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## The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [68/11](#) and Security Council resolution [2626 \(2022\)](#), in which the Secretary-General was requested to report every three months on the situation in Afghanistan and the implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), including at the subnational level.
2. The report provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan, including political, humanitarian and human rights efforts, since the issuance of the previous report, dated 7 December 2022 ([A/77/636-S/2022/916](#)). It also contains strategic and operational recommendations for the mandate of UNAMA.

#### II. Relevant developments

3. The Taliban de facto authorities continued to tighten control over the population through the adoption of additional restrictive measures. The announcement in December 2022 of decisions suspending women's higher education and employment in national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) further curtailed women's and girls' basic rights. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) claimed several high-profile attacks targeting civilians, the Taliban and foreign nationals. UNAMA continued to document cases of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture and ill-treatment carried out by the de facto authorities against former government officials and security personnel, in violation of the general amnesty announced in August 2021. UNAMA also documented an increase in the implementation of judicial corporal punishments by the de facto authorities and the first judicially sanctioned public execution since the Taliban takeover. The de facto authorities reported increased revenue collection, including from trade, and maintained their emphasis on economic self-reliance.



Overall humanitarian needs continue to rise, however, with 28.3 million people estimated to require humanitarian assistance in 2023, up from 24.4 million in 2022 and 18.4 million in 2021. The ban on female aid workers forced many organizations to pause operations, with a severe impact on populations in need, especially women and girls, notwithstanding a limited number of informal exemptions granted by the de facto authorities. These restrictions have, in effect, put the development of the Strategic Framework for Afghanistan for the period 2023–2025 on hold, pending the outcome of ongoing negotiations with the de facto authorities to lift them.

## **A. Political developments**

4. At the end of 2022, the de facto authorities took several decisions that curbed women's and girls' rights further. On 20 December, the de facto Ministry of Higher Education issued a letter, referencing a decision by the de facto Cabinet that suspended university education for women until the establishment of the "right sharia environment" in line with Afghan "culture", weeks after having allowed female students to take public university entrance examinations. On 8 January, the de facto Ministry of Education published a letter containing instructions for de facto officials to reopen facilities, including schools, training centres and madrasas, for girls' classes up to the sixth grade in those provinces where they had been suspended, including those implemented by NGOs with valid licences. A letter from the de facto Ministry of Higher Education dated 28 January contained instructions for private universities and higher education facilities not to register female students for entrance examinations until further notice, thereby preventing them from also studying at private tertiary institutions. On 5 February, the de facto Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Lutfullah Khairkhwah, announced that work on a strategy to find a solution for girls' higher education that was in alignment with sharia law had commenced.

5. On 24 December, the de facto Ministry of Economy issued a letter addressed to the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief pursuant to which Afghan women were banned from working in national and international NGOs, stating that dress codes and other unspecified rules were being violated in those organizations. On 30 December, the de facto spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid, informed media representatives that the de facto authorities would decide on women's workforce participation as determined by "necessity". Some limited exemptions were subsequently made in the areas of health and primary education.

6. Those restrictions sparked widespread condemnations by the international community. At the request of the Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General led a delegation to Afghanistan from 17 to 20 January, including the Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific. The delegation aimed to convey solidarity and consult with Afghan women and the humanitarian community directly affected, as well as to express grave concern and engage the de facto authorities on the most recent restrictions. The delegation also met the ulama council, affected communities, humanitarian workers and civil society, in particular women and women-led organizations in Kabul, Kandahar and Herat. The delegation engaged with communities of Afghan women in Pakistan and Türkiye and held high-level consultations across the Gulf, Asia and Europe to discuss the situation in Afghanistan. From 22 to 26 January, a delegation from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, led by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, made a follow-up visit to Afghanistan to continue the engagement with the de facto authorities on the consequences of barring female aid workers from humanitarian operations.

7. Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhundzada continued to exert influence over governance issues and reshuffled senior de facto officials at the national and subnational levels. On 16 January, the de facto Minister of Public Works, Abdul Manan Omari, was appointed de facto Minister of Labour and Social Affairs and was replaced by the de facto Deputy Minister of Energy and Water, Mohammad Essa Saani. Additional civilian appointments included 5 de facto deputy ministers in the Ministries of Higher Education, Urban Development and Land, for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, and the Afghanistan Natural Disaster Management Authority, the governor for Kabul Province and 15 district governors. All appointees were male and affiliated with the Taliban.

8. The de facto Ministry of Finance reported the completion of salary payments for all civil servants and de facto security personnel through December 2022, including for female civil servants, many of whom have not been allowed to report to work since the Taliban takeover. It also reported the payment of salaries for civil servants of all abolished Republic government institutions.

9. The de facto authorities continued to remodel state institutions. On 16 November, Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhundzada issued a decree by which the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre's jurisdiction was transferred to the de facto Military Court. In line with a decree issued on 13 December 2022, the National Procurement Commission, previously abolished by the Taliban, was re-established. On 10 January, the de facto authorities confirmed having completed the transfer of the de facto Director General for *huqooq* (rights) from the de facto Ministry of Justice to the de facto Supreme Court in line with the order from the Taliban leader issued on 13 October.

