



# Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

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Wednesday, 6 March 2024, 10 a.m.

New York

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<i>President:</i>	Mr. Yamazaki . . . . .	(Japan)
<i>Members:</i>	Algeria . . . . .	Mr. Koudri
	China . . . . .	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. De La Gasca
	France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
	Guyana . . . . .	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
	Malta . . . . .	Mrs. Frazier
	Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Afonso
	Republic of Korea . . . . .	Mr. Hwang
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Ms. Evstigneeva
	Sierra Leone . . . . .	Mr. George
	Slovenia . . . . .	Mrs. Blokar Drobič
	Switzerland . . . . .	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	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/2024/196)

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

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in Afghanistan**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2024/196)**

**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. Fatima Gailani, Chair of the Afghanistan Future Thought Forum.

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/2024/196, 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:** Resolution 2721 (2023) provides a clear goal for the international community's engagement with the de facto authorities. That end state is an Afghanistan at peace with itself and its neighbours, fully reintegrated into the international community and meeting its international obligations, which includes the need to ensure the full participation of Afghan women. This is also the objective towards which the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has carried out its own activities in Afghanistan since receiving a mandate for political engagement in March 2022.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for convening the second meeting of Special Envoys in Doha on 18 and 19 February. Despite the decision by the de facto authorities not to attend, the meeting was very important for the following reasons. First, it reiterated the international consensus established at

the first Doha meeting, held in May 2023, on the need for continued engagement. Secondly, it helped key stakeholders in the international community to clarify the way forward based on the Special Coordinator's independent assessment (see S/2023/856). Thirdly, it ensured that the needs of the Afghan people remained high on the international agenda, and established this group of Special Envoys as a standing mechanism for the international community that should meet more frequently to work towards the end state articulated in resolution 2721 (2023). Fourthly, it allowed Special Envoys to hear the views of Afghan civil society. Fifthly, it reiterated the international community's ongoing concerns about human rights in Afghanistan, the lack of inclusive governance and the fact that Afghanistan should not become a threat to neighbours and other countries.

I want to thank the Government of Qatar for generously hosting that meeting a second time, providing facilities and making logistical arrangements. It was the second time in a year that the Secretary-General has devoted two days out of his busy schedule to chair a meeting on Afghanistan. This is an important signal to the people of Afghanistan, and especially the women of Afghanistan, that their needs and rights are not being forgotten.

Indeed, we are just two days away from International Women's Day, which this year highlights the need to invest in women. What we are seeing in Afghanistan is precisely the opposite: a deliberate disinvestment that is both harsh and unsustainable. Denying women and girls access to education and work and removing them from many aspects of public life have caused immense harm to mental and physical health and livelihoods. The recent arbitrary detentions for alleged violations of Islamic dress code were a further violation of human rights and carry enormous stigma for women and girls. That also has a chilling effect among the wider female population, many of whom are now afraid to move about in public.

I take this opportunity to again call on the de facto authorities to reverse those restrictions. The longer they remain in place, the more damage will be done. I thank the Council and the international community for maintaining their solidarity and focus on that crisis.

An important part of the consensus established at the first Doha meeting was the need to continue consultations with the de facto authorities. In my discussions with them after the meeting, they explained

that their decision to not attend was not a rejection of their stated desire to engage with the international community, but a reflection of their concern that they were not being treated as a full stakeholder in discussions about Afghanistan. We will make every effort to encourage their participation at the next meeting in that format.

The de facto authorities welcomed the Secretary-General's statement at Doha on the need for deeper consultations, but they also stressed that consultations should be genuine and not merely a matter of the international community communicating its decision to them.

The independent assessment calls for the full reintegration of Afghanistan into the international system by accepting its international obligations and commitments. Not all of the de facto authorities are convinced about the need for that. However, many of them do understand that Afghanistan stands to benefit from the full implementation of the independent assessment's recommendations. I stress that the conditions for reintegration also reflect the expectations of Afghanistan's population, especially full respect for the rights of women and girls and the rights of ethnic and religious communities and the need for greater economic opportunity.

I am concerned by numerous negative trends that we have observed recently, some of which are documented in more detail in the Secretary-General's report (S/2024/196). UNAMA's extensive monitoring and advocacy, including on human rights, has highlighted the denial of the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of the population; the well-documented policies and actions for the repression of women and girls; public displays of violence, including corporal and capital punishment; a lack of inclusive governance; and the marginalization of minorities. It is true that, day to day, security has improved for millions of people since the Taliban takeover, but that has come at an enormous cost.

It is worth recalling what has been done by the international community to support the Afghan people since the collapse of the Republic. Donors have provided nearly \$8 billion in funding for humanitarian needs and basic human services, ensuring vital assistance to 32 million Afghans so that they have sufficient food and water, adequate shelter and income opportunities. Donors have also responded to specific emergencies, such as the earthquakes in Paktika in 2022 and in

Herat in 2023, which directly impacted hundreds of thousands of people. More than 500,000 Afghans repatriated from Pakistan were helped to restart their lives, with the international community supporting an effective response strategy put in place by the de facto authorities.

The international community has enabled the continuation of most primary medical care. Since May 2022, collective donor support through the World Bank has enabled 7.5 million people to receive health and nutrition services. Regular United Nations cash shipments to support those vital humanitarian operations have continued. As a secondary effect, those shipments have injected liquidity into the local economy that, in large part, has allowed the private sector to continue to function and averted a fiscal crisis. Support for the printing and shipping of banknotes has also helped with liquidity and supported the Afghan currency.

In December 2021, the Security Council adopted resolution 2615 (2021), providing a humanitarian exemption in which it decided that humanitarian assistance and other activities that support basic human needs in Afghanistan are not a violation of the financial sanctions set out in the sanctions regime of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). That decision has enabled everything that I have described so far to take place.

A number of countries have retained their diplomatic presences in Kabul, engaging regularly with the de facto authorities, especially on economic issues, enhancing trade and investment. On 15 February, the World Bank Board approved an adjusted approach to Afghanistan that unlocks more funding for basic needs and restarts an important regional electricity supply project.

Afghanistan has been a challenge for the international community for decades. It has been a source of instability, with terrorism exported to the rest of the world; the source of 85 per cent of the world's opium production; and the homeland of millions of refugees who have been driven to live in neighbouring countries, and millions more who have chosen to live far away, where their sons and daughters can be educated. The relative stability that exists now should be appreciated, as should the significant efforts that the de facto authorities have made to reduce the cultivation of opium and to combat Da'esh. But if the other issues that I mentioned are not addressed, those achievements will not be enough to ensure long-term sustainability.

In the region and beyond, there are well-founded concerns over the presence of terrorist groups in Afghanistan. Those concerns have been reflected in the reports of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team. It is not only Da'esh that constitutes a threat, but also Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan — a major concern for Pakistan, which has seen an increase in terrorist activity.

What is the way forward? Pending consultations regarding the appointment of a Special Envoy, UNAMA will work within its mandate to implement the substance of the independent assessment. We will maintain our engagement with the de facto authorities on respect for human rights and ways to increase consultations with local populations, as well as their participation in political decision-making so that all of Afghanistan's available resources can be deployed for its own well-being.

We will encourage donors to identify areas where they can provide longer-term sustainable assistance that directly benefits the Afghan people. Those include measures to reduce the effects of climate change, to reduce the effects of the opium ban and to support the ongoing demining of Afghanistan in cooperation with the de facto authorities.

We will advocate for support for more funding to be directed towards basic human needs in order to build more social and economic resilience. Assistance in basic services is a lifeline for most vulnerable Afghans, with women constituting the majority of beneficiaries.

We will promote measures to support economic stabilization as a foundation for poverty reduction, which will not be possible without the right enabling environment in the financial sector. Banking and microfinance are only two of the concrete areas that we need to strengthen.

We will commence preparations for the next meeting in the Doha format, which should have a practical agenda and should involve the participation of the de facto authorities as well as other Afghan stakeholders.

