspectives on the matter at hand.

This first quarterly meeting of the Security Council on the work and activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and on the situation in Afghanistan in 2023 represents a crucial opportunity to lay fundamental groundwork as part of our shared responsibilities, especially in the light of the Mission's imminent mandate renewal. Based on our long-standing support for the essential role that UNAMA plays in Afghanistan and for the broad endorsement of the mandate established by resolution 2626 (2022), including from key actors with deep knowledge of the situation on the ground, Brazil intends to favour its extension, and we count on the guidance of the co-penholders in that regard. We very much hope that once it is approved, the mandate's new cycle will contribute to progress across all sectors of Afghan society.

As we have said on previous occasions, Brazil firmly believes that a stable, economically viable and peaceful Afghanistan is attainable only if all people of Afghanistan, including women and girls, have access to and receive education and fully, equally and meaningfully participate in and contribute to the country's future and development, in line with resolutions 1325 (2000), 2593 (2021) and 2626 (2022). Similarly, the future we all seek for the Afghan people depends on the necessary respect for human rights law, as well as on maintaining the full scope of humanitarian assistance on the ground.

In that context, there can be no doubt that imposing restrictions on the work of humanitarian and non-governmental organizations, both national and international, and denying the rights of Afghan women and girls and erasing their presence from public life,

can lead only to further desperation and instability. We urge all parties to allow and facilitate rapid, safe and unhindered access for humanitarian assistance to all in need in order to protect civilians, including humanitarian personnel and people in vulnerable situations, especially children. For that reason, Brazil reiterates its appreciation to Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths, UNAMA's leadership and all partners and stakeholders for their recent and ongoing efforts to safeguard both the maintenance of crucial humanitarian assistance and the fundamental rights of women and girls in the country.

At this critical juncture, we once again urge the relevant authorities in Afghanistan to show the necessary goodwill and flexibility needed to urgently reverse the restrictive approach they have adopted so far. At the very least, we call on them to remove obstacles to the delivery of aid and to widen the civic space for women and girls. That said, we firmly believe in the need for continued engagement with the de facto authorities, and that symbolic gestures, such as acknowledging improvements in the fight against corruption and drug trafficking, can go a long way to building bridges of mutual understanding and trust between Afghanistan's leaders and the international community. Above all, ensuring that all channels of communication are open and running is key, not only to upholding the rights of all Afghans but also to promoting long-term peace, stability and development.

In line with its long-standing tradition in international protection, Brazil's Government has decided to authorize humanitarian visas to people affected by the crisis in Afghanistan. Since September 2021, we have already authorized more than 8,000 visas for Afghans in need, paying special attention to requests from women and children. As Brazil has remained one of the few countries in the world to grant visas without major requirements, we would like to remind the Council of the central importance of the principle of responsibility-sharing in ensuring effective protection for displaced populations, with due consideration for the fundamental role of host countries and communities. Both the maintenance of humanitarian operations and the welfare of women and girls must remain at the heart of our efforts to build a stable, functioning and self-reliant Afghanistan. Brazil reaffirms its steadfast commitment to continuing to pursue the imminent task of bringing peace and development to Afghanistan through our joint work and collective responsibility.

**Mrs. Broadhurst Estival** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Roza Otunbayeva and Ms. Zubaida Akbar for their very informative briefings. I would like to highlight two points.

As we are celebrating International Women's Day today, I would like to emphasize how vital it is to address this issue. The situation of women and girls in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate. They are still being deprived of their most basic rights and freedoms. The ban on women working in non-governmental organizations continues to have disastrous consequences, and the same is true for the ban on women and girls' access to secondary education, university and many jobs. The Taliban are responsible for the grave deterioration of the humanitarian, economic and social situation in Afghanistan, and especially as a result of the policies they have instituted that systematically exclude women. We call on the Taliban to rescind their measures, which undermine any possibility of the country achieving sustainable and balanced development. We are also concerned about the continuing violence against children and about the increase in incidents of corporal punishment and other inhumane and degrading treatment of the population generally. The situation is complex, and the challenges are many and multidimensional, particularly with regard to the security situation. However, we must continue our demands on the Taliban in terms of safeguarding human rights, especially those of women and girls. As we know, in actual fact all those issues are interlinked, when we consider that the country's recovery will be impossible without the participation of half its population.

