



Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

Provisional

9227th meeting

Tuesday, 20 December 2022, 10.35 a.m.

New York

<i>President:</i>	Mrs. Kamboj/Mr. Verma/Mr. Ravindran	(India)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania	Mr. Hoxha
	Brazil	Mr. Costa Filho
	China	Mr. Zhang Jun
	France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
	Gabon	Mr. Biang
	Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
	Ireland	Mr. Mythen
	Kenya	Mr. Kiboino
	Mexico	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
	Norway	Ms. Huitfeldt
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Alhefeiti
	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/2022/916)

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22-76293 (E)



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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 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/2022/916)

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; and Ms. Mahbouba Seraj, Afghan women's rights activist.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2022/916, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Ms. Otunbayeva, Mr. Griffiths, Ms. Seraj and myself, in my capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011).

I give the floor to Ms. Otunbayeva.

Ms. Otunbayeva: I have visited as many parts of Afghanistan as possible in my first three months as Special Representative of the Secretary-General. What struck me most was the misery of so many Afghans who live in great poverty and uncertainty about the future. Many told me during my visits around the country that they are simply surviving. My colleague Martin Griffiths will provide details on the humanitarian situation. Beyond pressing immediate humanitarian needs, however, Afghanistan is a country still traumatized by long decades of war. The Taliban

remain essentially in control of the country but unable to satisfactorily address the problem of terrorist groups operating inside Afghanistan. We are deeply concerned about the recent activity of the Islamic State-Khorosan Province in particular, as well as the attacks on the embassies of the Russian Federation and Pakistan and a hotel hosting many Chinese nationals, which resulted in significant civilian casualties. There nonetheless remains a general sense of security and freedom of movement for Afghans. On the other hand, we are greatly concerned about the recent continued exchanges of fire between Afghanistan and Pakistan and welcome all efforts towards de-escalation.

There is no significant visible political opposition to the Taliban inside Afghanistan. The exiled politicians of the Republic are of course vocal critics, but they are fragmented, and their statements resonate less and less with the population inside Afghanistan. The Taliban reject the need for any sort of intra-Afghan dialogue and claim that their Government is sufficiently representative. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continues to push at all levels for wider consultation and representation, as I briefed the Council about during the Arria Formula meeting in October. We also continue to interact with many non-Taliban civil-society and political figures in Afghanistan. We believe that the only way forward for Afghanistan is through a more pluralistic polity where all Afghans, especially women and minorities, see themselves represented and have a real voice in decision-making. That is clearly not the case now. Moreover, the media and civil society, which are already suffering from serious financial constraints, continue to be stifled through intimidation by the de facto security institutions and at times through repressive actions.

The suppression of opposing voices is all the more unfortunate given the increasing harshness of the Taliban's social policies. We have seen a slew of decrees that are especially harmful to women. Women have been banned since 9 November from visiting most public parks, bathhouses and gymnasiums. Their social space is now being restricted as much as their political space. The banning of secondary education will mean that in two years no girls will be entering university. That decision is extremely unpopular among Afghans and even within the Taliban leadership. It has been criticized by the entire Islamic world and has undermined the Taliban's relationship with the international community, but it remains in force, causing damage today that will be felt far into the future.

On 13 November, the Taliban announced that their leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada, had ordered judges to implement capital and corporal punishments known as *hudūd* and *qisās* in order to fully enforce sharia law. UNAMA has documented that such punishments have been taking place ever since the Taliban's takeover. However, since the announcement of the Taliban leader's order they have become increasingly public. Any international criticism of such punishments as violations of human rights has been rejected by the Taliban as anti-Islamic. We have urged the Taliban to do as many Islamic countries do and refrain from inflicting pain, including through acts of corporal punishment, in their application of religious law. On 7 December, the first judicially sanctioned public execution — reportedly as an implementation of *qisās* punishment — was carried out for a murder that took place in 2017. It was attended by senior members of the Taliban. I want to reiterate here what I have stressed to the de facto authorities, which is that the death penalty is incompatible with the core principles of international human rights law. The United Nations uniformly criticizes all countries that apply the death penalty or corporal punishment.

It is clear that there are severe differences of positions on a range of issues between UNAMA and the de facto authorities. We, as the United Nations, have an ongoing dialogue with the Taliban regarding human rights concerns and specific violations of international human rights law. We do not see eye to eye with the Taliban on a number of issues, but the focus is and should be on maintaining a dialogue in the hope of a better future for Afghanistan, where everyone — women, men, girls and boys — can live a life of dignity and equality.

There are, however, some positive developments, particularly on the economic front. The overall levels of corruption are significantly down compared to the days of the Republic, but there have been worrying signs of an uptick in the past six months, especially in petty corruption at the local level. For now, the main impediment to investment, besides policy uncertainty, is that it is extremely expensive for the Taliban to engage in international financial transactions owing to the reluctance of international banks to do business with Afghanistan. However, the de facto authorities announced the collection of more revenues in the first 10 months of 2022 than the Republic collected in 2021 and 2020 together, despite an economic contraction

of 20 per cent in 2021. With those revenues, and by reducing the costs of Government, the Taliban have managed to finance their operational budget and have indicated that they have the resources to begin some development projects. They have also managed to maintain macroeconomic stability, albeit at a much lower level of economic activity. After the currency's steep deterioration a year ago, the afghani has remained generally stable. Exports have risen to a historic level of about \$1.7 billion this year, compared to about \$700 million under the Republic.

The de facto authorities are implementing an economic strategy that focuses on self-reliance. They are investing in sectors such as agriculture, irrigation, infrastructure, water management and mining, industries that can provide a foundation for economic growth. The Taliban have identified the private sector as a key driver of economic growth and are somewhat responsive to the concerns of private-sector actors. UNAMA has been in regular contact with private-sector actors and organizations, including women's chambers of commerce. The main impediment to greater investment is the high cost of international financial transactions. And while the Taliban's economic management has been more effective than expected, it should also be recognized that international donors continue to feed more than half of the population. The cash payments required to deliver humanitarian assistance indirectly inject liquidity into the economy. Without that assistance, the picture in Afghanistan could be far bleaker.

Finally, there is evidence that the Taliban are implementing the ban that they announced in April on the cultivation of opium and other narcotics by destroying fields that were planted before and after the ban's announcement. We will not be able to verify the actual implementation of this ban until early next year, but the intention behind it is commendable. Nonetheless, the ban will have a negative effect on the income of individual farmers, as few alternative livelihood programmes have been put into place.

These somewhat positive economic developments may not be sustainable if the real concerns of Afghans are not addressed. Between 11 October and 8 November, UNAMA carried out stakeholder consultations in 12 provinces selected to ensure a representation of all Afghan communities and sectors. We engaged with 519 participants, including 189 women and 83 representatives of the de facto authorities. The concerns

expressed by the population had to do with the ban on girls' education, lack of health-care facilities, mental-health problems of the population, poverty and economic insecurity, and discrimination against ethnic minorities. The Taliban have not addressed these issues, and in many cases their decisions have made them worse.