10. At the subnational level, on 29 December the de facto Ministry of Interior announced the establishment of 25 new districts across the country, bringing the total number to 419 districts as reported by the de facto authorities, with the stated intention of improving access to services. Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhundzada established additional provincial ulama shuras, including in Kabul, Kapisa, Baghlan, Faryab, Uruzgan and Khost, to oversee de facto provincial administrations. To date, he has formally approved 15 of the 22 established shuras.

11. Elements of the political opposition inside and outside the country continued to call for an intra-Afghan dialogue, and four more political movements in exile were formed during the reporting period. On 17 January, de facto spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid stated that those movements represented a chapter of the past and lacked current relevance. De facto authorities at various levels increased outreach efforts to political actors and movements inside Afghanistan in an ad hoc manner. In particular, the de facto Deputy Prime Ministers, Abdul Kabir Mohammed Jan and Abdul Salam Hanafi, undertook outreach to political actors at the national level. On 16 January, the Commission for Return and Communication with Former Afghan Officers and Political Figures announced that 475 individuals had returned to Afghanistan as a result of its efforts.

12. Senior de facto officials increased provincial and district visits focused on communities and economic projects. In particular, officials from the de facto Ministry of Tribal and Border Affairs engaged tribal and minority communities with the stated aim to promote unity. Following the suspension of women's access to higher education, the de facto Minister of Higher Education, Neda Mohammad Nadeem, engaged local de facto officials, community leaders and university lecturers on educational reform. On 4 December, he announced revised curricula for different academic fields, including medicine, Islamic studies and law. The de facto Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, Abdul Ghani Baradar, led an interministerial delegation, including the de facto Minister of Mines and Petroleum, Shahabuddin

Delawar, to the Mes Aynak copper mine in Logar Province in November, and across the northern provinces in January, focused on mining and the security of companies contracted for extractive activities. In December and January, the de facto Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, Attaullah Omari, visited northern provinces, including to assess the erosion of the Amu Darya River, an important water source in the region.

13. The Constitution of 2004 remained suspended, with no further clarity on the legal framework. On 5 November, the de facto Ministry of Justice published official gazettes for the first time since August 2021, containing five decrees, including one outlining the procedure for making laws, regulations and procedures. On 10 January, the de facto authorities shared a decision by Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhundzada that all rules and regulations drafted during the former Republic were automatically abandoned because they were contrary to sharia law. Beyond the significant obstacles in the informal and formal justice system, according to research undertaken by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the broader restrictions on women's rights made it almost impossible for women and girls to gain access to justice. Female defence lawyers remained excluded from the justice sector. On 18 December, the Department of Defence Lawyers in the de facto Ministry of Justice extended the deadline for completing the ongoing defence lawyers' evaluations from 21 November 2022 to February 2023. By 31 January, of 1,519 applicants, 1,250 had obtained licences. Women defence lawyers continued to report that their licences were not renewed.

14. The de facto security sector continued to focus on further reform of the security forces, including through "professional, ideological and religious training". Police and de facto General Directorate of Intelligence units reported the seizure of caches of heavy and light weapons and ammunition, and highlighted progress on curbing drug trafficking and cultivation, as well as the treatment of addicts. Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhundzada increased his direct influence over security organs by visiting various corps commands in Helmand and Kandahar and by asking selected commanders to report directly to him.

15. United Nations officials and the UNAMA leadership continued to engage with the de facto authorities, emphasizing the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, including for women and girls, and promoting inclusive, participatory and responsive governance. UNAMA and United Nations partners regularly consulted Afghan women's groups and activists across the country and engaged the Afghan women's chambers of commerce and industry, women entrepreneurs and the de facto Ministry of Commerce and Industry to discuss support for Afghan businesswomen. UNAMA, through its field offices, attended more than 170 subnational outreach meetings and facilitated 32 community relationship-building and engagement events with the de facto authorities in 19 provinces, which brought together representatives of the ulama, community elders, young people and existing community structures to discuss good governance principles, identify key priorities and strengthen community relationships. On 4 December, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of UNAMA met female defence lawyers to discuss options to mitigate their concerns. UNAMA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) concluded a pilot legal aid project in Bamyan and Herat Provinces on 22 December, benefiting 612 people, including 220 women.

## **B. Security**

16. Between 14 November and 31 January, there was an increase in the overall number of conflict-related security incidents and civilian casualties compared with the same period in 2021–2022. The United Nations recorded 1,201 security-related

incidents, a 10 per cent increase from the 1,088 incidents recorded during the same period in 2021–2022. Available data indicated that armed clashes had decreased by 35 per cent, from 81 to 52 incidents; airstrikes had risen by 100 per cent, from 1 to 2; detonations from improvised explosive devices had increased by 7 per cent, from 52 to 56; and assassinations had decreased by 24 per cent, from 77 to 58. The economic and humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate, resulting in an increase in crime-related security incidents. The western, southern and eastern regions accounted for 58 per cent of all recorded incidents, with Helmand, Herat, Kandahar, Kabul and Nangarhar being the most affected provinces.

17. Armed opposition attacks and armed clashes with the Taliban continued to decline. UNAMA recorded 23 armed groups claiming to operate in Afghanistan. The National Resistance Front, the Afghanistan Freedom Front and the Afghanistan Liberation Movement (formerly the Afghanistan Liberation Front) claimed responsibility for attacks in Helmand, Kabul, Kandahar, Kapisa, Nangarhar, Nuristan and Panjshir Provinces. De facto security forces carried out operations targeting National Resistance Front fighters, including a military operation on 25 and 26 December in Baghlan Province, resulting in an unconfirmed number of casualties.