France reiterates its support for the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and remains determined to provide every possible assistance to the people of Afghanistan. France has steadfastly reaffirmed its support for the Afghan people and will continue to provide them with humanitarian assistance in full respect for humanitarian principles and international law. We will continue to help the Afghan population, with a special focus on the needs of women and girls. As one of the major donors to Afghanistan, the European Union is also continuing its response. Needless to say, we will continue to engage with our partners, including neighbouring countries and other countries in the region. They have a key role to play in helping meet the expectations of the

international community, as set out in resolution 2593 (2021). The requirements outlined in the resolution, including with regard to counter-terrorism, continue to make any potential engagement with the Taliban conditional on their honouring of their promises.

In that context, we will continue to support the work of UNAMA, whose overall mandate remains entirely pertinent to the situation and in accord with the previous relevant resolutions of the Council. We also commend the efforts of the Under-Secretary-General in support of Afghanistan and remain committed to contributing to efforts to support the Afghan people.

**Mr. Wood** (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Otunbayeva and Ms. Akbar for their briefings. I am grateful to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for its work to advance the Security Council's goal of a stable, prosperous and secure Afghanistan. The United States fully supports UNAMA and its mission, and we welcome the Secretary-General's recommendations on strategic objectives and priorities for UNAMA (S/2023/151).

As we know, today is International Women's Day, when the United States and countries around the world honour the achievements and valour of women and girls everywhere. And on this occasion, we must also highlight the immense barriers facing women and girls. Nowhere is that more pronounced than in Afghanistan. The Taliban have continued to prevent women and girls from exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Regrettably, in late December the Taliban announced an edict forbidding women from working for national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Later that month, on top of an existing ban on girls attending secondary school, the Taliban suspended permission for women to attend public and private universities. Those obstacles add to the numerous edicts and restrictions that the Taliban have disproportionately placed on women and girls since August 2021. By preventing women from working for NGOs, including humanitarian organizations, they are jeopardizing the lives of Afghans who depend on the aid that many women deliver. That aid is a matter of survival, particularly for women-headed households that are already among the most vulnerable.

UNAMA's mandate will soon expire. The United States underscores its strong support for the Mission's comprehensive mandate, including its vital work on



human rights, the protection of children and civilians and women's empowerment. It is critical to working for the peace and stability that we all agree is so important for Afghanistan and the world. The Security Council must act to preserve UNAMA as a lifeline for the people of Afghanistan. The United States opposes — I repeat, opposes — any effort to interfere with a simple technical extension, which would be entirely unwarranted. It would negatively affect both UNAMA and the Secretary-General's plan to convene special envoys for Afghanistan. The Council should preserve UNAMA's mandate through a simple technical extension without delay. We have only days left. More broadly, the Taliban's grave restrictions demand a strong response from Afghanistan's neighbours and the rest of the international community. We cannot sit silently by and watch the Taliban erase women from public life.

When the Deputy Secretary-General travelled to Afghanistan this year, she noted broad unity among the States of the region on the belief that edicts restricting women's education and employment should be repealed. The United States supports the regional efforts to enshrine that unity in the form of a General Assembly draft resolution and will continue to do its part to support the people of Afghanistan. We expect the Taliban to allow unhindered humanitarian access for aid workers of all genders, safe conditions for humanitarian personnel and the independent and impartial provision of assistance. We urge the Taliban to establish a credible process to support representative governance that fully reflects Afghanistan's rich diversity, including the full, equal and meaningful representation of women and minority communities. We stand firm in our long-standing commitment to advancing gender equity and equality and the empowerment of women and girls everywhere.

**Mr. Geng Shuang** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva and Ms. Akbar for their briefings.

Today is International Women's Day. On this special day, as we consider the situation in Afghanistan, we cannot help turning our attention to Afghan women. They are a vulnerable segment of Afghan society and the victims worst affected by the country's many years of war and turmoil. They are in urgent need of global attention and assistance. Afghan women yearn for a peaceful and tranquil homeland and a future full of hope. They should be well integrated into Afghanistan's

economy and society and become important drivers and primary beneficiaries of the national peace and reconstruction process. And their rights and interests should be effectively protected in that process.

Security and stability are vital to the protection of the rights and interests of Afghan women and girls. Since the beginning of this year there have been several vicious terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, resulting in significant casualties. Terrorist forces such as the Islamic State-Khorasan and the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement have colluded with one another in plotting and staging terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, and we have recently been seeing a resurgence in their activities. The international community should follow those developments closely, take a zero-tolerance approach to combating all forms of terrorism and urge the Taliban to take resolute and robust measures to prevent the build-up of terrorist forces in Afghanistan and effectively ensure the safety and security of the Afghan people, as well as foreign citizens in Afghanistan.