But during these stakeholder discussions, Afghans showed that they are also frustrated with the international community's approach. They expressed a desire for projects that are more long term, involve cash for work rather than handouts, or are more participatory, consultative and development-oriented. However, under current conditions, donors are increasingly unwilling to look beyond the provision of humanitarian assistance. As long as girls remain excluded from school and the de facto authorities continue to disregard other stated concerns of the international community, we remain at something of an impasse.

In UNAMA, we are undertaking an internal review to assess what has and has not been effective in the implementation of our mandate. This will yield recommendations for our future mandate. But, overall, we believe that engagement with the de facto authorities must continue in some form.

As Council member themselves heard from female humanitarian workers in yesterday's closed consultations of the whole, Afghans want continued engagement from the international community and believe that it is only through increased interaction with the de facto authorities that positive change can take place.

UNAMA's focus must remain on the Afghan people, providing them life-saving humanitarian assistance, giving a voice to their demands for fundamental rights and freedoms, and, by its presence, holding out hope that Afghanistan will not be isolated from the international community. We are committed to these goals and to trying to maintain a space for positive engagement with the Taliban. But we must do so with a sense of realism, patience and a proper understanding of the situation as it evolves. As always, we look to the Security Council for support and guidance.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Griffiths: It is impossible to come up with new ways to describe the deprivation and suffering facing people in Afghanistan, so allow me to share some well-known, though still sobering, facts.

Ninety-seven percent of Afghans live in poverty. Two thirds of the population need humanitarian assistance to survive. Twenty million people face acute hunger. Half of the people urgently need access to clean water and sanitation. Some 1.1 million teenage girls remain banned from school. Nearly 7 million Afghan nationals remain in neighbouring countries, including as refugees, and there are more than 3.4 million internally displaced people in Afghanistan who have yet to find a way home.

And if lingering conflict, entrenched poverty, economic downfall—and I thank Special Representative Otunbayeva for her briefing on that matter also—and political instability were not enough, Afghanistan must also face a worsening climate crisis. A third consecutive drought is looming, bringing with it threats of more displacement, more disease and more death. Winter is already in full swing, causing temperatures to plummet. This week temperatures will drop to -10°C in remote areas of Ghor province, which earlier this year registered pre-famine conditions.

The humanitarian community in Afghanistan is fully mobilized, trying to address the most urgent needs. Any progress we have made so far is thanks to three main factors. First, there was the massive scale-up, aided by the quick and generous donor response, which enabled us to reach around 25 million people in all 34 governorates with at least some form of assistance. Secondly, there is the United Nations cash facility, which has brought in at least \$1.8 billion this year to support humanitarian operations. For one United Nations agency, by way of example, this has enabled the injection of well over \$55 million into the economy each month, including by paying national staff salaries, hiring tens of thousands of staff in partner humanitarian organizations, and providing jobs for labourers. And thirdly, there is the humanitarian exception adopted by the Security Council in December 2021 in resolution 2615 (2021), which has played a critical facilitating role.

A key component of the humanitarian exception was to clarify that the provision of funds or assets to designated persons or entities is permitted when it is necessary for humanitarian and basic human-needs programming. I cannot overstate how essential this legal

cover has been for humanitarian and commercial actors alike. It allows us, the humanitarians, to implement at scale, and it authorizes our business and commercial partners, as a starting point, to process and pay funds to line ministries headed by designated individuals. To put it more clearly: it helps us and others to save lives.

Resolution 2615 (2021) requires that I as the Emergency Relief Coordinator brief the Security Council on the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, so allow me to share some updates.

But first, I would like to make an important clarification. Transferring funds to line ministries for the delivery of humanitarian aid in Afghanistan is not new. Since long before August 2021, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organization partners were required by law to pay taxes, administrative fees and public utilities. These could take the form of withholding tax on income, sales tax, property tax, fees for visas and work permits, vehicle registration duties, electricity and water bills, and customs payments for imported goods. Clearance fees paid to the Afghanistan Telecommunications Regulatory Authority for the use of communications equipment, including high-frequency radios and satellite phones, has allowed operations to stay connected, particularly in hard-to reach and remote areas or where there is poor coverage, and, in a very limited number of cases, humanitarian organizations have provided line ministries with assets, including technical equipment, vehicles and office supplies in support of programme implementation.

United Nations agencies in Afghanistan continue to identify ways to strengthen interventions in a responsible manner that safeguards humanitarian space. In that regard, I commend the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for its recent partnership agreement with the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation in support of affected populations. That agreement, if fully implemented, helps to ensure that the de facto authorities do not interfere in the humanitarian activities of UNHCR or its partners.

However, the humanitarian exception is no carte blanche for any operation. We are not transferring funds to line ministries in any excessive fashion. Ninety-eight per cent of the 66 organizations that reported making payments to line ministries — as required by law — are national and international non-governmental

organizations (NGOs). Those payments are in relatively nominal amounts and are to pay for tax on rent and withholding tax on national staff income.

In that regard, I would like to draw the Council member's attention to what humanitarian partners have been doing to minimize risks.

We have continued to implement and enhance robust risk management and due diligence measures. That includes a new system-wide approach to fraud detection, clunkily labelled the Contractor Information Management System, a centrally managed platform that feeds back to United Nations agencies in real time on the veracity of contractual partners and vendors. Several organizations have also created new functions in their operations, such as senior risk management and compliance advisers, to assist in a more proactive and engaged risk management.

Another measure being utilized when supporting the functions of key line ministries that provide basic services is the direct contracting of utility companies that provide electricity or Internet, rather than giving funds via the line ministry. Likewise, for the daily charges the United Nations makes related to security escorts and perimeter protection, fuel is put directly into escort vehicles, and food allowances are made either in kind or through direct payment to the personnel providing the security.

Due diligence assessments are conducted on all money service providers and implementing partners before partnering, and the signing of those contracts is contingent upon the successful screening of their directors, key personnel and other employees. Of note, customs charges are currently approximately \$23 per container or shipment, which is same rate as during the previous Government.

Let me be clear: failure to make some of the payments that I have been describing can have severe consequences for NGO partners, including the freezing of bank accounts, the shutting of offices and even de-registration.

Recipient line ministries headed by listed individuals include the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Water and Electricity, the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation and the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock. Thanks to the authorization provided

by resolution 2615 (2021), we have been able to meet and match humanitarian needs and do so in a manner consistent with the instructions of the Security Council.

For example, the leasing of State-owned warehouses from local municipalities has enabled the United Nations to maintain the food stocks needed to reach 22 million people over the course of this year. Those warehouses were a critical part of the United Nations supply chain network prior to August 2021, and there were no alternate facilities that could have been used, given the scale of monthly requirements.