18. Attacks claimed by or attributed to ISIL-K decreased. Between 14 November and 31 January, the United Nations recorded 16 attacks by the group in four provinces, compared with 53 attacks in seven provinces during the same period in 2021–2022. ISIL-K claimed attacks, including the targeted killing of an imam in Kabul on 17 November; an attack on the Embassy of Pakistan in Kabul on 2 December; an explosion targeting a shop of a Sikh community member in Jalalabad on 3 December; a complex attack on a hotel in Kabul on 12 December; the targeted killing of the de facto Badakhshan Chief of Police in Faizabad city on 26 December; an explosion at an air force compound in Kabul on 1 January; and an explosion in front of the de facto Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul on 11 January.

19. High-profile unclaimed attacks included an explosion in the Jahdia madrasa in Aybak city, Samangan Province, on 30 November and an explosion in Mazar-e Sharif on 6 December against a bus carrying de facto Department of Gas and Petroleum employees. On 2 December, the Hezb-e Islami leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, survived a complex attack against his compound in Kabul.

20. Border tensions endured. A total of 17 of 19 incidents occurred along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, including border clashes reported in Dand-e Patan district, Paktiya Province, on 15, 19, 20, 21 and 26 November; in Dangam district, Kunar Province, on 7 December; and in Spin Boldak district, Kandahar Province, on 11 and 15 December. A cross-border mortar round incident into Jaji Maidan district, Khost Province, was reported on 18 December. On 27 November, a joint meeting of tribal elders from both sides of the border formed a committee to address the dispute in Dand-e Patan district, Paktiya Province. On 4 January, reports were received of mortar shelling into Ghosta district, Nangarhar Province. Pakistani authorities rejected claims by the Taliban of having conducted airstrikes in Salala area in Ghosta district. On 5 January, a security incident was reported across the border from Momand Dara district, Nangarhar Province. One clash was reported at the border with the Islamic Republic of Iran in Kang district, Nimroz Province, on 8 December.

21. On 28 November, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan announced an end to the May 2022 ceasefire with the Government of Pakistan and ordered its fighters to resume attacks against Pakistani security forces. Pakistan repeatedly expressed concern over the threat posed by terrorist groups operating from Afghan territory, especially by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan. Two senior Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan commanders were killed in Paktiya Province on 17 November and in Nangarhar Province on 18 November. In response to Government of Pakistan statements following an attack

30 January in a mosque in Peshawar, Pakistan, on 2 February, the de facto Foreign Minister, Amir Khan Motaqi, stated that there were no terrorist bases in Afghanistan and that the de facto authorities would never allow the use of its territory against other countries.

22. The de facto authorities continued to express their intention to counter the proliferation of weapons. Between 14 November and 31 January, the United Nations recorded 28 seizures of weapons caches across 14 provinces, while the de facto authorities announced at least 30 seizures.

23. UNAMA continued to engage relevant stakeholders on the risks associated with the illicit trade, accumulation and diversion of small arms and light weapons and ammunition, and of explosive ordnance. UNAMA also requested the de facto authorities to assess the safe management of explosives and ammunition storage facilities in urban centres. During the reporting period, UNAMA attended and briefed three regional United Nations-convened conferences, in Ashgabat, Almaty, Kazakhstan, and Tashkent on risks associated with the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

24. Between 14 November and 31 January, the United Nations documented 60 incidents affecting its personnel directly, including 26 cases of intimidation, 9 crime-related incidents, 11 arrests and 14 incidents affecting United Nations compounds, offices and property. The total represents a decrease from the 78 incidents recorded during the same period in 2021–2022. Following the de facto authorities' order of 24 December suspending women's employment with NGOs, female national staff employed by the United Nations received threatening calls and warnings for not traveling with a *mahram* (a male relative). The de facto authorities also attempted to inspect United Nations compounds in Herat, Kabul, Kunduz and Nangarhar Provinces.

### **C. Regional cooperation**

25. Regional countries and organizations continued to engage the de facto authorities in both multilateral and bilateral formats. Issues addressed included regional connectivity and economic cooperation, border security, counter-terrorism, drug trafficking, inclusive governance and women's and girls' rights.

26. On 16 November, senior officials from regional countries exchanged views on the Afghan political, economic and humanitarian situation in a meeting of the Moscow-format consultations on Afghanistan in Moscow. Participants issued a joint statement in which they called upon the Taliban to form an inclusive government, enhance their efforts in the fight against terrorism and uphold commitments on counter-narcotics. On 8 February, representatives from regional countries held another meeting on Afghanistan in Moscow. A joint statement was issued containing calls upon the de facto authorities to form an inclusive government, improve efforts in the fight against terrorism and commit themselves to promises made on counter-narcotics.

27. A series of statements and events focused on access to education for Afghan girls and women. On 29 and 30 November, in Almaty, Kazakhstan, a regional dialogue was convened by UN-Women in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, bringing together Afghan women and young people with women experts from Central Asia and regional leaders to reflect on priorities to advance women's rights, including political alliances for stability and security in Afghanistan, bordering countries and the region; organizing a women's summit and promoting the unity of Afghan women; establishing a regional alliance of civil society organizations; promoting women's economic empowerment; and strengthening Central Asian

advocacy for women's rights. On 8 December, the Governments of Indonesia and Qatar co-hosted the International Conference on Afghan Women's Education in Bali, Indonesia, gathering representatives of 38 countries at the level of ministers of foreign affairs and ambassadors, international organizations, including the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, NGOs and academia.