Economic and social development is key to safeguarding the rights and interests of Afghan women and girls. The Afghan economy showed positive signs in the past year, and its fiscal revenues have increased considerably, which is encouraging. Afghanistan should further develop its domestic markets, restore economic growth, expand connectivity, deepen regional cooperation, promote alternative agricultural cultivation and continue to increase people's income so that they can live happy lives and the root causes of turmoil and instability can be eliminated. That is the only way to ensure that Afghan refugees and displaced persons will be able to return to their homeland and that women and girls can truly enjoy peace and dignity as soon as possible.

Protecting the rights and interests of Afghan women and girls goes hand in hand with assistance from the international community. The Secretary-General's report (S/2023/151) indicates that the Afghan humanitarian situation is worsening, with countless women and children lacking access to food and warm clothing. Their very survival is at stake. This year, 28.3 million Afghans — two thirds of the country's population — will require humanitarian assistance. According to recent news reports, developed donor countries are considering cutting back on international aid to Afghanistan, which is a worrisome development. In the current circumstances, humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan must not be reduced, let alone

stopped. Developed donor countries should maintain humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and explore more direct and effective ways to ensure that such resources are actually invested in the Afghan people, especially women and girls.

The rights and interests of Afghan women and children cannot be protected without the lifting of external constraints. Unilateral sanctions have seriously undermined Afghanistan's economic foundations and have exacerbated the humanitarian situation on the ground, becoming a huge drag on the survival and development of local women and children. They should be lifted immediately. Afghanistan's \$7 billion in overseas assets belong to its people and should be used for their benefit. Last month, the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York ruled that the United States has no right to divert Afghanistan's overseas assets for other uses, in yet another demonstration that the freezing of Afghan assets is unjustified and illegal. The United States and other countries concerned should immediately return the assets of the Central Bank of Afghanistan to the Afghan people so that the women and children of Afghanistan can benefit from them, instead of making various excuses to delay their handover.

China is concerned about the recently enacted bans on access to education and work that target Afghan women and about their potential impact on the basic rights and interests of Afghan women, as well as on the humanitarian situation in the country. We hope that the interim Government of Afghanistan will take concrete actions to guarantee women's education and employment. Where the international community is concerned, mutual respect and effective engagement are prerequisites for exerting influence and finding solutions to problems. Mere condemnation and pressure can be not just futile but counterproductive. A peaceful, stable, developing and prosperous Afghanistan is what all Afghan people aspire to and is in line with the common interests of the countries of the region and the international community as a whole. As a neighbour of Afghanistan, China has always been committed to supporting Afghanistan in achieving peace, stability and development. China will work together with the international community to support the Afghan people in finding a path out of their current predicament at an early date in order to create a better future.

Last but not least, I would like to commend Special Representative Otunbayeva and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

for their work. We support UNAMA in the active implementation of its mandate, which plays an important role in alleviating the humanitarian situation, promoting economic development and improving governance capabilities in Afghanistan. China stands ready to continue engaging with other members of the Security Council to make proper arrangements for the renewal of UNAMA's mandate.

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

**Mr. Faiq (Afghanistan):** I thank you, Sir, for convening us today and I congratulate Mozambique on assuming the presidency of the Council for this month. I also want to thank Special Representative Otunbayeva for her accurate but depressing update and to Ms. Akbar for her bold and powerful remarks.

This International Women's Day, I join the international community in sending a message of solidarity and support to all courageous women and girls around the world, particularly the brave and resilient women and girls of Afghanistan, who fearlessly fight against the oppressive rule of the Taliban to restore their social, economic and political rights. In just over a year and a half, the Taliban has systemically stripped Afghan women and girls of their fundamental human rights and effectively erased them from society. Under Taliban rule, women and girls have faced gender apartheid and gender-based discrimination, including forced marriage, depriving them of health care, education and freedom of movement. In just over a year and a half, the doors of science, technology and knowledge have been closed to Afghan women and girls. The quality of Afghans' once-modern education, from primary school to university, is being radicalized and has descended into extremism. As a result, millions of young Afghans are facing educational uncertainty.