Payments to the Customs and Revenue Department by United Nations-contracted commercial transporters, as well as the payments of fees for processing exemption certificates to the Customs and Revenue Department, have facilitated the entry of 1.1 million metric tons of life-saving food assistance.

Electricity and payments to the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation have allowed the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service to make more than 4,000 domestic and international flights in and out of Kabul this year, transporting more than 24,000 humanitarian workers to multiple locations across the country.

Those efforts with money service providers and with those who receive our assistance continue and include a review of the legal status, national and international registration documents, partnership agreements, policies on anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing and reference checks. Council members can see me piling up the references to verification and compliance and mitigation, on top of pre-existing risk management processes, to which I have referred. We have put therefore multiple monitoring mechanisms in place to ensure that assistance goes to the intended recipients. Those also include routine post-distribution monitoring; the use of third-party monitors; community feedback mechanisms; regular site visits and field missions by both management and technical staff; and external audits to verify expenditures and check on cash distributions to local communities and beneficiaries.

Earlier this year, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the Mission led by Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, invited an expert to help to strengthen the humanitarian community's understanding and implementation of the humanitarian exception and to identify concrete measures to manage risks.

Before I finish, I would like to share some of the challenges that we face.

First, while we do maintain constructive engagement, as encouraged by Ms. Otunbayeva, with de facto authorities, we also, as she has described, face routine interference and restrictions. They have detained humanitarian staff, tried to influence or control the humanitarian response and constrained women's freedom of movement and involvement in humanitarian action. The *mahram* requirement, in particular, is what hampers women's participation in humanitarian action the most and persistently affects women's access to services. There have been concerning reports from Helmand province, among others, that women have been prevented from entering health facilities when they do not have a *mahram*.

Members of the Security Council — again, as referenced by Ms. Otunbayeva — heard directly yesterday from Afghan women humanitarian workers. Effective humanitarian assistance relies on the meaningful participation of women, as they stated. We cannot overstate the importance of their capacities, insight and ability to reach women and girls across the country.

The second challenge relates to continued bank de-risking. The humanitarian exception has been a necessary, but still insufficient, condition for banks to fully restart international transactions to and from Afghanistan, given the range of non-sanction-related factors they have to take into account. While our partners report fewer challenges with transferring funds into Afghanistan than they did before the exception was secured, that remains a serious problem that will remain with us for some time.

The third challenge is the daunting financial challenge we face as we enter 2023. We need \$4.6 billion for the programme for next year to adequately address the country's needs. Despite the many pressing global demands, we cannot underestimate the consequences of decreasing funding to operations in Afghanistan.

And finally — and I particularly want to emphasize this — there has been a paucity of progress on restarting urgently needed development initiatives, without which the humanitarian situation is likely to further deteriorate, resulting in more people requiring emergency assistance. Saving lives is certainly our responsibility, but it is not ours alone, and I say that as a lifelong humanitarian. Development partners also

save lives. They deliver basic services. Humanitarian programming cannot, and should not, be seen as the only acceptable channel through which the extraordinary suffering of Afghans is addressed.

In conclusion, our work is fraught with challenges. Millions of people need humanitarian assistance to survive. The figures I provided at the beginning of these remarks are shocking and need no repetition. The Council can be sure that, with its support, we will continue to do at least the necessary for those people in Afghanistan and for their future.

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

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011).

I am pleased to brief the Security Council on the work of the 1988 Committee, in accordance with paragraph 56 of resolution 2255 (2015).

I am also thankful to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for their support of the work of the 1988 Sanctions Committee and the continuous assistance to the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team. As this will be my last briefing to the Council as Chair of the Committee, please also allow me to also thank my 1988 Committee colleagues, the Monitoring Team and the Secretariat for their excellent cooperation, as well as invaluable support over the past two years.

In its latest report to the Council, of May 2022 (see S/2022/419), 1988 Committee Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team noted that 41 United Nations-sanctioned individuals occupied Cabinet and senior positions in the Taliban Administration. That number is now believed to be over 60.

The Monitoring Team also reiterated that relations between the Taliban and Al-Qaida remained close and are underscored by the presence, both in Afghanistan and the region, of Al-Qaida core leadership and affiliated groups, such as Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent. On 1 August, the United States announced that, at the end of July, the leader of Al-Qaida was killed in a Kabul compound. However, that has not yet been confirmed by the Taliban and Al-Qaida.

The Administration in Kabul remains overwhelmingly Taliban. Since taking power, concerns have been expressed that the group has reversed policies and gone

back on commitments made prior to assuming power, as reported by the Monitoring Team. Concerns have also been expressed on the further erosion of human rights, including the rights of women and girls, as well as lack of progress on inclusive governance.

Regarding narcotics production in Afghanistan, the report of the Monitoring Team stated that opium poppy cultivation, accompanied by an ongoing boom in methamphetamine production and trafficking, remains Afghanistan's largest illicit economic activity. Despite a decree issued by the Taliban, in April 2022, banning the cultivation, use and trafficking of narcotics, including the fanning of opium poppy, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reported a 32 per cent increase during 2021 in opium cultivation, with 2022 opium prices having soared due to the announcement of the cultivation ban.

The Monitoring Team has also reported that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) remains a primary threat in Afghanistan and in the region, as has been demonstrated by its regular attacks against Afghanistan's neighbouring States, as well as against minority ethnic and religious communities in the country. Another worrisome fact is the attacks of ISIL-K against diplomatic embassies and their personnel. Moreover, ISIL-K maintains the potential to attract disillusioned Taliban and foreign fighters into its ranks, thereby enhancing its capability to carry out attacks and its ability to regain a territorial hold in the country, as well as the potential to establish a so-called Islamic caliphate in the region in future.

The Monitoring Team has also noted the challenge posed to the Taliban regime by the presence of the National Resistance Front and other anti-Taliban groups and that potential for further outbreaks of fighting looms large in the absence of real or sustained dialogue.

As the Council is aware, the 1988 Committee's desired goal through the use of its sanctions measures is to promote a peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan by deterring support to terrorist entities and by supporting peace and stability discussions.

A travel-ban exemption granted in April 2019 to a group of listed Taliban, with a view to enabling them to engage in peace and stability discussions in a range of countries, expired in August 2022 and was not extended since the Committee was unable to reach consensus on same. However, the Committee stood ready to consider exemptions to the travel ban on a case-by-case

basis in accordance with the relevant resolutions and Committee guidelines, with the overall objective of furthering peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Humanitarian needs in Afghanistan remain dire. The Council will recall that, following the uncertainty that came in the wake of the August 2021 Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, the Security Council acted to clarify that humanitarian assistance and other activities that support basic human needs in Afghanistan are not a violation of paragraph 1 (a) of resolution 2255 (2015) and that the processing of payments of funds, other financial assets, economic resources and the provision of goods and services needed to support humanitarian aid delivery are permitted. That opened the door for much-needed financing and aid delivery in order to mitigate the impact of the crisis. The Sanctions Committee heard a briefing from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on 4 April on the humanitarian activities in Afghanistan. It remains our hope that the work of the 1988 Committee can and will support the creation of an environment conducive to the formation of a peaceful and stable Afghanistan free from terrorism and drugs.