That is our workplan as the Council considers the renewal of UNAMA's mandate. Our approach is one of patient expectation that ongoing consultations will eventually yield the results we are seeking. And I thank the Council for the support it continues to show for the efforts of UNAMA and the United Nations in general in Afghanistan.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Gailani.

**Ms. Gailani:** I thank you, Mr. President, for inviting me to this timely and important meeting today to address current challenges — and opportunities — facing Afghanistan at a more crucial time than ever before.

Thankfully, the end goal has been defined as endorsing a process that ensures a peaceful Afghanistan that is fully integrated into the international community and meets its international obligations. The concerns voiced about inclusivity, economic distress, restricted dress and especially the rights of women to education and work are also of the utmost importance to us all, especially to millions of families inside Afghanistan. However, the process needs to include all key stakeholders and has to gain more trust from all key players. I think there are important lessons to be learned from our interactions, our messaging and our negotiations, especially with current Afghan caretaker authorities and other engaged Afghans who truly believe in dialogue as an important tool to resolve fundamental issues.

As Chair of the Afghanistan Future Thought Forum, an inclusive intra-Afghan platform, allow me to give my takeaways and assessment regarding future steps that are needed to assure a pragmatic pathway leading to success, mutual understanding and beyond.

I wish the international community at large would be more cohesive, have greater consensus and prioritize a plan of action regarding Afghanistan. We need effective diplomacy to bridge the existing gaps. Unfortunately, Afghans are more fragmented today — on issues ranging from war or peace and effective engagement or punitive measures, to aid priorities and governance reforms. I really hope for a positive dialogue process and international forums on the basis of constructive and problem-solving approaches, not just venting, posturing or the use of spoiler tactics. More than 40 million Afghans inside the country are victims of bad strategies, kleptocratic systems from the past and harmful decisions made since the 2021 transition. We cannot ignore the humanitarian plight, or can we wait any longer to improve livelihoods, give the Afghan people access to their assets and to financial markets, and smartly reboot the economy. Failure to do so will further isolate Afghanistan and regionalize its fate.

Regarding inclusivity and effective engagement, we need to avoid polarization — an approach that only helps promote radical ideas on all sides and precludes practical solutions. I am in favour of what has been termed “engagement architecture” to guide the international community’s political, humanitarian and development activities in Afghanistan, alongside other recommendations, while addressing the basic needs of Afghans and strengthening trust through structured engagement and greater cooperation on regional and global security and stability — a road map that would reintegrate Afghanistan into the international community, in line with its commitments and obligations. However, such engagement cannot be swayed by the parties and interest groups, or can it ignore a side that carries more weight and needs a seat at the table.

As part of the lessons learned, with more than 46 years of turmoil and geopolitical wrangling affecting my country, I want to take this opportunity to stress that Afghanistan, with its rich diversity, is suffering from a historical rush to find quick solutions, overlooking the fundamental linkages between and traits of State and society. We need to build national consensus to agree on those fundamental issues that constitute the root causes of chronic protracted armed conflict, instability and social and political fragmentation. Those objectives can be addressed once we discuss and agree to a national vision of the basis of national values and best practices of reconciliation, inclusivity, stability, social justice and prosperity. I thank members again for this opportunity to hear one more Afghan voice.

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

I shall now make a state in my capacity as the representative of Japan.

I would like to begin by thanking Special Representative Otunbayeva for her briefing on the situation in Afghanistan and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I am also grateful for the insightful briefing by Ms. Fatima Gailani, which gave us a broad perspective.

The situation in Afghanistan is becoming more complex, and our interpretation varies depending on the angle from which we see the country. The economy is somewhat stable but at a very low equilibrium, and its base remains fragile. Security has broadly improved, but the threat of terrorism persists. Although opium cultivation has decreased significantly, the production of

methamphetamine is increasing. While we acknowledge that the Taliban has claimed achievements, there is little progress on the human rights situation, including with regard to women and girls, which is one of the issues that the international community, including Japan, is most concerned about. Additionally, the humanitarian situation remains dire, compounded by earthquakes, a mass influx of Afghan returnees from Pakistan and the country’s susceptibility to climate change.

What I think we can agree on is that the current situation is at an impasse and not sustainable. There are numerous problems that require an internationally coordinated approach to tackle. We should work to alleviate the suffering of the Afghan people and not let Afghanistan be destabilized again. In that vein, we welcome that the participants of the meeting of Special Envoys on Afghanistan in Doha last month agreed on the importance of continued engagement with the Taliban and the need to address the issues contained in the independent assessment (see S/2023/856). I commend the initiative of the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, to make this event productive and thank the Government of Qatar for hosting the delegations. Japan actively contributed to the discussions, stressing the importance of patient, pragmatic and principled engagement with the Taliban through confidence-building measures.

We believe that the meeting in Doha would have been an ideal opportunity for the Taliban and international actors to communicate their positions directly, build confidence and deepen engagement. In addition, participating countries would have been able to explain to the Taliban the need to address human rights and other issues.

We support the Secretary-General’s intention to make this meeting format of Special Envoys a standing one, where stakeholders can meet more frequently and at various levels. We hope that the Taliban will participate in the next meeting. In that regard, it is critical that the United Nations continue and strengthen its communication with them. Needless to say, various actors, including women, must participate in the processes concerning Afghanistan.

We also hope to see a United Nations Special Envoy on Afghanistan appointed sooner rather than later, in accordance with resolution 2721 (2023). The Special Envoy needs to be able to facilitate engagement, build a cooperative relationship with the Taliban, actively communicate with neighbouring and donor countries



and work closely with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. That will be a vital part of a framework to address Afghanistan's issues in a more coherent, coordinated and structured manner.

Japan will continue to be proactive in assisting and empowering the Afghan people and remains committed to supporting the active engagement of the United Nations to the greatest extent possible, including through our Embassy in Kabul. Our Embassy will keep explaining to the Taliban the significance of greater engagement with the international community, while urging them to reverse their repressive policies regarding women and girls.

As the Secretary-General mentioned in his latest report (S/2024/196), the Organization's presence remains critical for Afghanistan to address a myriad of challenges. UNAMA is more important than ever, and Japan fully supports its role and functions under the leadership of Special Representative Otunbayeva. We are doing our best to ensure a smooth renewal of its mandate next week.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

**Ms. Evstigneeva** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for her assessment of the situation in Afghanistan. The Russian Federation supports the activities of UNAMA under her skilful leadership within the framework of the tasks entrusted to the Mission. We note Kabul's interest in maintaining and developing contacts with her. We welcome the unwavering commitment of the United Nations to maintain its presence and provide the necessary assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

We listened attentively to the statement delivered by the representative of civil society, Ms. Fatima Gailani. We are pleased to see that regional actors will also participate in our discussion today. We take note of the Secretary-General's report on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2024/196) and would like to make several remarks in that regard.

Two and a half years ago, as a result of the irresponsible withdrawal of foreign troops and the disgraceful flight of former President Ashraf Ghani and his Administration, the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan. That was preceded, on 29 February 2020,

by the signing of a behind-the-scenes deal between the United States and the Taliban in Doha. As a result, the de facto authorities inherited a country with a heap of problems and threats accumulated over years of war. After 20 years of dependency and total reliance on international infusions, Afghanistan ended up in a situation of complete financial starvation, under unprecedented unilateral sanctions and one step away from a humanitarian and economic catastrophe.

However, contrary to the gloomy forecasts and expectations of our Western colleagues, Afghanistan did not plunge into yet another civil war and did not become a black hole. At the same time, it is clear that, despite the efforts undertaken, under current conditions it will be very difficult for the country to independently achieve development, resolve all long-standing issues and meet all the challenges. Its people need our assistance and full support more than ever.

We have been saying consistently that there is no alternative to a realistic comprehensive approach to Afghanistan based on an objective analysis and a balanced assessment of the situation and the prospects for a settlement. That approach implies constructive interaction on Afghanistan within the international community, with full consideration of the needs of the Afghans themselves, as well as a patient dialogue, without blackmail or pressure, with the de facto authorities on a wide range of urgent issues. Ensuring sustainable peace and stability in the country remains imperative, as that is the key to stability in the region and beyond. This approach is shared by the participants of the Moscow format.