In just over a year and a half, essential services, including those in administrative, electronic, banking and Internet sectors, have been dismantled. In just over a year and a half, poverty and unemployment have increased. Starvation and hunger have driven some of our people to resort to selling their body parts. Some 28 million Afghans are suffering from food insecurity, while the Taliban boast that domestic revenue has increased without explaining where that revenue is spent. Contrary to the Taliban's claims, they have fostered corruption in Afghan institutions, going so far as to resort to robbery by collecting taxes under

different names and false justifications. In just over a year and a half, natural and human-made disasters have caused immense human casualties and financial losses without effective preventive action. In just over a year and a half, millions of Afghan refugees and migrants have fled the country and been trapped by human traffickers. Those Afghans are often tortured, killed or imprisoned, or even lose their lives crossing borders and seas. We have recently seen numerous Afghans lose their lives in Italy and Bulgaria. In just over a year and a half, despite the Taliban's claims that they are ensuring domestic security, the blood of hundreds of our innocent people has been spilled by terrorist groups in Afghan homes, schools and religious centres without transparency or accountability.

In just over a year and a half, the Taliban have reversed all of Afghanistan's achievements over the past two decades and have abolished mechanisms for the protection of human rights. In the absence of an effective judicial system, the country is being ruled from the barrel of a gun without any national legitimacy. In just over a year and a half, Afghanistan has been politically and globally isolated because of the Taliban's barbaric and un-Islamic policies and behaviour. In just over a year and a half, our national security forces have been dismantled, with thousands of personnel arrested, tortured, forced to leave the country or extrajudicially executed.

In just over a year and a half, competence, professionalism and merit-based recruitment have lost their value. Thousands of skilled and experienced professionals, including doctors, engineers, military leaders, journalists, schoolteachers, university professors and activists specializing in agriculture, art, literature, economy, law, political science, history and philosophy have left the country as refugees. They are living in dire economic straits in neighbouring countries, waiting for assistance from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Finally, it has been just over a year and a half since an extremist group took Afghanistan by force and against the will of the Afghan people. In that context, the people of Afghanistan have continued to live their lives with resilience and in hope of change. The dark regime will never be able to suppress the Afghan people's desire for freedom. The Taliban's oppressive regime is a tragic reality for Afghans today, but it does not represent the Afghan people. Without public support and national legitimacy, the Taliban regime will not endure. The Taliban have placed Afghanistan on the brink of a

social, economic and political precipice. If their policies continue they will lead to further misery and to the destruction of Afghanistan. Their refusal to establish an inclusive and accountable system based on the rule of law, justice and the will of the people is indicative of their lack of interest in putting Afghanistan on a path to peace and prosperity. Furthermore, their justification of their strict policies and actions is largely due to a lack of proper Islamic knowledge and modern management and governance skills. I fully agree with the Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates that the actions of the Taliban do not represent the culture of the people of Afghanistan or Islamic values. The Taliban's practices defame Islamic principles and disseminate Islamophobia. Their actions and policies are a biased propagation and false interpretation of Islam derived from religious teachings in madrasas beyond Afghanistan.

In addition, the Taliban are either unable or unwilling to respond to national and international calls to reverse their oppressive policies towards women and girls. Contrary to their claims to be serving the impoverished people of Afghanistan, they are using the people's dire economic and humanitarian situation as a bargaining chip for their demands and the consolidation of their power. That is especially true with regard women and girls' right to education and work. They are implementing a distorted policy that runs counter to the interests of donor countries and the people of Afghanistan. By banning female workers at the non-governmental organizations, the Taliban are interfering with the delivery of aid and obstructing the distribution of and access to humanitarian assistance.

We are grateful to the Secretary-General, the international community and donor countries for their patience and continued support to the people of Afghanistan through strong statements, life-saving services, including the delivery of aid, and the funding of the United Nations humanitarian response plan. While we appreciate the cash flows to the people of Afghanistan, we also would like to underline that there should be a mechanism to make sure that the funds are delivered to the country's vulnerable people. I welcome the decision and judgment of the United States District Court with regard to the \$3.5 billion in assets belonging to Afghanistan's Central Bank. We hope that those funds — the national reserves of Afghanistan — will be used by a legitimate Government with strict, transparent monitoring for the long-term benefit of the Afghan people.