In that respect, the work of the 1988 Committee and of the Monitoring Team has become even more essential in helping shape change for the better in Afghanistan. Going forward, I would emphasize the need for Member States to further support and assist the work of the Committee and the Monitoring Team, as outlined in paragraph 1 of resolution 2255 (2015) and the annex to resolution 2611 (2021).

In that regard, we welcome the decision of the Council to extend the mandate of the 1988 Sanctions Committee and its Monitoring Team to continue to oversee the implementation of sanctions measures, as well as to support the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan.

The overall effectiveness of the 1988 sanctions measures relies on the coordination and communication of all relevant Member States. Nowhere is that more important than with the Member States of the region, which share a common interest in ensuring a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. In the aftermath of the Taliban takeover, the Monitoring Team, in addition to its normal interaction with Member States, has focused on greater engagement with Afghanistan's neighbours in order to discuss the implementation of 1988 sanctions measures, as well as to conduct threat assessments. It is my hope that such outreach will continue and will be reciprocated.

Please allow me once again to reiterate that the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) and its Monitoring Team seek to support peace and stabilization efforts in Afghanistan. The Committee looks forward to a continuous fruitful and cooperative relationship with Member States, particularly those neighbouring Afghanistan, as well as other relevant stakeholders. We also hope for continued close engagement with UNAMA and other relevant stakeholders in 2023 so as to ensure the full implementation of the 1988 sanctions regime, along with supporting negotiations towards securing a peaceful, stable and inclusive Afghanistan.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to Ms. Seraj.

Ms. Seraj: First of all, before I begin I would like to thank you, Madam President, and the Government of India, for giving me this opportunity to talk about Afghanistan, in my capacity as a human rights defender. I am also a voice for the women of Afghanistan. I would like to thank you very much for that and for the opportunity to brief the Council on what is really happening in Afghanistan today.

I thank you for inviting me to today's important meeting. It was nearly a year ago, in January, that I was last here in the Council (see S/PV.8954). As I have lived in Afghanistan since then, I can provide some reflections on how things stand today as compared to how they were in January. Let me therefore revisit some of the points that I made then in this same forum and see where we stand today. First, I said that hundreds of thousands of Afghans had been displaced to countries around the world and that women were literally being erased from public life, down to the beheading of female mannequins in shop windows. It pains me to say that the situation has only worsened since then. Barely two months after I said that in the Council, the world was shocked by the promises that had been made to the international community and that were not kept. The schools were closed to girls. Girls were being locked out of their schools and forced to return home.

It has been 700 days and Afghan girls have yet to be permitted to return, making Afghanistan the only country in the world where girls are banned from going to school. And that is not the only thing. The Taliban issued a mandate that women must cover their faces when they go out, which was not something that was

happening before. We covered the rest of our bodies but not our faces. Women are not allowed to go out in public without a male guardian. Women who used to be the sole breadwinners for their families are no longer permitted to go to their offices or workplaces. Public corporal punishment has made its way back into Afghan society. There are about three dozen edicts by the Taliban that target the women of Afghanistan alone. As I mentioned before, this is not just about women's status but about their literal erasure from public life. It is a complete reversal of the empowerment enjoyed by the women of Afghanistan over the past 20 years, when they made advances in many walks of life.

Similarly, minorities have vanished and have been banished from Afghanistan's public and social life. Our brothers and sisters in minority communities no longer believe that the country belongs to them. Discriminatory policies and fear of the unknown, as well as the gory history of what happened to minorities in the 1990s, serve as a grim reminder to them. In addition, ethnic and religious minorities' places of worship are deliberately targeted by terrorist groups. It is very unfortunate that the world is still silent about this.

Secondly, are we more safe and secure today than we were a year and a half ago? Yes, the civil war has ended, but we are living in fear every day. International terrorist groups have been wreaking havoc with impunity. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan, Al-Qaida and Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent and all the other cross-border terrorist groups in the region are now emboldened. If any Council members are under the impression that it is only Afghanistan that will suffer as a result of the terrorism in our country, they should think again. Just in the past year, we have had attacks on the Russian Embassy, the Ambassador of Pakistan and, very recently, a hotel hosting Chinese visitors. Even the United Nations report (see S/2022/916) mentions that the terrorist entities enjoy more freedom of movement today in Afghanistan.

Let me look back at what happened in the 1990s. We are told that what happens in Afghanistan will stay in Afghanistan. The world was unmoved when Al-Qaida established itself and its bases in Afghanistan and terrorist groups expanded their tentacles throughout the region. The world stayed silent. It was only after the attacks of 11 September 2001 that people realized that the threat of terrorism is not limited to a single part of the world. We can sense the same complacency today.

There is almost a naive belief that the terrorist entities that now have free rein in Afghanistan will at worst expand their reach within the region and nothing more. History teaches us otherwise, and I do not want to have to come back here in a year or so and say I told you so.

Thirdly, the Security Council's resolutions talk about the need for inclusive governance, but what is the reality? The people of Afghanistan were used to participating in their country's governance structure. It was not a perfect system, but at least it was inclusive and participatory. Today's governance is carried out only by a small group of men. It is almost as if the rest have no stake in the system.

Finally, and most important for the Afghan people, the economic and humanitarian situations in the country are dire. Mere words cannot express what we have to go through every day, and mere statistics will not show the full picture. Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths provided clear statistics on the entire situation in Afghanistan, and I really thank him for that. It was a very compelling briefing. Just to give an idea of where we stand — more than 20 million people are facing acute hunger, the most anywhere in the world. Malnutrition will affect more than 3 million children. There has been a sixfold increase in debt across Afghanistan's households because of the economic collapse, job losses and inflation, and most Afghans today live in poverty. In short, the ordinary lives of the people of Afghanistan are full of misery and destitution. We are truly thankful to all who have provided assistance to our people. There are so many here in the Chamber who have been generous with their aid. But that is not enough. The needs of the people are so enormous and the situation so miserable that our requirements are huge.

Unfortunately, Afghanistan is an economy that has depended on foreign aid for many decades now. The takeover by the Taliban and the resultant stoppage of aid and economic links to the world have hit us hard. Development projects are at a standstill. No one wants to invest in a country that is unstable. Banks do not want to transact business with Afghanistan. In addition, the policies of the Taliban have meant that more than half of the members of the working-age population — women — are now jobless and confined to their homes. They were major contributors to work and moneymaking in Afghanistan.