Over the most recent period, the Taliban themselves have repeatedly demonstrated interest in developing broad pragmatic cooperation, strengthening regional cooperation and enhancing contacts with various international players, including under the auspices of the United Nations.

However, it is very difficult to make progress on this track if the reciprocal steps of the entire international community depend on the approval of a number of Western donors pursuing their own narrow interests. Nor does the reputation of the United Nations stand to benefit from such actions. We expect that appropriate conclusions will be drawn in preparation for the next meeting of Special Envoys for Afghanistan in Doha.

We share some of the Secretary-General's assessments of the situation in the country. We are

particularly concerned about the ongoing security risks posed by the activity of the terrorist group of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-KP) and its affiliated foreign terrorist fighters. We note that the de facto authorities are making efforts to resolve this issue. However, in the absence of the necessary capacity to do so, a full resolution of this problem is hardly feasible. Over the years of United States and NATO military presence, the group has strengthened its presence in the country, established strong ties with other terrorist associations and received support from the outside. ISIL-KP periodically changes tactics and recruits new members in an effort to attract new supporters to its ranks. Their goal is clear to us: to undermine stability in Afghanistan and its neighbouring States. Given the number of weapons left behind by the Western military in the country, the risk of such weapons falling into the hands of militants and the group's subsequent spread in the region and beyond is becoming a very real possibility.

The drug problem is closely related to terrorism. We are convinced of the need to enhance comprehensive international and regional cooperation in that regard in order to eradicate that threat, including through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. It is imperative to make sure that there is consistency in that connection. We are also concerned about the manufacturing of synthetic drugs.

We are closely following the development of the humanitarian and socioeconomic situation in the country. We note the efforts made by the United Nations and regional organizations to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. We highly appreciate the contribution of humanitarian agencies and their staff, who are ready to stay on the ground under any conditions and help the Afghan people. Clearly, however, those measures are not sufficient. What is objectionable is the attempts of some Western countries to reduce their level of assistance through preconditions. As a result, the funding of the United Nations humanitarian plan to assist Afghanistan is under threat for the second year in a row. What is needed is an end to politicizing humanitarian assistance, unfreezing assets and providing enhanced assistance for the subsequent economic reconstruction and development of Afghanistan.

We are also paying close attention to the situation of the rights of all Afghan people in general, including the universal rights of women and girls and their socioeconomic rights to education and work, as well

as the formation of a truly inclusive Government with the participation of all ethno-political groups in the country. We expect to see positive trends on both of those tracks.

The Russian Federation fully supports the right and the desire of the Afghan people to live in peace and stability. Order in the region depends on that. However, building that lasting and sustainable peace is impossible without interacting with the de facto authorities on a wide range of issues. There is no alternative. Finding a speedy way out of the current impasse and ensuring the subsequent reintegration of Afghanistan into the international community depend upon it. It is our view that the effective implementation of the mandates entrusted to UNAMA depend on adhering to a comprehensive approach. We support the Mission's upcoming mandate extension.

**Mr. Wood** (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Otunbayeva and Ms. Gailani for their briefings, as well as the entire team of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for its work to build a stable, prosperous, inclusive and secure Afghanistan. We appreciate its commitment in the face of many challenges.

We will highlight three pressing topics today: UNAMA's work in Afghanistan, our continuing concerns about the rights of women and girls and the United Nations-led effort to implement resolution 2721 (2023).

The United States fully supports a renewal of UNAMA's mandate. We appreciate UNAMA's thorough quarterly report (S/2024/196). It notes that the Taliban continues to deny women and girls the ability to exercise their human rights. The Taliban continues to enforce severe edicts restricting women and girls' access to secondary or higher education, preventing women's full participation in the workforce. The Taliban is also detaining women who are deemed to be non-compliant with a hijab decree.

The United States continues to partner with Afghan women to help them to prepare for the day when they are able to fully participate in society. On 27 February, Secretary Blinken welcomed the Alliance for Afghan Women's Economic Resilience summit to the Department of State. Secretary Blinken noted that the Taliban's decrees go against the will of the people of Afghanistan. Surveys show that more than 85 per cent of the Afghan population believe that women should have equal access to education. Women's contributions

would help to create a more resilient society and add more than \$1 billion to the Afghan economy. It is Afghanistan's loss if women and girls are not allowed to reach their full potential. Secretary Blinken also noted that the Alliance for Afghan Women's Economic Resilience will provide virtual job training and skills-building courses for Afghan women around the world. Working with our partners, such as the Qatari Government, the Qatari foundation Education Above All and the American education company Coursera, the Alliance will provide hundreds of thousands of Afghan women with technical job training classes. Taken together, those efforts will support Afghan women as they start, and then grow, their own businesses.

Regarding the United Nations Special Envoy, we strongly support the Security Council's directive to appoint someone to work with the international community, the Taliban and other Afghans. That work should focus on developing a road map of essential steps, including the Taliban's respect for Afghanistan's international commitments, before the international community moves towards the normalization of relations. That work only complements the work of UNAMA. Such a multilateral effort will also help to find solutions to the humanitarian and economic problems affecting the lives of all Afghans. As other global priorities risk overburdening capitals, a timely appointment will keep international attention on Afghanistan.

When the Security Council adopted resolution 2721 (2023) in response to the United Nations independent assessment on Afghanistan (see S/2023/856), it highlighted the critical importance of UNAMA's continued presence. The United States underscores the essential role for UNAMA in coordinating the United Nations efforts on the ground and in serving as the voice of the international community in Afghanistan.

**Mr. Hwang** (Republic of Korea): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Otunbayeva, for her briefing and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for its tireless work on the ground. My sincere appreciation also goes to Ms. Fatima Gailani.

Taking stock of the recent developments, my delegation would like to focus on the following points.

The first point is on the urgency of the human rights situation. The continuous and systematic suppression of human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially

those of women and girls in Afghanistan, is deeply concerning. The Taliban's misogynistic policies are having tragic and intergenerational impacts. The Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Afghanistan has reported high rates of suicide among young girls. The expansion of madrassas with an increasing focus on ideological education implies the possibility of youth radicalization. At the same time, UN-Women, UNAMA and the International Organization for Migration have reported that Afghan boys are starting to internalize the subordination of their mothers and sisters. It is of additional concern that terrorist groups could feed on and exploit such ideologies for recruitment and indoctrination. Those disturbing trends should be tackled immediately to improve the lives and well-being of the Afghan people. The human rights situation in Afghanistan is no less urgent than the country's humanitarian crisis. While we take note from the Secretary-General's report (S/2024/196) and today's briefing of the Taliban's efforts and activities to counter narcotics, enhance security and increase outreach among the Afghan population, we reiterate that excluding Afghan women can never enable the necessary inclusivity to sustain a country.

The second point is on the drivers of humanitarian needs. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs humanitarian response plan for 2024 shows that 23.7 million Afghan people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Most of them require protection from factors such as unexploded ordnance and mine contamination, the adverse impacts of climate change and increased risks of gender-based violence, early marriage and child labour. Some of those factors indeed require increasing international assistance. In that regard, we commend UNAMA and other United Nations agencies for scaling-up activities, including demining and responding to frequent natural disasters.

But we should bear in mind that a considerable portion of those humanitarian needs stems directly from the Taliban's policies and that, as long as they remain in place, humanitarian needs are being consistently regenerated. The Republic of Korea has provided \$74 million in humanitarian assistance since the Taliban takeover. That includes our contributions to the United Nations Population Fund for countering gender-based violence and to UNICEF for providing community-based education to girls and boys. However, what we have witnessed since the provision of aid is an increased number of women and girls at heightened risk of gender-based violence and international organizations having



difficulties running schools. This reminds me of the Korean phrase “like pouring water into a pot with a hole in it”. This policy-induced aspect of humanitarian needs, which is likely to bring about a deeper and more prolonged humanitarian crisis, should be highlighted in engagements with the Taliban.