We commend the recent visit to Afghanistan by Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths to express solidarity and support for Afghan women, engage with diverse groups and stakeholders, and build momentum for a political track. Let me emphasize that we welcome principled engagement with the Taliban without concessions or compromises on the legitimate demands and rights of the people of Afghanistan, as well as the Charter of the United Nations and universal human rights, norms and principles. We must be careful not to help the unacceptable become a norm. Engagement must not create obstacles to the social, economic and political rights of progressive Afghans or democratic forces inside and outside Afghanistan.

I would like to ask the United Nations, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and our international partners to support and provide platforms for progressive and democratic movements of Afghans inside and outside Afghanistan. They are against the current situation and would like to find a solution. Their voices must be heard, and they must be engaged in all discussions about Afghanistan. The Taliban are not the only representatives of Afghanistan. The United Nations has all the right tools, such as targeted sanctions, and the Security Council should use them to pressure the Taliban to comply effectively with their commitments. In addition, we need a collective approach and united response from all international partners, including Security Council members, the countries of the region and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

It is very alarming that the Taliban have recently increased their crackdown on and targeted killings of former security and defence forces. Despite their amnesty announcement, there are credible reports of extrajudicial killings, the detention of former security forces and requests for money for their release. Last month, Mr. Sirat, a former special forces member, was taken out of a public bus in Sheberghan, after which the Taliban tortured him and cut his body in two. Just recently Taliban fighters released a video of the merciless execution of Commander Badruddin. Shir Mohammad, another former national police officer in Bala Karz in Kandahar, was taken from his home at midnight and killed. That happened in the capital of the Taliban and the city of its leader Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada. Those are crimes against humanity and should be prosecuted by the International Criminal

Court. I want to express our appreciation to Mr. Richard Bennett, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, for documenting those human rights crimes and reporting them to the Human Rights Council.

In conclusion, as we are discussing the UNAMA mandate extension, I want to first of all express our appreciation to the co-penholders for their efforts to extend the UNAMA mandate, and to UNAMA itself, especially for its coordination and delivery of humanitarian assistance and its documenting and reporting of human rights violations. We would like to support UNAMA's strong mandate. We urge for the implementation of all mandate components, particularly the political aspect, which focuses on a political solution with the engagement of all Afghans. In that regard, we would like to once again highlight the robust role of the United Nations leadership in addressing the current crisis and dilemma in Afghanistan by initiating a political process, supported unanimously by the Security Council and under the auspices of the Secretary-General, to bring all stakeholders together to achieve a truly representative and inclusive political system.

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

**Mr. Irvani** (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank Mozambique for convening this meeting. We welcome the presence of Ms. Otunbayeva, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, at this meeting and appreciate her updated and insightful briefing. We also thank Ms. Akbar for her views.

Since August 2021, Afghanistan has been grappling with a multitude of challenges. Despite the efforts of the United Nations to alleviate the humanitarian crisis, the situation remains dire, with an estimated 28 million people projected to require humanitarian and protection assistance in 2023. Furthermore, the threat of terrorism persists with the presence of Da'esh and Al-Qaida affiliates. In the meantime, the recent restrictions and bans imposed on Afghan women and girls that prevent them from accessing education are deeply concerning.

However, we must beware of politicizing or exploiting humanitarian aid for political purposes, which would harm the Afghan people who depend on the aid for their survival. It is also crucial to ensure that the release of the frozen assets belonging to the Afghan people is expedited and not subject to political



conditions. That is critical to restoring the Afghan economy and saving lives. In order to ensure that the Afghan people receive the support they need, their humanitarian aid must remain impartial and unconditional. We must prioritize the well-being of the Afghan people above everything else.

As neighbours of Afghanistan, we are deeply concerned about the potentially disastrous consequences of the ongoing situation there. The presence of Da'esh and Al-Qaida affiliates, as well as drug cultivation and trafficking, poses a significant threat to the security of Afghanistan, its neighbours and the entire region. If it is not addressed effectively, the situation has the potential to lead to widespread destitution and a massive influx of migrants into neighbouring countries, which are already overburdened by having to host millions of displaced Afghans.

We strongly support the extension of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). UNAMA has a critical role to play in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan, and it is essential that its mandate is extended to ensure continued support for the Afghan people during this challenging time.

Iran hosts more than 5 million Afghan people, making it one of the largest hosting countries. Despite receiving minimum support from the international community and donor countries and facing challenges caused by the inhumane unilateral sanctions of the United States and Western countries, Iran has continued to provide essential services to Afghans living in Iran for over four decades.