On behalf of the people of Afghanistan, I would like to request that the Council continue to provide life-saving aid to our people. Aid must reach all Afghans, including women, minorities and other vulnerable groups. The international community must ensure that such humanitarian aid is not diverted. But we also need support to reinvigorate our economy. The Taliban must be made aware, in clear terms, that it is their retrograde policies that are stopping the economy from functioning normally and that they should reverse them if the country is to find economic stability.

All members have been engaging with the Taliban, which I consider to be a great idea and a great thing to do. We want members to continue their engagement. But when engaging with the Taliban, I ask that members make sure to keep the interests of the people of Afghanistan in mind. Ultimately, peace, security and stability in Afghanistan are not only in the interest of the people of Afghanistan, but also in the interest of the entire world.

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

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

I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway.

Ms. Huitfeldt (Norway): I would like to thank Special Representative Otunbayeva, Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Ms. Seraj, for their extremely valuable briefings. I am pleased to hear today from Ms. Seraj, who took part in our meeting with the Taliban in Oslo and, as she just mentioned, also briefed the Security Council in January during Norway's presidency (see S/PV.8954). I think that everyone around this table took note of her very thought-provoking message regarding the difficult situation in Afghanistan. Norway will do all it can to support the Afghan people, including once we leave the Council.

As this is one of Norway's last statements during its current Security Council tenure, allow me to emphasize one of the core pillars of our membership, namely, the importance of being consistent.

Today Afghanistan is the only country in the world in which girls are denied access to education. That cannot continue. Nevertheless, throughout a very challenging year for international diplomacy, the Council has managed to come together on the subject of Afghanistan. The Security Council has, with one voice, expressed concern over the increasing

erosion of respect for the human rights of the Afghan people, especially for women and girls. We also agree that it is important to prevent international terrorist organizations from gaining a foothold in the country, and we are all concerned that the lack of a legitimate and representative Government poses a threat to the country's stability. Together, we must clearly communicate our expectations to the Taliban.

Since the Taliban took power by force, Norway's message has been clear: we will judge the Taliban by their actions, not by their words. Thus far, we are deeply disappointed. We see that security for many Afghan people has improved, but without a representative and responsible Government there can be no stability. Most women and girls have no access to education, to work, to freedom of movement or to free speech. On many levels, women have basically been erased from public life. Moreover, the targeting of vulnerable minority groups is unacceptable. This is a human rights crisis. It is also bad for the economy. Sustainable development in Afghanistan is impossible if half the population is excluded.

Norway has been at the forefront of arguing for continued contact with the Taliban. We believe that it is necessary to talk to those who are in power, but we must do so with our eyes open and avoid giving legitimacy to the Taliban. At the beginning of the year, we invited the Taliban to Norway. Many were surprised and disappointed by that decision, but I remain convinced that the stakes in Afghanistan are too high for us to look the other way.

History has taught us that no one will benefit if the country descends into civil war or becomes a place where terrorist groups thrive. Today the Islamic State poses an increasing threat in Afghanistan. If not contained, that threat could also spread more widely in the region and internationally. The Taliban must ensure that Afghan territory is not used to plan or finance terrorist acts, or to shelter or train terrorists. It is the Afghan population that bears the brunt of the Taliban's actions, but instability in Afghanistan is also a threat to international peace and security.

Against that backdrop, it is essential that the Security Council remain united in support of the Afghan people. We must focus on what we can do to create leverage and to make our message heard in order to deliver basic services and rights.

For the past two years, Norway has been the penholder on the Afghanistan file in the Council. Our main focus has been on strengthening international support for the Afghan people. I am encouraged by the ability of the Council to find pragmatic solutions to a politically challenging situation. In March, we were able to adopt a renewed mandate for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), covering all pillars of the Charter of the United Nations (resolution 2626 (2022)). Let me once again express Norway's gratitude to the representatives of Afghan civil society who worked so closely with us to achieve that success. The only way we can steer a way through the challenging crisis Afghanistan is facing is to listen to its people.

The Council has equipped UNAMA with a strong mandate. UNAMA should take the lead in translating that mandate into joint international action. The Council must also continue to listen to Afghan voices — to the Afghan women and men who directly convey the experiences and interests of the Afghan people.

The Afghan people are facing yet another brutal winter. More than two thirds of the Afghan population will need humanitarian assistance in the coming year. The Taliban are imposing restrictions on human rights in violation of Afghanistan's international obligations. The hopes many Afghans had for greater stability and security are fading. The picture is bleak, but the Afghan people are not giving up hope. The Council must be consistent and owes it to the Afghan people not to give up, either.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Martin Griffiths, for their informative briefings. I also thank Ms. Mahbouba Seraj for her contribution. I wish to congratulate you, Madam, on India's outstanding work as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011).

The most recent report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2022/916) is damning. There has been little to no progress on the political, security, economic or humanitarian tracks in Afghanistan. Ms. Seraj's poignant testimony was compelling in many ways.

On the political front, the restructuring of the State apparatus and the establishment of institutions by the Taliban continues. Efforts to promote dialogue and the return of Afghans in exile through the Commission for Return and Communication with Former Afghan Officials and Political Figures are noteworthy. However, despite the various measures taken, the lack of representation of the diversity of the Afghan people, both ethnically and socially, in the political landscape persists. Very little progress has been made during the reporting period. The inclusion of women in governance structures is not advancing. Girls' education and their access to secondary education are crucial, and the international community must continue to advocate boldly for them. Afghanistan is a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognizes the right of every child to education regardless of gender. It is incumbent on the country's de facto authorities to ensure respect for the right to education by allowing girls to attend school at every level. It is unacceptable that generations of young Afghan boys and girls who are the adults of the future may grow up thinking that the marginalization of women in society is normal.

We must continue our efforts to support the resilience of Afghan women and convince the Taliban that the marginalization of women and girls, who make up half of the Afghan population, deprives the country of significant economic actors able to play a major role in the country's growth, which is in crisis. At the same time, that marginalization prevents the population as a whole from rallying to support Afghanistan's development and stability. The Council should be an epicentre for supporting and mobilizing the resilience of women suffering in regions plagued by instability. We commend the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations country team and Afghan and international non-governmental organizations to promote women's rights and their inclusion in society.

The security situation on the ground in Afghanistan is fragile. We are concerned about the security breaches related to the armed opposition and attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan. The 12 December attack on a Kabul hotel in one of the capital's main commercial areas, resulting in civilian casualties, is unacceptable. We condemn the attack and call on the de facto authorities to step up their efforts to combat terrorism and meet their obligation

to protect the population. The illicit drug trade, along with frequent clashes between the opposition and security forces, the presence of foreign forces on Afghan territory and continued border tensions, is increasing the volatility of the situation on the ground. Furthermore, the civilian population continues to suffer the deadly consequences of the use of improvised explosive devices. The continued cooperation of Afghanistan's neighbours will be vital to the quest for peace and stability and to prevent the situation in the region from deteriorating further. We commend UNAMA's work in combating the illicit trade, accumulation and diversion of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition, and of explosive materials.