That observation leads me to my final point: the role of the Special Envoy. UNAMA has done a great job in running large-scale ground operations and conducting daily engagements. We reaffirm our strong support for UNAMA’s continued presence and its effective operations on the ground. But plugging the hole in the pot requires a more fundamental change, of course. Asking UNAMA to manage streams of water and, at the same time, to fill the hole seems likely to be a “mission impossible”.

In that connection, we see value in appointing a Special Envoy to promote coherence and coordination in international engagement and induce necessary mid- and long-term policy changes, as recommended in the independent assessment report (see S/2023/856). Fragmented engagement by different actors focusing on different priorities are enabling the Taliban to select counterparts and consolidate misguided policies. Having a separate envoy position with a distinct mandate will also enable UNAMA to more effectively implement its daily mandates on the ground.

The Republic of Korea has been an active and long-standing supporter of the Afghan people through the provision of both human and financial resources since 2002. It is our sincere wish that the people of Afghanistan, especially the women and girls who were completely deprived of their lifestyles and dreams overnight, see signs of hopeful progress without delay.

**Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett** (Guyana): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council, namely, Algeria, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and my own country, Guyana (A3+).

The A3+ thanks the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, and Ms. Fatima Gailani for their briefings.

As Afghanistan grapples with complex and multifaceted challenges, a comprehensive and holistic approach is required. We encourage all parties to

continue engaging on the recommendations of the report of the independent assessment (see S/2023/856).

Peace, stability, sustainable development and the eradication of poverty in Afghanistan can be achieved only through inclusivity and investment in the Afghan people. Considering that women make up almost half of the Afghan population, it is imperative to include women in the development process and to consider them as truly important partners. To that end, their full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in the public, political, economic, social and cultural life of the country must be guaranteed.

We call upon the Taliban to swiftly reverse all policies and practices that discriminate against women and girls and curtail the enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including rights to education, freedom of movement and right to employment. In that regard, the A3+ calls for the reopening of schools and universities for women and girls to have access to all levels of education. We also call for the cessation of arbitrary arrests of women. The A3+ urges the Taliban to respect Afghanistan’s obligations under international law.

Afghanistan is home to one of the youngest populations in the world, and access to quality education for youth, including girls, will help to boost economic growth and development in Afghanistan.

The security challenges in Afghanistan related to terrorism, drugs and weapons trafficking remain a serious concern. We recognize the ongoing efforts of the Taliban to combat drug trafficking and end opium cultivation while noting the consequent loss of income to farmers. We encourage the Taliban and the international community to support farmers in transitioning to alternative crops for sustainable livelihoods.

We recognize that regional involvement and interaction are important to improving Afghanistan’s economic and security situation and note the efforts by the Taliban in that regard.

The A3+ is deeply concerned about the dire humanitarian situation affecting millions of people in Afghanistan. That is compounded by the large-scale return of Afghan refugees and the climate-related challenges. We note the support provided by the Taliban to returnees.

We commend UNAMA for the delivery and coordination of humanitarian assistance and encourage

international donors to increase support. We urge the removal of restrictions on female aid workers, as that is negatively impacting the reach and effectiveness of humanitarian operations.

The A3+ emphasizes that more sustainable forms of international assistance beyond humanitarian aid are needed to address the basic human and economic needs of the population and to achieve long-term development for Afghanistan.

In conclusion, we express our full support to UNAMA and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva and for their important work in Afghanistan and convey our support for the renewal of UNAMA's mandate.

**Mr. Geng Shuang** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva for her briefing and Ms. Gailani for her statement.

In the two and a half years since the interim Administration took office, the domestic situation in Afghanistan has been generally stable, with improvement in the economy and people's livelihoods and expansions in regional cooperation. Those positive developments merit recognition.

At the same time, Afghanistan still faces severe challenges in terms of the humanitarian situation, economic development and the threat of terrorism. Last November, the independence assessment report (see S/2023/856), submitted by the Special Coordinator, put forward a series of recommendations on how to enhance constructive engagement between the international community and the Afghan authorities and mobilize the efforts of all parties to help Afghanistan to emerge from its difficult situation and get back on track at an earlier date.

The meeting of Special Envoys held in Doha last month held useful discussions in that regard. The Council should build on those efforts and seek a more comprehensive and objective understanding of the situation in Afghanistan, plan a solution in a more rational and pragmatic manner, break the deadlock and resolve the impasse, and play a positive and constructive role in the stable development of Afghanistan and its integration into the international community.

China would like to emphasize the following points.

First, the promotion of practical cooperation with Afghanistan should be prioritized. The most recent

report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/196) points out that Afghanistan's potential for development is good and its economic growth can be driven by the promotion of trade and connectivity, thereby gradually reducing its dependence on foreign aid. In recent years, regional countries, within the framework of regional cooperation mechanisms, have undertaken cooperation in the areas of energy supply, transportation and customs clearance facilitation, which has brought tangible benefits to the Afghan people. Those initiatives are very much in line with the relevant pragmatic recommendations of the independent assessment report. The international community should, on the one hand, guarantee humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and, on the other hand, provide more help in the areas of alternative crop cultivation, mine clearance, the restoration of the Afghan banking system and trade investment facilitation in the light of the country's needs, so as to contribute to the long-term development of Afghanistan.

Secondly, it is imperative to maintain dialogue with the Afghan authorities. Resolution 2721 (2023) urges the Afghan authorities to promote inclusive governance and to uphold the fundamental rights of all, including those of women, children and ethnic minorities. The international community should, through patient communication with the Afghan authorities, gradually enhance their understanding of and trust in the outside world and encourage them to adopt more positive initiatives in response to international expectations.

It is important to create favourable conditions for dialogue and engagement and avoid presuppositions and impose programmes on Afghanistan. As an important step for confidence-building, the Security Council should make timely adjustments to the sanctions regime and reinstate the exemptions to the travel ban for relevant members of the Afghan authorities. Illegal unilateral sanctions imposed on Afghanistan by relevant countries should be terminated and assets abroad should be returned immediately.

Thirdly, it is important to support the Afghan authorities in their continued and resolute efforts to combat terrorism. The Secretary-General's report shows that the terrorist forces based in Afghanistan remain active and continue to threaten the security of Afghanistan and the region. We expect the Afghan authorities to fulfil their commitments in good faith and take resolute and strong measures to combat terrorist organizations, such as the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement and the Islamic State in Iraq and

the Levant, so as to eliminate the breeding ground for terrorism. In the face of terrorism, which is a common enemy of humankind, all parties should abandon geopolitical calculations and ideological prejudice, reject double standards and selective counter-terrorism and work together to preserve the overall landscape of international counter-terrorism cooperation.

Under the leadership of Special Representative Otunbayeva, UNAMA has maintained a positive interaction with the Afghan authorities and actively coordinated and enhanced humanitarian assistance and development and reconstruction efforts for Afghanistan. China appreciates those efforts. We look forward to UNAMA continuing to be the bridge to enhanced understanding and mutual trust between the international community and the Afghan authorities and playing a greater role in addressing Afghanistan's urgent needs and long-term development.

As a friendly neighbour of Afghanistan, China will continue to firmly support the peaceful development of Afghanistan and provide the Afghan people with all possible assistance, to the best of our capabilities.

**Dame Barbara Woodward** (United Kingdom): Like others, I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva and Ms. Fatima Gailani for their briefings. I also thank the staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for all the work they do to support the Afghan people.

UNAMA's latest report (S/2024/196) outlines the challenges that Afghanistan continues to face — restrictions on the rights of women and girls are becoming stricter, and more than half the country's population will require humanitarian assistance this year. It is therefore vital that, collectively, we continue to support the Afghan people.

First, we must do so by ensuring that the international community stays united — or in Ms. Gailani's words, cohesive — in its engagement with the Taliban. The future path for an Afghanistan at peace with itself and its neighbours is laid out in the Special Coordinator's independent assessment (see S/2023/856) and in resolution 2721 (2023). We should therefore now seek to move forward with its recommendations, including the formation of a small contact group and the appointment of a Special Envoy. In order to make further progress, the Taliban must meet their international obligations. Afghanistan cannot be self-reliant when it excludes

50 per cent of its people from society. And without inclusive governance, it will not find durable and lasting peace.