Iran has provided free education and training to all Afghan students living in Iran. The Iranian education system has welcomed 670,000 Afghan students, including 3,700 students with special education needs or mental disabilities and over 33,000 students enrolled in Iranian universities. Iran has taken further steps to support Afghan women and girls who have been affected by the recent restrictions imposed by the Taliban. Iran has streamlined the visa process for women and girls seeking to continue their education within Iran.

Since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in August 2021, the Islamic Republic of Iran has taken a clear, consistent and unequivocal position. It has repeatedly urged the de facto authorities in Afghanistan to establish an inclusive government that represents all Afghan ethnic religious, linguistic and political groups.

Iran has reiterated that recognition of the current de facto authorities is contingent on compliance with their obligations, including the establishment of an inclusive and truly representative government. This position has not changed and remains valid, and we are committed to upholding our principles. However, we recognize the importance of ensuring that our position does not negatively affect the lives and livelihoods of our Afghan brothers and sisters or exacerbates the already dire humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

We are committed to working collaboratively with all neighbouring countries of Afghanistan and other relevant partners to support the Afghan people during this challenging time. Recently, on 7 March, the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, along with Russia, held their first meeting of special representatives for Afghanistan in Tashkent. The discussions at the meeting centred around the current situation in Afghanistan and how the parties can collaborate to improve its condition and establish long-term peace and stability in the region. Our goal is to achieve comprehensive and durable peace in Afghanistan, as well as sustainable development in the country. We believe that this can be achieved only through joint efforts and collective cooperation among neighbours, the countries concerned in the region and the international community.

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

**Mr. Akram (Pakistan):** I would like to congratulate Mozambique and you, Mr. President, on an active and successful presidency of the Council during this month. We also thank the Secretary-General for his latest report on Afghanistan (S/2023/151) and the Special Representative, Her Excellency Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, for her briefing today. We also heard from two Afghan citizens. The Security Council's proceedings would have been more productive if we were able to interact with the people who actually control the territory of Afghanistan.

As Afghanistan's immediate and closest neighbour, Pakistan has suffered enormously from the four decades of conflict in the country. Pakistan desires peace and stability in Afghanistan as a strategic compulsion. Pakistan is deeply concerned by recent developments in Afghanistan, reflected in the report of the Secretary-General. We join others in expressing our deep disappointment at the further restrictions placed

by the Afghan interim Government on the rights of women and girls to education and work. We hope that the Afghan interim Government will soon find a solution to restore these rights in the light of Islamic injunctions.

Pakistan commends Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, United Nations Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffith and Special Representative Roza Otunbayeva for their efforts and engagements with the Afghan interim Government to create space for the continuation of humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan. We continue to believe that ending or reducing humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan would be morally wrong and politically counter-productive. As the report of the Secretary-General outlines, 28 million Afghan women, children and men face abject poverty and need urgent assistance. Halting or reducing humanitarian assistance would hurt the very people — women and children — whose human rights the international community seeks to uphold. It would also create more refugees, more drugs and more violence in and from Afghanistan. We therefore urge the full funding of the Secretary-General's \$4.2 billion recovery plan for Afghanistan.

On the other hand, what is needed is a more comprehensive international effort to revive the Afghan economy. Although the Afghan interim Government appears to have mobilized resources to manage itself through trade and customs revenues, the Afghan people continue to suffer because of the collapse of the Afghan economy after external assistance was eliminated following the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan. It is therefore essential to revive the Afghan banking and financial sector, productively utilize Afghanistan's national resources and assets, finance desperately needed reconstruction of infrastructure and implement the several shovel ready connectivity projects, including the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, the Central Asia South Asia electricity grid and the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan rail project. All of Afghanistan's neighbours support such steps for the revival of the Afghan economy.

Pakistan's major concern is the terrorist attacks within and from Afghanistan by Da'esh, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other terrorist groups. In recent months, Pakistan has endured a series of such terrorist attacks emanating from the TTP and other associated terrorists from sentry posts in Afghanistan. These terrorist actions also have external sponsorship and financing.

The Afghan interim Government has repeatedly assured us and others that Afghanistan's territory will not be used for terrorism against neighbouring countries, including Pakistan or any other country. The Afghan interim Government needs to demonstrate more effectively that it has the intent and the capacity to fulfil these assurances.