28. On 29 December, the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Hissein Brahim Taha, called upon the International Islamic Fiqh Academy to launch a global campaign to unite scholars and religious authorities in the Islamic world against the decision by the de facto authorities to restrict female education. On 11 January, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Executive Committee convened an extraordinary meeting on Afghanistan, at which recent bans on women's activities were characterized as "in violation of the purposes of Islamic law".

29. Regional bilateral engagements focused primarily on regional security, cross-border migration and economic relations. On 29 November, a Pakistani delegation led by the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Hina Rabbani Khar, visited Kabul to discuss the release of Afghan detainees in Pakistan and the visa issuance process for Afghan citizens, as well as trade and transit. The de facto Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the two parties had reached an agreement to improve their relations through negotiations. On 4 December, in Abu Dhabi, the President of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, met the de facto Minister of Defence, Yaqoob Mujahid, to discuss strengthening relations, bilateral cooperation and other issues of mutual interest. On 12 December, a delegation led by de facto Deputy Minister for Refugees and Repatriation, Abdul Rahman Rashid, participated in the eighth meeting of the quadrilateral steering committee of the solutions strategy for Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran to discuss voluntary repatriation and the sustainable reintegration of Afghan refugees, and assistance to the host countries. On 24 December, the Special Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Afghanistan, Hassan Kazemi Qomi, visited Kabul to discuss Afghan migrants and political and economic relations. On 13 and 14 January, the Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, visited Kabul to discuss regional security, economic cooperation and the prospects for recognition by the international community. On 5 February, the Special Envoy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, Mutlaq bin Majed Al Qahtani, visited Kabul to discuss recent developments, in particular politics, the economy, development and education.

30. Regional economic cooperation continued to be a cornerstone of the economic policy of the de facto authorities. On 19 November, de facto Deputy Prime Minister Baradar virtually addressed the sixth exhibition of economic cooperation, trade and Investment between China and South Asia, held in Kunming, China. From 1 to 8 December, the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment hosted an international trade exhibition in Kabul, with some 600 businesses from Afghanistan, China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan and Türkiye showcasing their work. On 19 December, the de facto Afghanistan Railway Authority announced the identification of routes for the trans-Afghanistan railway project and discussions for starting a project with Uzbek and Pakistani officials. On 5 January, the de facto authorities and a Chinese company signed a 25-year contract for the exploitation of the Amu Darya River oil fields in Faryab, Jowzjan and Sar-e-Pul Provinces. The de facto electricity authority, Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat, announced extensions of electricity import contracts for 2023 with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, respectively, on 31 December and 10 and 23 January. In a communiqué of the twenty-sixth meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Economic Cooperation Organization, held in Tashkent on 24 January, attendees reiterated their support for assisting

reconstruction, development and socioeconomic progress in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, short-term prospects for large-scale Afghanistan-centred regional economic development projects remained uncertain in the absence of international financing.

31. UNAMA continued to engage the de facto authorities on regional cooperation and hosted regular coordination meetings with Kabul-based regional ambassadors. In November and December, UNAMA visited Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to engage the respective authorities and Afghan interlocutors residing in those countries. UNAMA also continued its cooperation with the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia and attended the Centre-organized annual meeting of deputy foreign ministers of Central Asian countries, held in Ashgabat on 11 December.

### III. Human rights

32. From 15 November to 31 January, UNAMA documented 103 civilian casualties (20 killed and 83 wounded). Improvised explosive devices and unexploded ordnance were the leading causes of civilian harm, with children comprising one third of all victims.

33. Between 1 October and 31 December, the country task force on monitoring and reporting verified 435 grave violations against almost 200 children. Killing and maiming remained the most prevalent violation committed against children representing 90 per cent of all verified violations.

34. UNAMA documented cases of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and torture and ill-treatment carried out by the de facto authorities against former government officials and Afghan National Defence and Security Forces members, in violation of the general amnesty announced in August 2021, with at least 9 extrajudicial killings, at least 17 arbitrary arrests and detentions and at least 9 instances of torture and ill-treatment. UNAMA also documented such violations attributable to the de facto authorities against individuals accused of affiliation with the National Resistance Front, in particular in Panjshir Province, with at least three extrajudicial killings, at least four arbitrary arrests and detentions and at least three instances of torture and ill-treatment.

35. On 23 and 24 November, in Sewak village, Daykundi Province, de facto security forces conducted security operations in which at least five men and three boys were killed and one woman was wounded, all extrajudicially. The de facto Taliban spokesperson stated that all those killed in the operation had been “armed rebels”. The findings of UNAMA indicated that those killed had been unarmed at the time of their deaths.

36. Following the announcement of 13 November by the de facto Taliban spokesperson regarding obligations to apply *hudud* and *qisas* sentences when sharia law conditions were met, UNAMA documented a significant increase in the implementation of judicial corporal punishment by the de facto authorities. The sentences included at least 28 instances of judicial corporal punishment of at least 222 men and 42 women for a variety of offences, including *zina* (unlawful sexual relations), “running away from home”, theft, homosexuality, consumption of alcohol, fraud and drug trafficking. All punishments were lashings. On 7 December, UNAMA documented the first instance of a judicially sanctioned public execution (in Farah city) carried out since 15 August 2021. The executed person had reportedly been convicted of murder.