Secondly, we must continue our urgent action to address the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. The United Nations humanitarian needs and response plan for Afghanistan remains underfunded. We call on all States to step up their support, and the United Kingdom's own bilateral aid programme this year currently stands at \$144 million. We need to support aid agencies as they try to ensure that all marginalized groups have equal, safe and dignified access to assistance and services.

The United Kingdom remains committed to finding a constructive way forward, working with all international partners and a range of Afghan stakeholders in this endeavour. We continue to stand with the Afghan people.

**Mrs. Baeriswyl** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to join my colleagues in thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva and Ms. Gailani for their briefings. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for convening the Doha meeting of Special Envoys and to mention what we discussed in the Council last week (see S/PV.9558), above all the fact that the recommendations of the independent assessment (see S/2023/856) must be implemented promptly.

As we heard from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and from all our colleagues, and as we have read in the report (S/2024/196), Afghanistan continues to face a multitude of complex crises, combining, among others, an economic crisis with a human rights crisis that is affecting women in particular.

In addition, the climate crisis is already having serious consequences for the region as a whole. In the future, growing competition for water is likely to accentuate conflicts, instability and insecurity. It is therefore imperative to take immediate steps to mitigate the negative effects of climate change on security. That is also one of the recommendations of the New Agenda for Peace. In that context, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is well placed to promote dialogue and cooperation at the regional level and to enhance the sustainable management of water resources. We therefore encourage the Mission to develop that area of work and to continue working with local communities and organizations.

Climate change is also placing additional pressure on an already shaken economy that is largely dependent on agriculture. Almost half of Afghanistan's population lives in poverty. The humanitarian response plan requires more than \$3 billion to cover the needs of more than 17 million people. Three billion dollars is far more than Afghanistan can currently generate in annual revenue. Moreover, the population's economic prospects remain bleak.

Against that backdrop, the Taliban's actions remain detrimental to the prosperity of Afghanistan and its people. Probably the worst measure of all is the exclusion of half of the population from public life and economic participation. The recent intensification of repression against women who do not comply with the Taliban dress code shows how fear and insecurity are being systematically reinforced among the female population. That leads to even greater exclusion and psychological trauma. We strongly condemn those actions.

Afghanistan is a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It is therefore obliged to ensure that the rights enshrined in that Convention are respected. As we will discuss at an Arria Formula meeting next week, the Convention and the women and peace and security agenda complement each other, given the urgent need to ensure women's participation at all levels of decision-making and public life. Whether as business owners, entrepreneurs or employees, Afghan women are vital to the country's economic development and prosperity.

Equally reprehensible is the fact that half of all children, the future of Afghanistan — and here I would highlight what the three African members of the Security Council and Guyana have noted — are being denied a secondary education, while the other half receive what is essentially a religious education. We have long recognized the importance of quality education for all and have collectively enshrined it as a Sustainable Development Goal. Furthermore, restricting education also makes children more vulnerable to abuse.

All those actions raise a fundamental question: if the Taliban show no willingness to assume the responsibilities inherent in governance and fail to meet their international obligations, how can we build the confidence to resume international cooperation? I think that unity and a common approach within the Council remain vital. In that regard, the formulation of

a road map by a Special Envoy and coordination within a contact group will be important steps going forward.

I would like to reiterate our full support for United Nations efforts in Afghanistan under the leadership of UNAMA and for the Mission's essential work on the ground. The Mission's mandate provides it with the tools it needs to continue to do its work, even in complex circumstances. We will therefore support Japan's efforts as penholder to renew the mandate for another year. We call on our fellow Council members to send a united signal of support for UNAMA's mandate and work, as we have done in the past.

**Mr. De Rivi re** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Ms. Gailani for their briefings.

This March, for the third year running, hundreds of thousands of girls will not be going to school in Afghanistan. Hundreds of thousands of young women will not go on to university. Millions of women will continue to be deprived of their most basic rights and freedoms. That is because the Taliban have deliberately decided to eliminate women from public, economic and political life. Those violations continue to escalate. We note with great concern that since February, local media have been prohibited from contacting Afghan women in Khost province.

France condemns the Taliban's systematic discrimination against women and girls, which constitutes a policy of segregation with far-reaching consequences for the future of the country. France will continue to affirm that Afghan women and girls have the right to live in freedom and dignity.

The security situation also remains very worrisome. We will not allow Afghanistan to become a safe haven for international terrorism. Indeed, terrorist groups, from Da'esh-Khorasan to Al-Qaida, are active in the country and pose a threat to regional and international security. Drug cultivation and trafficking also remain alarming, with methamphetamine trafficking on the rise in the region.

France believes that the international community must therefore continue to affirm its commitment to Afghanistan on the basis of clear principles.

The first is the principle of solidarity. France remains committed to meeting the needs of the Afghan population. It has donated more than €140 million in humanitarian aid since 2021 and will continue to



provide assistance in the areas of health, education and food security. We also made a commitment during the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023 to resettle Afghan women in France via our Women in Danger scheme.

The second principle we wish to underscore is that of responsibility. The Security Council must continue to demand that the Taliban respect its international obligations. Resolutions 2593 (2021) and 2681 (2023) set clear expectations, and their implementation is the condition for any form of standardization. Any process of engagement will require the resolute mobilization of the international community to ensure that the Taliban fulfil their obligations.

The final principle I wish to mention is that of unity. The meeting of Special Envoys organized in Doha, under the chairmanship of the Secretary-General, demonstrated that the international community remains mobilized and capable of staying united on essential aspects despite differences of opinion. We hope that the process will continue to help bring about a unified strategy. We support the appointment of a Special Envoy if it helps to maintain that unity and contributes to the definition of a coherent approach.

A few days before the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan's, the robustness of which France wishes to preserve, I would like to once again express our support for the Mission, all United Nations agencies and their partners on the ground.

**Mr. De La Gasca** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the information provided by Special Representative Otunbayeva, as well as by Ms. Gailani on behalf of civil society. I welcome the presence of the Permanent Representatives of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, India and Pakistan.

The report on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2024/196) and the results of the Doha meeting are discouraging with respect to the future of the humanitarian, economic and security crisis that the Afghan people are experiencing.

For young Afghan girls, the month March will serve as a reminder of the ban imposed by the de facto regime to prevent them from continuing with their secondary studies. The information available on the level of education provided in madrassas is of concern to my delegation, as it could further perpetuate gender inequality and become a cornerstone of the policy

principles that the de facto regime proposes for the future in Afghanistan.

The resistance surrounding the inclusion of women in economic life further diminishes the possibilities of emerging from the crisis, which has so far generated humanitarian assistance needs for 23.7 million people. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 77 per cent of them are women and children and 12 per cent suffer from some type of disability.

Against that backdrop, Ecuador highlights the complex role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in the following: first, ensuring timely access for humanitarian actors despite insecure conditions, mobility restrictions and bureaucratic obstacles imposed by the de facto regime, especially towards women humanitarian assistance personnel; secondly, reporting and making visible, through its monitoring mechanisms, violations of the fundamental rights and freedoms of women and girls, as well as treatment considered inhumane; and thirdly, facilitating dialogue and promoting cooperation around the needs of displaced people and ensuring that their return occurs only if it is voluntary, safe and dignified.

Regarding the second meeting of Special Envoys and Special Representatives on Afghanistan held on 18 and 19 February in Doha, Ecuador encourages the Secretary-General to continue seeking a dialogue that will make it possible, first, to reverse the edicts that restrict the rights of women and girls; secondly, to strengthen the fight against terrorism and the production and trafficking of drugs; thirdly, to improve the economy, finances and levels of governance; and finally, to identify mechanisms to strengthen plural and inclusive dialogue that involves the substantive and safe participation of women.

Ecuador believes that, in order to advance that agenda, it is necessary to capitalize on the experience acquired by UNAMA and to support its work with complementary strategies such as periodic meetings of Special Envoys, the deployment of good offices of the International Contact Group and the designation of a Special Envoy within the framework of an expanded consultation process.