On the economic front, despite the degree to which the situation has stabilized, most of the factors that have adversely affected the economy since August 2021 persist, including the sharp drop in development assistance, the difficulties related to international financial operations and their impact on the banking sector. The freezing of Afghan assets has contributed to creating a significant financial crisis that is affecting the population. Coupled with the mistrust of donors and banking institutions, the sanctions are increasing the precariousness of the situation for the population. We call on donors to pursue their multidimensional work to support the recovery of the Afghan economy. The Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan, managed by the United Nations Development Programme, remains a critical funding platform for the 2022 United Nations Transitional Engagement Framework for Afghanistan.

The worrisome humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is a result of social, political, economic and security crises, as well as climate change, which is exacerbating other vulnerabilities. The lack of basic supplies, medicines and regular salaries for health-care workers makes the task of humanitarian workers difficult. At the same time, drought, food insecurity and malnutrition persist. Threats and acts of intimidation by local authorities against humanitarian workers, such as restrictions on their freedom of movement, are not likely to calm the situation on the ground. We condemn the multiple obstacles to access to aid and the harassment of humanitarian personnel.

In conclusion, we reiterate the need for dialogue among the Afghan forces. A stable and prosperous Afghanistan cannot be built without women, as well as all other segments of society. The international community must maintain its commitment in Afghanistan in support of the legitimate aspirations of the Afghan people for security and dignity.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva, Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and you, Madam President, in your capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), for our briefings. I also listened closely to Ms. Seraj's statement.

Afghanistan is currently at a critical stage of nation-building. Much remains to be done to realize peace and development. The Afghan people should not be forgotten. The international community should make greater efforts to provide additional support and assistance. In the light of the current situation, I would like to make four points.

First, we must resolutely combat terrorism and prevent the return of terrorist forces. The series of recent terrorist attacks in Afghanistan led to heavy casualties and signalled an increasingly severe threat of terrorism. As a neighbour of Afghanistan, China is deeply concerned about that. The international community should maintain its unity and cooperation, abandon double standards and politicization and help Afghanistan effectively fight terrorism and organized crime, while working to prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming a hub of terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Al-Qaida and the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement. We urge the Afghan Taliban to steer clear of all terrorist forces and take resolute and vigorous measures to ensure the safety of Afghans and foreign diplomats and nationals in Afghanistan. The foreign troops left large quantities of weapons behind after their withdrawal. Considering the current threat of terrorism, a high level of vigilance should be maintained to ensure those weapons do not proliferate. We welcome the positive measures taken by Afghanistan's de facto authorities to strengthen their control over weapons and ammunition. We hope that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) will step up its communication and cooperation with Afghanistan and promote support for Afghan capacity-building.

Secondly, we should scale up resources to help Afghans deal with difficulties related to their ability to earn a living. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/916) acknowledges that 28.3 million Afghans will be in need of humanitarian assistance next year, which is an increase of 4 million from the previous year. Resolution 2615 (2021), adopted in December 2021, makes it clear that humanitarian assistance to

Afghanistan is not in violation of Security Council sanctions and therefore should dispel the concerns and doubts of humanitarian agencies. The resolution, however, is not a panacea. It cannot and does not fundamentally address the challenges related to the provision of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.

The international assistance received by Afghanistan for 2022 to date is far lower than that before August 2021. The substantial drop in donor aid from developed countries, resulting in a shortage of humanitarian resources, has been an important factor contributing to Afghanistan's current predicament. Meanwhile, the obstacles to humanitarian assistance resulting from unilateral sanctions remain glaring despite the adoption of resolution 2615 (2021). We regret to see that the Afghan frozen overseas assets have not been returned to the hands of Afghans. Instead, they were moved from one account over which they have no control to another account over which they have no control, and excuses are being made for the delay of their return.

Thirdly, integrated measures should be taken to support the sound development of Afghanistan. The intertwined problems facing Afghanistan should be tackled at their roots. The rights and interests of Afghan women and girls in education and employment should be guaranteed. We expect the Taliban authorities to make greater efforts in responding to the concerns of the international community, which inevitably includes ensuring Afghanistan's overall stability, gradual development and progress.

In the past year, the Afghan interim administration has worked actively to stabilize the economy, steadily increase its tax revenue and engage in economic and trade cooperation and efforts to connect with countries in the region. The progress made in those areas should be encouraged. The international community should help Afghanistan restore its domestic market, completely eliminate the root causes of its instability and embark on the path to lasting peace and development. We expect and encourage UNAMA to make more efforts and explore further efforts in that regard, so as to create better conditions for the development of Afghanistan.

Fourthly, we should maintain dialogue and engagement and provide patient guidance. Only through engaging with the Afghan interim administration in a pragmatic manner can we enhance understanding and mutual trust, exert positive influence and better

promote the peaceful development of Afghanistan. As the Secretary-General said in his report, "all sides must set aside mutual blame and hardened positions, and engage, with respect, patience and realism, on an agenda that places Afghans' future at its centre." (S/2022/916, para. 84)

In the current situation, the Security Council should seriously reflect on the Taliban sanctions mechanism and prevent it from having a negative impact on Afghanistan's socioeconomic development. Travel exemptions are a necessary tool for engagement. They should not become a bargaining chip in negotiations. Regrettably, the Council did not reach consensus in September on extending those exemptions. The facts show that terminating the exemptions has only created more obstacles to dialogue and engagement. It was not a wise decision.

For a long time, Afghanistan's neighbours and surrounding countries have made tremendous efforts in support of the Afghan peace process. In the past year, China has provided Afghanistan with ¥300 million in emergency aid and actively worked to deliver ¥1 billion in bilateral assistance. We have expanded our economic and trade cooperation with Afghanistan, opened up an air corridor for Afghan pine nuts exports to China and granted zero-tariff imports for 98 per cent of the products from Afghanistan, providing ongoing care and assistance to the Afghans through concrete actions. China supports the important role played by the United Nations in assisting Afghans in their peace and rebuilding efforts. China would like to work with the international community and contribute further to peace, stability and development in Afghanistan.

Mrs. Alhefeiti (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I thank Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for her briefing, and we affirm the support of the United Arab Emirates for her efforts. I also thank Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Ambassador Kamboj for their briefings. I thank Ms. Mahboubia Seraj, Afghan women's rights activist, for her impressive presentation that reflected the difficult situation in Afghanistan and the suffering of the Afghan people, especially women and girls. We appreciate her participation in today's meeting.

The briefings that we heard today confirm our view about the course of the situation in Afghanistan over the past few months. We regret that the new year does not hold promising hopes for the Afghan people. The country is already experiencing the highest levels of food insecurity, and two-thirds of the population are in need of humanitarian assistance. The situation of women and girls is getting worse owing to the most recent wave of restrictions that prevent them from accessing public places, including parks. That requires a decisive response from the Council.