37. UNAMA recorded 63 human rights violations carried out by the de facto Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice in respect of

individuals accused of moral and religious infractions of various decrees and instructions, including women for going to the market without a *mahram* or accused of failing to wear an Islamic hijab and male barbers for trimming men's beards. Violations included ill-treatment and torture (primarily beatings) and arbitrary arrests and detentions.

38. The de facto authorities continued to target media workers and civil society members who expressed dissent with relevant policies. For example, on 7 January in Kabul, members of the de facto General Directorate of Intelligence arrested a civil society activist, Sultan Ali Ziaee, reportedly in relation to his plans to organize protests against the recent directives of the de facto authorities aimed at limiting women's access to work and higher education. On 2 February in Kabul, de facto police officers arrested a university professor, Ismail Mashal, who had appeared on public television tearing up his university degrees in protest against the ban by the de facto authorities on women attending university. Between 12 and 24 December, the de facto General Directorate of Intelligence released Zarifa Yaqobi and three of her male colleagues, all of whom had been detained in Kabul on 3 November during a press conference to launch a women's protest movement. UNAMA had advocated, both publicly and bilaterally, for their release. In addition, UNAMA documented 28 instances of the arbitrary arrest and detention of civil society actors and human rights defenders, and 10 instances of the arbitrary arrest and detention of and 2 instances of ill-treatment and threats against journalists and media workers.

39. On 18 November, the Media Freedom Coalition removed Afghanistan from its membership for failing to fulfil the global pledge on media freedom signed by the country in 2020. Threats from the de facto authorities and financial difficulties continued to be the main reasons for independent media outlets ceasing to operate. On 1 December, the de facto authorities prohibited the FM radio broadcast of Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, citing alleged violations of journalistic principles.

40. A total of 27 instances of public protests were documented, most of which concluded peacefully and concerned topics not considered by the de facto authorities to be highly sensitive, such as the payment of benefits or commercial issues. Most protests triggered by the decision to suspend women from higher education and work were dispersed by the de facto authorities with warning shots, water cannons, threats, beatings, arrests and incommunicado detention employed against both protesters and journalists reporting on the protests. De facto security personnel enhanced security deployments to thwart further protests, including additional checkpoints, and issued warnings to universities. In addition, 58 peaceful protests, led mostly by the de facto authorities, were held to condemn the tearing up and burning of the Qur'an in the Netherlands and Sweden.

41. The de facto Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice was observed to enforce what appeared to be a general prohibition of music, by which wedding halls and hotels were reminded not to play music and poetry with a musical meter was disallowed. In many instances, the display of human and animal images was prohibited because they were considered "un-Islamic" by the de facto authorities. This included removing advertising signboards and public statues and covering or removing the faces of shop mannequins.

42. Women's and girls' enjoyment of their basic rights and freedoms continued to deteriorate. The recent bans in December, together with numerous restrictions already in place, including the *mahram* and hijab directives, further contributed to confining women's role to the private sphere. Also in December, the de facto authorities implemented localized measures, such as the closure of women-operated shops and

beauty salons in Kandahar and the denial of access to madrasa inside mosques for women and girls in Kabul.

43. Incidents of violence against women and girls continued to be reported, ranging from murder and honour killings to forced marriages and beatings resulting in injuries or disabilities and suicides. Reports continued to suggest that local de facto authorities used a combination of formal and informal justice mechanisms to address civil and criminal matters, including reported cases of violence against women and girls, but the mechanisms were not available equally throughout the country and did not specifically address concerns over women's access to justice, especially given the absence of female justice professionals.

44. In January 2023, UNAMA, UN-Women and the International Organization for Migration convened nine in-country consultations reaching a diverse group of Afghan women leaders from 21 provinces. The women almost unanimously identified the removal of restrictions on education and work as the key priority for reducing the devastating psychological and economic harm that they experienced. They emphasized that economic empowerment, including the provision of financial and technical support to Afghan women and women-led businesses, was essential to improving their position in the public and private domains. Women in the country reported that they had almost no influence beyond the confines of their home (93 per cent felt that they had little or no influence at the district or provincial level and 96 per cent at the national level). They requested that the United Nations and the international community, in particular Muslim-majority countries, exert their influence through continued sanctions and urgent negotiations for the full reversal of restrictions on women's rights.

45. UNAMA continued to provide technical advice and awareness-raising sessions to the de facto Office of Prison Administration in order to enable prisons to fulfil their human rights obligations. In addition to ongoing engagement with provincial prison leadership on detention conditions and measures addressing prolonged pretrial detention, UNAMA continued to engage with detainees in several prisons, including Pul-e-Charkhi prison in Kabul, in accordance with the previously granted authorization of the de facto Office.

46. Notwithstanding previously reported efforts to reduce the incarcerated population, financial constraints and discontinued donor funding continued to have a significant impact on the ability of the de facto Office of Prison Administration to meet international standards, including the systematic provision of adequate food and hygiene supplies, vocational education and training, and health needs.