The efficient, coordinated and complementary work of UNAMA, regional and international organizations and all sectors of Afghan society will be essential to face the challenges involved in building a prosperous,

stable, secure and peaceful Afghanistan, as well as to accelerate the restoration of the social fabric and national reconciliation. We reaffirm our support for the work of UNAMA and its mandate contained in resolution 2626 (2022). We believe that mandate to be robust and comprehensive, and its renewal essential.

**Mrs. Blokari Drobic** (Slovenia): I wish to add my thanks to Special Representative Otunbayeva and Ms. Gailani for their briefings.

We welcome and commend the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for all the activities it has undertaken. Its presence in Afghanistan remains essential. We particularly stress the importance of its work in the fields of human rights, humanitarian assistance and continued political dialogue with the Taliban. Slovenia supports the renewal of UNAMA's mandate and its full implementation.

We reiterate our strong support for the democratic and prosperous future of Afghanistan — an Afghanistan that is at peace with itself and its neighbours and fully integrated in the international community and able to assume the obligations of a sovereign State in relation to other States and its own population. We support a coherent and structured engagement on Afghanistan with the aim of helping the Afghan people and bring about stability, prosperity and sustainable peace.

The bedrock of a country's strength lies in recognizing and upholding the inherent equality of all its people. In its domestic and foreign policy approach, the Taliban must focus on serving the whole population. We call for inclusivity and good, effective and accountable governance.

Unfortunately, the human rights situation remains grim. At this point, it is worth repeating that Afghanistan is party to human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and those must be respected and implemented. It is an obligation. In that regard, we condemn the reported public executions and instances of corporal punishment in public spaces. Those are direct violations of Afghanistan's obligations under international human rights law. Furthermore, we are concerned about the continued extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and systematic restrictions on the activities of human rights defenders and journalists. We call on the Taliban to release all women's rights activists who have been detained.

We also call for the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women and girls in all spheres of public life and for respect for their rights to education, employment and work, as well as their freedom of movement, expression and assembly. We strongly advocate for an immediate shift and the reversal of policies and practices of unacceptable repression of women's rights. We condemn the increased challenges for women and girls to access health-care services, which will severely affect the already compromised health situation of Afghan women.

We strongly commend those humanitarian partners trying to bridge the gender gap and deliver health-care assistance to women and girls. Since 2016, Slovenia has been providing financial support to the Mine Detection Centre polyclinic in Kabul, which is operating under the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance Enhancing Human Security — a non-profit organization established by the Slovenian Government. The polyclinic continues to employ women personnel, who provide free medical care and psychosocial support to Afghan women and girls.

It is deeply concerning that there is no indication of girls returning to secondary and tertiary education. Imagine how much potential and talent go unrecognized due to lack of opportunity — and not just the lack of it, but the direct negation. How many doctors, teachers, engineers, scientists and artists that would contribute to a bright future for the country could come from Afghan women and girls? It is a negation of its own future. The current crisis continues to generate humanitarian needs unparalleled in scale, severity and complexity. It has profound repercussions for the overall stability of Afghanistan. Let me repeat that all humanitarian operations need safe and unhindered access so that they can provide urgent assistance, and nobody should be discriminated against in that regard.

While the nature of the conflict in Afghanistan has changed, we remain gravely concerned about the security challenges for Afghanistan and the region. We call for concerted efforts to tackle those security issues, including the threat of terrorism. In addition, comprehensive policies should be in place to address the production and illicit trafficking of narcotics, which are also security issues. And as elsewhere, climate-induced risk must be addressed in that regard.

The Taliban and the international community have yet to find a pathway to trust that will enable them to properly address the needs and aspirations

of Afghanistan's diverse population. We can support stronger engagement with the Taliban, but with a clear and non-negotiable understanding of their obligation to advance the process further. Slovenia also supports the appointment of a Special Envoy for Afghanistan, as mandated by resolution 2721 (2023), who will work with all parts of the Afghan society. We expect the appointee to have a high level of gender expertise and extensive knowledge of human rights.

**Mrs. Frazier** (Malta): I thank Special Representative Otunbayeva and Ms. Gailani for their briefings. I also welcome the participation of the representative of Afghanistan in this meeting today.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) plays a vital role in addressing the many challenges in Afghanistan, and Malta supports its important work. The Secretary-General's report (S/2024/196) documents a 38 per cent increase in recorded conflict-related security incidents, largely attributable to narcotics. The issue of methamphetamine production and trafficking is deeply concerning and must be addressed. Almost half of the country's population is living in poverty. The Taliban are responsible for 95 per cent of humanitarian access incidents, detentions of United Nations staff, increasing restrictions on Afghan women and aid workers and the suspension of humanitarian projects. The Taliban's refusal to meet Afghanistan's international obligations and facilitate humanitarian action are fundamental matters. Humanitarian principles require a fair and equitable distribution of resources. For that, Afghan women and girls must participate in needs assessments and the delivery of international assistance. The report documents escalating human rights violations that target civilian and security personnel from the previous regime, the media, civil society and women's rights activists. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs also reports a 30 per cent increase in the numbers of women and girls at risk of gender-based violence.

The Taliban have consistently rejected efforts to foster an inclusive political process, and international experts have warned that their systematic violation of women's rights may amount to gender persecution. Those discriminatory restrictions are unacceptable, and we call for their immediate reversal. We urge the Taliban to immediately and unconditionally release all women human rights defenders, including Manizha Seddiqi, who has been imprisoned without charges

since December 2023. A political solution for the future of Afghanistan is not possible without a legitimate and inclusive political process in which the rights of women and girls are fully respected and the diversity of Afghans is represented. Appropriate mechanisms must be established to ensure the full, equal, meaningful and safe engagement of Afghan women and civil society in all related political processes.

In conclusion, we reiterate our full support for UNAMA's robust mandate to monitor and report on the situation in Afghanistan. Through its full implementation, we can help improve the situation in Afghanistan for the benefit of all its people.

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

**Mr. Faiq** (Afghanistan): Let me begin by thanking Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, for her comprehensive briefing on the challenging situation in Afghanistan. I also thank Ms. Gailani for her remarks and her good wishes. However, her wish list lacked condemnation and criticism of the Taliban's policies, and neither did it call for an end to their inhuman violations, or for respecting and listening to the aspirations of the people of Afghanistan and the international community.

I would also like to join Council members in emphasizing and supporting the vital role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in fostering peace, stability and prosperity in our country. We fully support the renewal of UNAMA's mandate, which is currently under discussion and negotiation. We are also grateful to Council members for their continued commitment to peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan. We are especially grateful to all who have reaffirmed their support for the people of Afghanistan, emphasizing inclusivity, respect and the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of all Afghan citizens, particularly women, girls and minority groups. We also want to express our appreciation to all donors and the United Nations system, as well as national and international non-governmental organizations, for remaining engaged and continuing to provide vital humanitarian and life-saving support in a principled manner to the people of Afghanistan. We echo the Secretary-General's call for donors to maintain their life-saving responses and support the funding of Afghanistan's humanitarian response plan.

The deepening social, political, economic and humanitarian challenges in Afghanistan underscore the urgency of immediate and united action by the United Nations and the Council. We are grateful for the Secretary-General's efforts to enhance the global focus on Afghanistan. The meeting of Special Envoys on Afghanistan held on 18 and 19 February was a welcome step towards unity and consensus on the international community's ongoing engagement with Afghanistan in a coherent, coordinated and structured manner. The Afghan people are anticipating that the Doha meeting will be the beginning of a new phase of international support for achieving genuine peace in an inclusive, united and democratic Afghanistan. It was crucial that representatives of civil society, including women, were included in the meeting. We commend the United Nations for its principled stance on ensuring that the participation of civil society and democratic voices is uncompromised. Maintaining that participation as a priority in all future discussions on Afghanistan is essential.