In addition, the deteriorating security situation is exposing the challenges that the Taliban faces in combating terrorist activities, as we have seen in the recent attacks, including the attack against the Embassy of Pakistan in Kabul, which the United Arab Emirates condemned. We continue to condemn all forms of violence and terrorism that undermine security and stability in Afghanistan.

Taking all those factors into account, I would like to focus today on some areas in which the Council can take a strategic approach, if we can work in a collaborative manner.

First, given the most recent developments and the lack of response from the de facto Afghan authorities to the Council's calls, the international community may stop its engagement with them and increase attempts to isolate those authorities. However, we still believe that there is no alternative to dialogue, and we continue to advocate for thoughtful engagement with the de facto authorities. Isolation will only entrench positions and push the Taliban towards taking more extreme stances.

Secondly, we must focus on areas in which concrete outcomes are achievable. The recent International Conference on Afghan Women's Education, held in Bali, Indonesia, is one such example of seeking out ways for the international stakeholders to effect real change. In that respect, we welcome the activation of the Afghan Fund announced in September, and we look forward to its contribution to providing stability to the economy for the benefit of the Afghan people.

Thirdly, the renewal of UNAMA's mandate will provide an opportunity for the international community to speak with one voice and to send a clear and firm message to Afghan stakeholders. Despite the exceptional circumstances, UNAMA has been delivering on the ground with regard to all aspects of its mandate, including humanitarian, political and economic

aspects. We hope that the Council can use this mandate renewal as an opportunity to review the strengths and weaknesses of the mandate, to assess what the Mission needs, and to avoid the creation of unjustified divisions on the priorities of the Mission's work.

Lastly, Afghanistan is an example of how climate change negatively affects the situation in a country and becomes a source of insecurity. As we heard during the Arria Formula meeting in November, Afghanistan is the sixth most at-risk country in the world in terms of climate change impacts. UNAMA's mandate to monitor and report on the adverse impacts of drought will allow the humanitarian community to adapt its interventions in order to increase the resilience of Afghan communities against those impacts. We would welcome information on UNAMA's assessment of the adverse effects of climate change and how the United Nations, including this Council, can better support Afghanistan and respond to those challenges.

In conclusion, we should not succumb to the idea that 2023 will be another difficult year for Afghanistan. It is imperative that the Council stand ready to consider all the possible ways to assist the Afghan people and alleviate their suffering. We all ultimately share a common vision for a stable, inclusive and self-sufficient Afghanistan, in which men and women can equally undertake productive roles in their communities. The United Arab Emirates looks forward to continuing to work with all members of the Council next year towards achieving that vision.

Mr. Costa Filho (Brazil): Brazil thanks all the briefers for their invaluable updates on the situation in Afghanistan and the implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. Likewise, we convey our appreciation to you, Madam President, for your briefing as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). Let me also extend a welcome to the Afghan delegation and thank its members for enriching today's discussion with their presence and perspective.

Barring any unforeseen events, this should be our last gathering on the topic of Afghanistan in 2022. Throughout the year, we have attended numerous briefings, consultations and Arria-formula and expert-level meetings, and we have received abundant information about the situation on the ground. Much has been said, and many ideas have been put forward.

Amid everything else, one element remains constant: the plight of Afghans and their remarkable strength and resilience as they face multiple crises across all sectors of society.

Fifteen months after the Taliban takeover, economic activity is estimated to have contracted by around 30 per cent, and the banking system has collapsed, while unemployment and inflation have surged. Discriminatory policies have pushed women and girls out of public life. With the breakdown of basic services and the high levels of food insecurity, the population has plunged deeper into poverty, becoming more and more dependent on humanitarian assistance, which already faces enough issues of its own, from the lack of funding to restrictions of all sorts on the work of field agents. Meanwhile, the country grapples with multiple terrorist attacks and the many problems associated with drug trafficking following a sharp rise in opium prices.

As we prepare for the task that awaits the Security Council in 2023, we invite fellow Council members to take stock of our coordinated efforts and renew our shared resolve in support of stability and prosperity for all Afghans. Based on the information we have received since August 2021 and on the advice of the leadership of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, there can be no doubt that further isolating the de facto authority will not yield positive results. It is therefore important to keep channels open and engage constructively with the de facto leaders, even in the absence of formal recognition. We must continue to insist on more inclusiveness and on the rights and liberties of women and girls. We should also consider reassessing the travel bans in place. While necessary, they should not impair the ability of Afghan de facto leaders to engage with their regional counterparts and the broader international community.

Creative solutions are needed to address the urgency of rebuilding Afghanistan's banking system and overcoming its severe liquidity crisis as conditions to induce sustained recovery and domestic growth. This brings us to the need to reassess the situation of Afghan assets held abroad. Measures adopted thus far have been insufficient, and we should explore innovative ways to resolve the issue in a manner that satisfies the interests of the Afghan people.

We draw inspiration from the extraordinary resilience of the Afghan people through these trying times and hope to be able to build upon our response in the year ahead.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings. And we thank Ms. Seraj for her very sobering briefing on the overall situation in Afghanistan. The international community should take heed of her warning about the growing threat of terrorism emanating from Afghan soil. The United States would also like to thank the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) team for its ongoing work and tireless commitment to implementing the Security Council's mandate in support of the Afghan people and international peace and security under challenging circumstances.

As we all know, the reality on the ground more than one year after the Taliban takeover is dire. The Taliban has restricted the enjoyment of human rights by women and girls, including their right to education, movement and peaceful assembly as well as their right to work. Many independent media outlets have closed or been heavily censored. Those who dare to speak against the Taliban are frequently detained or worse. The Taliban's actions have caused the economy to continue to decline, and Afghanistan's already overwhelming humanitarian needs are growing.

It is not only women and girls who are affected. We have seen the reports that the Taliban have ordered judges to impose the strict interpretation of sharia law, which includes carrying out public executions, amputations and floggings. These punishments are an affront to the dignity and the human rights of all Afghans. Many Afghans continue to reject these actions by the Taliban. As the Taliban increasingly adopt their old practices, they move further from normalization with the international community and the recognition they desire.

We remain grateful for UNAMA's efforts inside the country, including its work to foster dialogue at subnational levels, and its urging of all stakeholders to respect human rights. We believe UNAMA is well positioned to convene key stakeholders at the local and national level, including women and civil society groups, in ways that promote meaningful dialogue with the Taliban on a range of important issues.

As the world's leading humanitarian donor, the United States has always understood the centrality of humanitarian aid to help Afghans recover from a crippling economic crisis, decades of conflict and recurring natural disasters. We have provided more than \$1.1 billion in humanitarian assistance since August 2021, and we will continue to address the needs of vulnerable Afghans in Afghanistan and of those who have fled to neighbouring countries. Our humanitarian aid has been and will remain unconditional, impartial and consistent with humanitarian principles.