#### **IV. Economic development, donor coordination and aid effectiveness**

47. Despite the economic slowdown since August 2021, the de facto authorities reported positive revenue and trade trends. Available data indicate that state revenue between 22 March and 21 December 2022, driven primarily by customs and non-tax revenue, totalled 135.9 billion afghanis (approximately \$1.5 billion), in line with revenue collection during the same period in 2020, while exports from January to November 2022 reached \$1.7 billion, compared with \$0.9 billion and \$0.8 billion for the full years 2021 and 2020, respectively. Macroeconomic indicators show that year-on-year inflation fell to 9.1 per cent in November 2022 from its peak of 18.3 per cent in July. The value of the currency has been stable, in the range of 87 to 91 afghanis per United States dollar.

48. On 16 November, the de facto Cabinet announced the approval of the mid-term 2022 budget prepared by the de facto Minister of Finance, who further reported, on 10 January, that the budget had been adjusted upward from 231 billion afghanis (approximately \$2.55 billion) to 239 billion afghanis (approximately \$2.64 billion), primarily through an increase of 7 billion afghanis (approximately \$77 million) in the recurrent budget, and that the budget deficit had been revised downward from 44.7 billion afghanis (approximately \$492 million) to 40.3 billion afghanis (\$444 million). National budgetary processes continued to lack transparency both in terms of revenue collection and expenditure. On 25 January, the Central Bank of Afghanistan announced the issuance of 100 million new bank notes to commercial banks and the recall of worn and damaged notes.

49. The de facto authorities continued to emphasize self-reliance and promote domestic production, prioritizing trade, agricultural, mining, and industrial and infrastructure projects through interaction with the private sector. However, that sector continued to face international banking challenges, visa issues, uncertainty regarding the legal framework and an unreliable electricity supply. Work continued on the 285-km Qush Tepah irrigation canal, which, according to the de facto authorities, is expected to improve agricultural prospects in northern Afghanistan.

50. The agrarian economy continued to face climate shocks. Decades of environmental degradation have fuelled desertification and repeated droughts, exacerbating the extreme vulnerability of the Afghan population to the effects of climate change. The de facto authorities exhibited awareness of those environmental threats, but there was a lack of adequate development funding and access to the climate financing mechanisms necessary to implement comprehensive mitigation measures.

51. The Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan continued to provide support directly to the communities in Afghanistan, although many activities were affected by the ban on female NGO workers. On 8 December, the Fund's steering committee approved the decision to transfer the chairpersonship of the Fund from the resident representative of UNDP to the resident coordinator. As at 2 February, 17 United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and 12 contributing donors were partnering under the Fund. Since its inception in October 2021, the Fund has received a total of \$176 million, with \$147.6 million approved for three joint regional programmes and \$112.72 million disbursed. By the end of 2022, support had reached approximately 2.2 million beneficiaries, including 700,000 women (34 per cent of beneficiaries) in the northern and southern provinces.

52. The United Nations and key donors continued to coordinate weekly on aid provision through the Afghanistan Coordination Group and associated strategic thematic working groups. The development of the Strategic Framework for Afghanistan for the period 2023–2025, a joint framework for basic human needs activities, remained on hold pending the outcome of ongoing engagement with the de facto authorities.

53. To implement the Action Agenda on Internal Displacement of the Secretary-General, the working group on national durable solutions formulated a strategy focused on the centrality of protection, area-based approaches and the humanitarian, peace and development nexus. During the reporting period, one national and five regional workshops were held to initiate the implementation of action plans.

54. The use by the United Nations of an online database for sharing information on vendors and contractors has reduced the risk of fraud and diversion of funds. On 30 January, UNAMA provided training to more than 60 programme and procurement focal points on the uploading of contractor data to the database. The United Nations

system-wide risk management working group continued to maintain an updated common risk assessment and developed a common risk action plan.

## **V. Humanitarian assistance**

55. Afghanistan is faced with unprecedented levels of human, humanitarian, climate and economic crises across all 34 provinces. Two thirds of the population will need humanitarian assistance in 2023 – a record number of 28.3 million people, up from 24.4 million in 2022 and 18.4 million in 2021. This will require funding of approximately \$4.6 billion, the highest humanitarian requirement in the world. Following the decision to bar women from working for NGOs, a survey by UN-Women found that 94 per cent of 127 women-led national civil society organizations working in the civil society sector had either fully or partially ceased their activities. The sector-specific impact of the ban is being monitored regularly by the humanitarian country team. Gaining access to women in need has become increasingly challenging, specifically in the areas of humanitarian assessment and monitoring.

56. In 2022, nearly 26 million people were reached with humanitarian assistance, including 22.3 million people with food and livelihood support, 13.3 million people with health care, 6.2 million children and nursing mothers with support to prevent and address acute malnutrition, 11 million people with water, sanitation and hygiene assistance, 554,400 children with access to education and education materials, 2 million people with emergency shelter and household items and 5.7 million people with at least one form of protection assistance.

57. Between 16 November and 5 February, the humanitarian community also reached approximately 4.1 million people with support to boost food production, including 3.4 million people with high-quality locally adapted certified wheat seeds and fertilizers, 500,000 with livestock protection support and training on livestock management, 96,000 households with cash for work to rehabilitate critical community irrigation infrastructure and 10,000 landless and highly food-insecure female-headed household recipients and people with disabilities with unconditional cash. More than 125,000 cattle were vaccinated against lumpy skin disease across 83 districts, supporting some 73,000 households.