We hope that the discussions in upcoming United Nations meetings will lead to a renewed approach that aligns with the long-lasting aspirations of the Afghan people. That approach must acknowledge a clear reality, which is that the current status quo of unilateral rule, systematic human rights violations — particularly against women and girls — and disregard for the people's demands on political and social issues are in direct conflict with the shared values and objectives of both the Afghan people and the international community. We emphasize that any future international actions or engagements with the Taliban must maintain Afghanistan's international obligations regarding counter-terrorism and human rights, especially women's and girls' rights, as a conditional component. No concessions should be made concerning the Taliban's institutionalized, systematic and widespread discrimination and persecution based on gender and gender-apartheid policies in Afghanistan. The people of Afghanistan are concerned about the possible normalization or legitimization of the Taliban without any demonstrated, measurable and independently verified improvements in the human rights situation.

We have emphasized that lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan is possible only through an inclusive, representative and broad-based system resulting from national dialogue that is able to reflect the will and aspirations of all Afghans. The experience of the past two and a half years affirms that this perspective holds

true as ever and should now be the guiding principle for the international community's efforts in the way forward.

What is now needed is to build international consensus through the adoption of a road map or an action plan with defined objectives and specific timelines. Hence, outreach with all Afghan and international stakeholders shall begin through the proposed implementation mechanisms, including the Special Envoy and a contact group after such a road map or action plan is adopted.

It is essential that all future meetings ensure inclusivity and balanced representation of all relevant Afghan groups, including women, diplomats and representatives from civil society and other democratic forces and movements. The Taliban are only one internal stakeholder and do not represent the people of Afghanistan as a whole.

We welcome the Secretary-General's recommendation to appoint a Special Envoy for Afghanistan in accordance with resolution 2721 (2023). That Special Envoy will play a critical role in achieving a more effective international engagement with Afghanistan through stronger consensus and initiating intra-Afghan dialogue with support from all relevant stakeholders in order to achieve a secure, stable, prosperous, representative and inclusive Afghanistan that is fully committed to respecting its obligations under international conventions. That goal requires a Special Envoy who is capable, trusted and possesses the necessary experience for this challenging, but crucial task.

The selection process should take into consideration factors such as leadership, personality, diplomatic skills and the relevant experience of the Special Envoy. These traits are among the characteristics required to ensure optimal output and progress during outreach and dialogue with regional and international stakeholders, as well as resisting pushbacks that arise during communication with the Taliban. Expertise, including with respect to human rights issues, and a solid background in diplomacy and conflict resolution, particularly concerning Afghanistan and the surrounding region, are other issues that require consideration.

The outcome of the independent assessment concluded that the lack of sufficient focus on the start of a political process through intra-Afghan dialogue was a key element that had been missing in international



efforts thus far on Afghanistan. The Special Envoy should therefore pursue the start of a results-oriented political process as a matter of priority. Increased and sustained engagement with democratic or non-Taliban groups aimed at consensus and convergence within the group, in preparation for direct talks with the Taliban, shall be an integral part of the Special Envoy's outreach effort with Afghan stakeholders.

Of paramount importance is his/her unwavering dedication to, and conviction in, universal values and principles, encompassing human rights, freedom, democracy and the rule of law. The Special Envoy must be perceived as unbiased and committed to promoting the best interests of the Afghan people, free from external influences. The utmost priority should be given to integrity and impartiality.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2024/196) and the emphasis on the importance of accessible, quality education for girls in Afghanistan. We support his calls for reversing the bans on education and employment and appeal to Member States and donors to fund the humanitarian response and support for Afghan refugees.

We also welcome the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan (A/HRC/55/80), which highlights the deteriorating human rights situation, including the erasure of women and girls from public life, the harsh enforcement of dress codes on women, the arbitrary detention of activists and journalists, public executions and the use of corporal punishment by the Taliban. Additionally, the report's insights into extrajudicial killings, ill-treatment, disappearances and torture of former security personnel, previous Government officials, opponents of the regime and marginalized communities, such as the Hazaras, are particularly concerning.

In conclusion, I emphasize that the end-state objective of achieving a peaceful Afghanistan, fully reintegrated into the international community, can be realized only through national legitimacy and more constructive and principled international engagement. That approach is necessary to reverse the current negative trajectory and set Afghanistan on the path to stability. The way forward should be guided by the will and interests of the Afghan people, along with a genuine spirit of international support and cooperation.

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

**Mrs. Kamboj (India):** At the outset, let me congratulate Japan for assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March 2024, and I wish you, Sir, all the best for a successful presidency.

We appreciate the briefing by Special Representative Roza Otunbayeva on the situation in Afghanistan. We have also listened carefully to the remarks by the civil society briefer.

India is a contiguous neighbour to Afghanistan and has a long history of cultural and people-to-people ties with the country. We therefore pay close attention to the situation in the country, which has a direct impact on us. Our objective is to establish long-term peace, security and stability in Afghanistan. And, if I may say, the overall objective of the vast majority of the international community aligns with India's priorities with respect to Afghanistan. Those include the need to counter terrorism; bring in inclusive governance; safeguard the rights and interests of women, children and minorities; counter narcotics; and prioritize humanitarian assistance for the well-being of the people of the country.

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is dire, as we just heard from the briefers. It is therefore important that the international community not lose its focus on Afghanistan and its people and step up with humanitarian assistance. India's own assistance over the past two years has primarily focused on three pillars: food security, medical supplies and education.

With regard to food, we have provided 50,000 tons of wheat. In order to ensure food security and to fight the locust menace, we have also supplied 40,000 litres of the pesticide Malathion. In the education sector, we have continued our scholarship schemes for Afghan students and, in the current academic year, have provided online educational opportunities to 1,000 Afghan students, including 300 Afghan females. Our association with Habibia High School, in Kabul, also continues. On the medical side, we continue to provide life-saving medicines to various hospitals in Afghanistan. And, to assist the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in its fight against drugs, we have partnered with it to provide hygiene kits, clothing, medical assistance and humanitarian kits for their rehabilitation camps. We have also provided learning tool kits, books, stationery items and classroom furniture for

UNODC-run education centres. And, importantly, our humanitarian assistance will continue for the benefit of the people of Afghanistan.

We thank Qatar for hosting the second round of the meeting of Special Envoys on Afghanistan in Doha recently. India participated actively in the meeting. There were constructive discussions on the recommendations of the report by Special Coordinator Feridun Sinirlioğlu (see /2023/856), including on the appointment of a Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and the establishment of an international contact group for Afghanistan. There was a general consensus that the international community should move forward on those issues by way of a consultative and transparent process.

With regard to the International Contact Group, we firmly believe that it has a much better chance of being effective and gaining legitimacy if it consists of all key stakeholders with a direct stake in the situation in Afghanistan. That would also be the general position of anyone who has any interest in ensuring peace and stability in Afghanistan.

I will close, as India always does, by reaffirming our unwavering commitment to the people of Afghanistan. I assure the Council that we will continue to be closely and actively involved in supporting the Afghan people.

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

**Mr. Akram** (Pakistan): Let me first congratulate you, Mr. President, and the Japanese delegation on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I would also like to express my gratitude to Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for her incisive briefing. We appreciate the work that she and her staff are doing in a very difficult situation. We also welcome the thoughtful statement by Ms. Fatima Gailani in today's meeting.

We thank the Secretary-General for convening the second Doha meeting last month and the Government of Qatar for hosting it. The international community has an obligation to help the millions of destitute Afghans by providing unconditional humanitarian assistance, which at 45 per cent remains severely underfunded. It is also important to find realistic pathways for reviving the Afghan economy and supporting sustainable development in Afghanistan. To that end,

the international community should help to revive the Afghan banking system and commercial activities and create the necessary conditions for the release of Afghanistan's frozen assets to its Central Bank. It is also important to implement the planned infrastructure and regional connectivity projects. We welcome the World Bank Group's recent announcement of the next phase of support for Afghanistan to generate employment opportunities and bolster income-generating activities, including through the revival of the Central Asia-South Asia CASA-1000 electricity transmission project and other connectivity projects.