Pakistan has continued its patient engagement with the Afghan interim Government to address our concerns with regard to terrorism, border incidents provoked by local Taliban commanders and other issues. Pakistan's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar visited Kabul on 29 November last year to promote these objectives, including respect for the rights of Afghan women and girls and to assure the Afghan interim Government of Pakistan's continued support for humanitarian, economic and technical assistance to Afghanistan. In addition, our Defence Minister led a delegation to Kabul on 22 February to discuss the threat of terrorism and other security issues.

It would be unrealistic and indeed dangerous to believe, as we have just heard, that the Afghan interim Government can be replaced or destabilized by force. That would be a recipe for further conflict and instability in Afghanistan and throughout the region. We have just ended 40 years of conflict. We must not repeat the mistakes that have been made in the past.

Despite the challenging environment, Pakistan believes that the continuing engagement with the Afghan interim Government is the best means to achieve the international community's objectives for the observance of human rights, especially women's rights, inclusive governance and an end to terrorism within and from Afghanistan.

We value the role that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and Special Representative Otunbayeva are playing in Afghanistan. Pakistan supports the renewal of UNAMA's mandate. It is essential for Afghanistan's immediate neighbours to move in concert with the efforts to restore normalcy and stability in Afghanistan. We also believe that the Organization of Islamic Cooperation has a vital role in supporting Afghanistan's active revival of its economy and in helping to restore human rights, especially the rights of women and girls, in accordance with Islamic injunctions by presenting best practices. Despite current geopolitical tensions, Pakistan believes that it is in the interest of the major Powers to cooperate in the endeavour to build peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Pakistan endorses the proposals for a clear road map or pathway to normalization in Afghanistan. Such a road map should, on the one hand, set out the desired objectives of the international community, and on the other, indicate the incentives for the Afghan interim Government, which seeks the lifting of sanctions and international recognition. As a first step, the travel ban exemptions could be restored, and a review of the sanctions regime established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) could be initiated. We hope that the anomaly of Afghanistan's United Nations representation will also soon be addressed.

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

**Mrs. Kamboj** (India): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Roza Otunbayeva, for her briefing and civil society briefer Zubaida Akbar for her remarks.

As a contiguous neighbour and long-standing partner of Afghanistan, and given our strong historical and civilizational linkages to the Afghan people, India has direct stakes in ensuring the return of peace and stability to the country. In the interest of time, however, I shall be brief, limiting myself to four points only.

First, the collective approach of the international community has been articulated in resolution 2593 (2021) of August 2021, which was adopted under India's presidency of the Security Council. In accordance with the resolution, we expect that the territory of Afghanistan should not be used for sheltering, training, planning or financing terrorist acts, specifically terrorist individuals and entities proscribed by the Security Council. It also means acting against drug trafficking. Resolution 2593 (2021) also outlines the need for the formation of a truly inclusive and representative Government structure that represents all sections of Afghan society, respects the rights of all Afghans and ensures equal rights for women, girls and members of minority groups, including their access to education.

Secondly, the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan remains deeply distressing. The dire situation has been highlighted by the Special Representative of the Secretary-

General as well. In response to the humanitarian needs of the Afghan people and in response to the urgent appeals made by the United Nations, India has dispatched several shipments of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. We are committed to continuing our help to the Afghan people going forward. In that regard, we have provided several shipments of humanitarian assistance, including 40,000 metric tons of wheat, 65 tons of medical aid and 28 tons of other relief material. Recently, we also sent approximately 5,000 units of stationary items and winter clothing for primary school students of Habibia High School in Kabul. In addition, we are also partnering with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for the welfare and rehabilitation of the drug-user population in Afghanistan, especially among Afghan women. We have also assisted UNODC by supplying medical aid, blankets and female hygiene kits, as per their requirement.

Thirdly, India appreciates and supports the work being done by the United Nations in Afghanistan. We actively took part in finalizing the draft of the current mandate of UNAMA after the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban in 2021. We are ready to work with the Secretary-General in his efforts to find progress on the situation in Afghanistan.

Fourthly, we are particularly concerned about increasing attempts to remove women from public life in Afghanistan. We call for women and minorities to be included in Afghanistan's future and their rights to be fully respected.

I would like to reiterate once again that security and stability in Afghanistan will continue to be our priority, and India will continue to speak out in support of the Afghan people. Peace and stability in Afghanistan are critical imperatives that all of us need to collectively strive for. India will continue to play its constructive role in pursuit of that objective. The interests of the Afghan people will always be at the core of all our efforts.

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

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

*The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.*