58. In 2022, there were 77,210 suspected cases of measles (77 per cent of which were among children under 5 years of age). Between 16 November and 31 December, the United Nations vaccinated 5.5 million children against measles across all districts. Between May and December 2022, 242,562 cases of acute watery diarrhoea with dehydration (55 per cent affecting children under 5 years of age) were reported in 175 districts in all 34 provinces. Since the start of 2022, Afghanistan had recorded two cases of wild poliovirus type 1.

59. Conflict-related trauma cases decreased by 69 per cent between 16 November and 15 January compared with the same period one year before, with 1,024 people having received conflict-related trauma care, compared with 3,269 in the previous period. Since the beginning of 2022, 665,689 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition had been admitted and treated in 3,200 in-patient and outpatient medical facilities, including 46,369 children with medical complications who had been admitted and treated in 127 in-patient departments for severe acute malnutrition. More than 500 mobile health and nutrition teams continued to reach populations in remote areas, providing more than 450,000 consultations every month.

60. Between 16 November and 15 January, 133,889 people were recorded to have crossed into Afghanistan. Of those, 65,070 had been deported and 68,819 made

spontaneous returns. A total of 124,455 returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran and 9,434 from Pakistan. More than 924,000 undocumented migrants crossed into Afghanistan throughout 2022. (These figures solely represent undocumented Afghan migrants returning through four border crossing points in Herat, Nimroz, Nangarhar and Kandahar Provinces.) During the same period, some 6,424 Afghan refugees, mainly from Pakistan (6,029) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (372), returned to Afghanistan under the United Nations voluntary repatriation programme. The United Nations supported more than 3 million internally displaced persons and refugee returnees and host community members in 80 priority areas of return and reintegration throughout Afghanistan. Assistance included improved access to primary education for girls and boys, better access to health care and to livelihood, shelter and energy support, and water and sanitation services. In 2022, at least 394,576 people were newly displaced by conflict and disasters, bringing the total number of people in a state of displacement to 5.8 million since 2012. In 2023, the number of displaced and vulnerable migrants is projected to reach approximately 691,000 (only 11 per cent of whom are expected to be displaced by conflict, with drought, economic factors and eroded resilience to shock anticipated to increasingly force people to flee their homes).

61. The number of incidents involving interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities remained high, with 494 reported between 16 November and 5 February, compared with 153 during the same period one year earlier. In 2022, 30 attacks on health-care personnel and 362 incidents of violence and threats against humanitarian personnel, assets and facilities were recorded, a significant decrease from the 522 incidents documented in 2021. In addition, 407 gender-motivated incidents attributed to the de facto authorities (including 39 incidents of threats against or intimidation of female aid workers and 57 incidents of restrictions on the movement of female aid workers) were recorded.

62. The Mine Action Service enabled the survey and clearance of contaminated land, safely removing explosive devices, including improvised explosive devices. Affected populations, including girls and women, received explosive ordnance risk education in communities and areas of return. A further 20 million people were estimated to have access to risk education through mass media.

## **VI. Counter-narcotics**

63. Following the narcotics ban by the de facto authorities in April 2022, field reports indicated that efforts were being made by those authorities to discourage farmers from cultivating opium poppy in the southern and western regions. A determination as to whether the ban has ultimately been effective, however, will depend on access to reliable information on the harvesting season from May to July. Field reports by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) indicated that, to date, enforcement levels had not been uniform. Opium poppy cultivation remained a critical source of cash for many farmers, especially in the southern region.

64. As a result of the ban, opium prices continued to rise. The national average prices per kg of dry and fresh opium at the farm gate in November 2022 were \$327 and \$205, respectively, more than four times the price of dry opium in July 2021. Prices were not consistent and reached more than \$400 per kg in the southern, eastern and western provinces, where most poppy plants were cultivated.

65. Since mid-November, the UNODC alternative development programme had reached 1,821 households (including 558 headed by women) in Helmand and Kandahar Provinces with agricultural inputs and extensions services. That assisted poppy-growing farmers in replacing 134 ha of poppy with licit crops. Since March

2022, an average increase of 25 per cent in cereal and vegetable crop production had improved food security and livelihoods. In addition, the construction of seven reservoirs with a capacity of 150,000 m<sup>3</sup> for providing water for irrigation and animals was completed in December, benefiting some 2,100 households and 350 nomad (Kuchi) families. The construction also provided 3,081 days of labour for landless households.

66. UNODC and UNDP jointly provided essential food packages and winterization kits to 17 drug treatment centres, allowing those facilities to function during winter. On 1 February, the de facto authorities inaugurated a 5,000-bed rehabilitation shelter in Kabul to provide medical treatment and support for people who use drugs.

## **VII. Mission support**

67. As at 31 January, vacancy rates in UNAMA were 11 per cent for international staff, 15 per cent for United Nations Volunteers, 12 per cent for National Professional Officers and 9 per cent for national staff, compared with approved rates of 9, 10, 4 and 4 per cent, respectively. The proportion of female staff was 31 per cent for international staff, 34 per cent for United Nations Volunteers, 9 per cent for National Professional Officers and 9 per cent for national staff. The National United Nations Volunteer programme remained a critical pipeline for young Afghan women to join the United Nations workforce. In addition, the United Nations country team was working to mitigate the additional hardship faced by national female staff in terms of their commuting needs. The UNAMA office within the United Nations common premises facility in Almaty remained available for use. The availability of adequate air assets, including timely access to the air operations services, remained a key factor for United Nations security preparedness and risk mitigation.