For its part, the Afghan interim Government must also fulfil its international obligations and comply with international laws and norms, especially on the fundamental rights of women and girls, promote inclusivity and above all eliminate terrorism within and from Afghanistan. The interim Government also has an obligation to refrain from threats against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of neighbouring or other countries and to prevent terrorist attacks on them from the territory of Afghanistan. The violation of those principles and norms is not in Afghanistan's immediate or long-term interests.

Pakistan considers sustained engagement with the Afghan interim Government to be essential to normalizing the situation in Afghanistan. We hope that a consensus can be reached on the recommendations made by Ambassador Feridun Sinirlioğlu in his report (see S/2023/856). We should develop a realistic road map with reciprocal steps to be taken by the Afghan interim Government and the international community, leading to an end state of normalization in Afghanistan and its integration into the international community. Pakistan regrets that the Afghan interim Government did not participate in the second Doha meeting convened by the Secretary-General. It was a missed opportunity for engagement with the international community. Both the Afghan interim Government and the international community must be pragmatic in their expectations and demands on the pathway to normalization.

Pakistan would welcome the appointment of a Special Envoy on Afghanistan. However, he or she should have a clear mandate, be acceptable to the Afghan interim Government and countries in the region and be selected after consultations with all the parties concerned. Pakistan is open to the idea of establishing a smaller International Contact Group, provided it brings added value and does not replace or duplicate

existing regional formats. It should exclude spoilers from its membership.

While we take note of the Secretary-General's report in document S/2024/196, I must express our disappointment at some observations that are factually incorrect and fail to take into account the context of some of the developments covered in the report. It is not true to assert that there have been large-scale forced returns of undocumented Afghans from Pakistan, or large-scale returns of refugees from Pakistan. After Pakistan declared its intention to apply its laws regarding the presence of illegal and undocumented aliens on our territory, approximately 500,000 undocumented Afghans chose to return to Afghanistan. They were not forced. In fact, 98 per cent of those who returned were voluntary returns. The 2 per cent who were deported included people who were involved in terrorism, drug smuggling and other crimes, or who were convicted prisoners who had completed their jail terms.

We find the assertion in paragraph 64 of the report of "an unfavourable protection environment in Pakistan" particularly offensive. Pakistan has sheltered almost 5 million Afghan refugees for more than 40 years at great economic, social and security cost to our country and society, with little help from the international community. Even today, more than 1 million undocumented Afghans remain in Pakistan. They should return forthwith. We have made several exceptions for those with Afghan identification cards or proof-of-registration cards, for those who may be vulnerable if they return and for the more than 60,000 Afghans whom third countries have offered to receive but have not done so for more than two years. Nor have we so far asked for the return of the 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan. But if the United Nations believes that the protection environment is unfavourable, it should arrange forthwith for their speedy repatriation.

Regarding the reported border incidents, the exchange of fire by Pakistani security forces was always in response to cross-border attacks by the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its affiliates on Pakistan's border posts and installations. We would expect the United Nations to urge the Afghan interim Government to prevent such cross-border attacks and infiltration by the TTP and other terrorists into Pakistan territory. Those terrorist groups include Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan, Al-Qaida and particularly the TTP and its affiliates, which are

responsible for persistent attacks on Pakistan's military and civilian targets. The Afghan interim Government's failure to control the TTP and other terrorist groups erodes its claim of full control of its territory which it asserts in order to secure international recognition. The United Nations should undertake an investigation to find out how the TTP has acquired advanced military equipment and weaponry and to identify the sources of the TTP's financing, which is helping to sustain its 50,000 fighters and their dependents and its terrorist operations.

I am confident that the Council will join Pakistan in demanding that the Afghan interim Government terminate its relationship with the TTP and its affiliates and prevent it from having free reign to conduct cross-border attacks against Pakistan or other neighbours. Left unchecked, the TTP, supported by Al-Qaida and some State sponsors, could soon pose a global terrorist threat.

The UNAMA mandate does not cover issues relating to terrorism. Yet terrorism within and from Afghanistan poses the most serious impediment to normalization in Afghanistan. The terrorist organizations present there pose a security threat to each one of Afghanistan's immediate neighbours. Counter-terrorism must be the highest priority in any future road map for engagement with the Afghan interim Government.

Afghanistan is our immediate and closest neighbour. Pakistan and its people have suffered immensely during the past four decades of conflict and civil war in Afghanistan. Yet Pakistan continues to provide the principal avenue for humanitarian help, trade and development support for the people of Afghanistan. We will continue to offer that support. The destinies of Pakistan and Afghanistan are intertwined. Peace, security and prosperity in Afghanistan are an imperative for Pakistan.

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

**Mr. Iravani** (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open briefing. I also thank Ms. Otunbayeva, Special Representative, for her insightful briefing. We take note of the views shared by Ms. Gailani.

The situation in Afghanistan remains challenging despite United Nations efforts and measures taken by the de facto authorities. The recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/196) estimates that over half

of the population, approximately 23.7 million people, will need humanitarian aid in 2024. Economic fragility, affecting 65 per cent of families in 2023, continues to contribute to acute food insecurity.

Challenges such as terrorism, drug trafficking and border control deficiencies continue and threaten the stability of Afghanistan and its neighbours. The threat of terrorist groups is causing concern to the neighbours. Regrettably, the de facto authorities have yet to implement their obligation to combat terrorism.

Iran, as an immediate neighbour, still faces challenges with illegal immigration. The migration of millions of Afghans to Iran has brought a burden to our country under sanctions. Unfortunately, the international community and individual countries have shown little sensitivity to that issue. Furthermore, Iran has been denied access to even the most basic border monitoring equipment under the pretext of sanctions. That underscores the differing priorities and concerns of neighbouring countries and the global community regarding Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the de facto authorities have failed to advance genuine ethnic and political inclusivity. Instead, they have imposed stricter limitations on women and girls, restricting their educational opportunities. Additionally, attacks on minority people, such as the Hazara Shia, continue, as confirmed by the United Nations report.

As reiterated at the recent Special Envoy conference on Afghanistan in Doha, maintaining continuous international engagement with the de facto authorities is imperative to tackling challenges and improving conditions in Afghanistan. In that regard, Iran commends the Secretary-General's efforts and his initiative to enhance that engagement in a more coherent, coordinated and organized approach.

We stress the importance of prioritizing and carefully addressing the legitimate concerns of neighbouring countries in all initiatives aimed at engaging with de facto authorities. Those include the establishment of an inclusive Government, safeguarding the rights of all ethnic groups, combating terrorist groups, preventing illegal immigration and addressing drug production and trafficking. Those concerns are, to some extent, accommodated in the independent assessment (see S/2023/856), which

underscores positive elements and recommends coherent engagement with the de facto authorities.

An inclusive Government in Afghanistan could help to tackle many problems, such as stopping conflicts and reducing the number of Afghan refugees moving to neighbouring countries. It would set a foundation for stability and security in Afghanistan and help to protect human rights, especially those of women. For Iran, a crucial sign of an inclusive Government would be the improvement of the lives of the Afghan people and the return of refugees, which sadly has gotten worse in the past two years, causing us significant hardship.

On the other hand, the de facto authorities demand from the international community a consolidation of sovereignty, the lifting of sanctions and global recognition. To achieve those objectives, we believe a comprehensive road map providing step-for-step explanations and offering tangible measures for any step taken by the de facto authorities is necessary.

Iran remains steadfast in its commitment to close collaboration with neighbouring countries, relevant partners and the United Nations to promote enduring peace, security and stability in Afghanistan.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) plays a pivotal role in the pursuit of peace and stability in Afghanistan. We reaffirm our full support for UNAMA and the Special Representative in fulfilling their mandate. Given the current situation, UNAMA needs to have a robust mandate to assist the people of Afghanistan and uphold peace and security in the country.

And finally, humanitarian aid must remain impartial and unconditional to ensure the Afghan people receive the support they need. Any politicization of humanitarian aid will only harm the Afghan people who rely on that assistance for their survival.

Equally crucial, the sanctions should not have an impact on efforts to revitalize the Afghan economy, as the Secretary-General has repeatedly called for measures to give the Afghan economy breathing room. As such, the frozen assets must be returned in full, without any politicization or conditions.

*The meeting rose at noon.*