## **VIII. Observations and recommendations**

68. During the reporting period, international attention on Afghanistan was focused predominately on the elevated humanitarian needs in the country and the further and drastic restrictions imposed on the lives of Afghan women and girls. Both elements are inextricably intertwined, as the latter will have devastating and long-lasting consequences on Afghan society as a whole.

69. Not only does the denial of higher education to women and girls violate the equal rights of women and girls, it will also have a catastrophic impact on the country's future development. Banning women from working for international and national NGOs negatively affects the provision of life-saving assistance at a moment when the needs of Afghanistan are among the highest in the world. Owing to the Taliban's own policies, women beneficiaries depend on the involvement of women humanitarian workers, not only to identify their needs and receive assistance but also to provide feedback that is essential to the quality and accountability of the assistance received. The latest most recent restrictions, if not quickly reversed, will have lasting negative consequences for economic recovery, poverty reduction and the long-term socioeconomic development and stability of Afghanistan, including the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, at the core of which are the education and empowerment of women.

70. I have opposed and will continue to oppose those decisions, and I have expressed my solidarity with Afghan women and girls, including by seeking practical solutions through engagement. The visits led by the Deputy Secretary-General and the Emergency Relief Coordinator were part of our continued engagement with the de facto authorities on the importance of women's and girls' rights and the

consequences of the restrictions if they are not reversed. Discussions with the de facto authorities, other Afghan stakeholders and countries in the region and beyond were intended to inform the de facto authorities of the consequences of those decisions and the lasting impact on Afghan society and the relationship of Afghanistan with the international community.

71. The Taliban gave assurances that they were working to find ways to reverse or mitigate the effects of the decisions. Trust, however, needs to be reinforced by substantial progress on the respect and protection of women's and girls' rights, as well as the other issues necessary to promote stability and development, including greater political inclusivity and efforts to combat terrorism.

72. The de facto authorities continue to assert security control across Afghanistan. Serious concerns remain, however, over the continued presence of foreign terrorist groups in the country. Attacks directed at civilian targets, including by ISIL-K, must cease. The de facto authorities must take more concrete action on the security and political fronts, including by engaging in counter-terrorism dialogue with countries in the region and the international community to strengthen cooperation in countering those threats while complying with their obligations under international law.

73. Civilians continue to be killed and maimed by unexploded remnants of war. In addition, the proliferation of weapons and the unsafe storage of ammunition and explosive material continue to pose a threat to civilian lives, in particular in densely populated urban areas. There also remains the very real risk of their diversion for illicit use, including terrorism and trafficking. The United Nations will continue to engage with the de facto authorities on the appropriate mitigation measures needed to counter such threats.

74. The Taliban described the amnesty that it granted after taking power as an effort to end the decades-long cycle of violence and retribution in Afghanistan. At the time, I called for the earnest implementation of that commitment. The reality today is one of increasing violations by the Taliban of its own amnesty declaration. Those actions threaten to reignite cycles of violence and should be stopped.

75. I am alarmed by the increase in the implementation of judicial corporal punishments by the de facto authorities. Those punishments constitute a form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and may amount to torture, both of which are strictly prohibited under international law. I am also alarmed by the public execution that was carried out on 7 December. The Human Rights Committee, in its general comment No. 36 (2018) on the right to life, relating to article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Afghanistan is a State party, noted that States parties that had not abolished the death penalty must respect article 7 of the Covenant, under which certain methods of execution are prohibited. Failure to respect article 7 would inevitably render the execution arbitrary in nature and thus also in violation of article 6. The Committee has opined that public executions are contrary to article 7.

76. Political space continues to close, with media freedoms increasingly curtailed and protests suppressed. The Taliban have rejected various proposals regarding meaningful national dialogue or other mechanisms for political inclusion. After decades of conflict, Afghans from all factions and communities deserve the opportunity to reconcile on the basis of a shared vision of their future. I reiterate the readiness of the United Nations to support a process of national dialogue that lays the foundation for a durable peace and national reconciliation.

77. The political environment in which the United Nations operates has changed significantly over the past year, with the Taliban taking decisions not aligned with international norms, standards and principles. The welfare of the people of Afghanistan is and must remain our foremost concern. It requires a strategy of patient

and principled engagement based on a more unified and integrated international approach. For the United Nations, UNAMA continues to be the main instrument in facilitating and implementing such an approach. The current mandate for the Mission provides sufficient flexibility for UNAMA to adapt to new developments. I recommend that it be extended for a further 12 months.

78. The three strategic objectives of the United Nations political presence, which are more specifically outlined in Security Council resolution [2626 \(2022\)](#), remain essential:

(a) To work with all actors to promote effective, responsible and inclusive Afghan governance and society while advancing reconciliation;

(b) To help strengthen the respect for and protection of fundamental rights and freedoms of all Afghan men and women;

(c) To support the provision of essential services to the Afghan population and contribute to creating economic and social conditions that can lead to self-reliance and stability.

79. The coordination and facilitation of humanitarian assistance and donor coordination in relation to basic human needs, the promotion of inclusive governance, the protection and promotion of human rights, the provision of support to regional cooperation, the coordination of risk management, and support mechanisms to improve the overall security situation in Afghanistan are also essential.

80. I extend my deep appreciation to all United Nations personnel in Afghanistan, under the leadership of my Special Representative, Roza Otunbayeva, for their continued dedication and service to the people of Afghanistan in an increasingly restrictive environment.

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