We are proud to have championed resolution 2615 (2021) last December, which maintains sanctions on bad actors while enabling humanitarian organizations to provide urgently needed humanitarian assistance and other activities that support basic human needs in Afghanistan. We also note that this resolution maintains an oversight mechanism to mitigate the diversion of assistance to sanctioned individuals.

We remain steadfast in holding the Taliban accountable for their commitments to the Afghan people and the international community. We expect the Taliban to follow through with their commitments on counter-terrorism in accordance with the Doha agreement. We also expect the Taliban to allow safe passage and freedom of movement, make efforts to build an inclusive system that gives the people a voice in their political future, and take responsibility for efforts aimed at supporting economic stability.

Without a serious national political dialogue among Afghans about the future of their country, we could see the re-emergence of conflict. We regularly hear from Afghans that they do not want to see a return to conflict. We also see there is an active dialogue under way among Afghans inside the country, at subnational levels and in the diaspora. The United States supports these Afghan-led efforts towards a political dialogue.

The United States has repeatedly stated that the legitimacy and support that the Taliban seeks from the international community begins with the legitimacy they earn from the Afghan people through their actions. We will continue to work closely with UNAMA to aid the Afghan people now and in future.

Mr. Kiboino (Kenya): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Roza Otunbayeva, Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Ms. Mahboubah Seraj for their briefings.

I also thank you, Madam President, for your briefing as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). I commend India's pragmatic leadership of this Committee over the last two years.

The situation in Afghanistan remains concerning. We have witnessed a consistent disturbing trend of terrorist attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan, as well as recurrent clashes with opposition forces and the continued presence of foreign terrorist groups, which are worsening the security situation. Afghanistan continues to be a haven for terrorist groups, including Al-Qaida, whose affiliates, such as Al-Shabaab, have inflicted constant fear and suffering on millions of civilians in the Horn of Africa for years. In that regard, the way the world responds to the situation in Afghanistan has a direct bearing on our own security in the Horn of Africa. It is important that the Taliban understand that part of what they must do if they expect to gain international recognition is to secure sustained peace and security in Afghanistan and ensure that the territory of Afghanistan is not a haven for any terrorist groups. It must therefore cut ties with such organizations and undertake meaningful counter-terrorism measures.

Over the past 16 months the Security Council and the international community have stepped up their support efforts for the people of Afghanistan, including through resolution 2615 (2021), by which the Council instituted exemptions for humanitarian agencies enabling them to deliver and navigate United Nations sanctions. But despite concerted efforts, the statistics point to a grim 2023. At least 28 million Afghans, including 12.7 million children, will require humanitarian assistance at a time when the 2022 humanitarian response plan is only just over 50 per cent funded. We also note that the 2023 requirement of \$4.6 billion remains largely unmet, as Under-Secretary-General Griffiths mentioned. We encourage all partners to scale up their assistance, especially during the winter, which is usually marked by increased humanitarian needs. Given that the international response plan requires \$51.5 billion in 2023, United Nations humanitarian operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere must operate in a difficult environment in more effective ways.

The increasing global humanitarian needs call for the consideration of pragmatic approaches to humanitarian action. We need to adopt a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach in responding to the humanitarian

and development crises in Afghanistan. We commend and call for further support for programmes such as the United Nations Development Programme's area-based approach for development emergency initiatives, which seeks to provide community-level solutions to complement urgent humanitarian interventions, and the alternative development programme of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which has reached more than 10,000 farmers in an initiative aimed at strengthening food security and livelihoods. It is unfortunate that while the people continue to face economic hardships, the management of the frozen Afghan assets remains contentious. We urge the relevant stakeholders to identify suitable and mutually agreeable mechanisms and frameworks to enable those funds to be injected into the ailing economy.

It is regrettable that Afghan girls are still forbidden to attend secondary schools while women are denied opportunities to work and rightfully contribute to their country's development, despite constant appeals by the Security Council, as well as regional and international partners. The disturbing trend whereby the authorities are using the *mahram* regulation as a systematic way to discriminate against women must stop. We see that this practice is taking root in other conflict situations, such as Yemen, and could spread further to Africa and beyond if not quickly halted. While we commend the resilience of Afghan women, we join others in calling on the Taliban to cease its retrogressive practices. They must honour the right of girls to an education and mainstream women into the economy by refraining from denying them opportunities to work. There is also a need to put in place an inclusive political and governance system marked by the meaningful participation of a wide spectrum of Afghan society, including women and minority groups.

Since this is the last briefing on Afghanistan that Kenya will participate in as an elected member of the Council for 2021 and 2022, we commend the Secretariat, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan team and other United Nations agencies, as well as humanitarian and civil society organizations, for their efforts in seeking solutions to the challenges faced by the people of Afghanistan. We will continue to follow their work closely, knowing that a peaceful and secure Afghanistan has cross-regional peace dividends.

I reaffirm Kenya's solidarity with the people of Afghanistan. We stand ready to support all endeavours aimed at securing their safety, security and well-being.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their update and detailed information. It is always of particular value to listen to the voices of civil society in the Security Council, and we thank Ms. Seraj, a powerful voice for Afghan women, for her account.

Since August 2021, every time we have met to discuss this issue we have found ourselves bound to tell a desolate story of broken promises. The Taliban have so far failed to uphold any promises they have made. They have misled the international community, betrayed the people of Afghanistan and let them down, especially women and girls. Calls for inclusivity and respect for fundamental rights have so far fallen on deaf ears. Instead, the Taliban are continually, methodically and resolutely engaged in repealing every achievement and democratic gain made during the previous two decades, to the detriment of the Afghan people, as Ms. Seraj also clearly explained.

As we heard, there is hardly any aspect of life in the country that does not give reason for great concern. Girls continue to be barred from secondary schools, an aberration from the most obscurantist times, which puts young girls at risk of child marriage and economic and sexual exploitation. Women are deprived of their right to safety, freedom and fulfilment and are increasingly barred from the public arena. In Afghanistan, women feel left alone, at the mercy of men with long beards who are inherently and openly anti-women and happy to impose degrading rules. Women in Afghanistan today have nowhere to turn. There is no longer support, shelter or independent bodies to redress their rights. The outside world is their last resort. Minorities are persecuted and the civic space continues to be severely restricted. Artists remain under threat and cultural heritage is under constant attack. This severe rollback by the Taliban of rights, their ramping up of reprisals targeting opponents and critics and their clampdown on freedom of expression depict a descent into severe authoritarianism. The complete absence of the rule of law, the disregard of the constitutional framework and the arbitrary exercise of power without recourse have only worsened the overall situation, perpetuating impunity.

The security situation is no better. The fears of continuing ties with terrorist groups are reasonable and should be addressed. We have seen an increase in attacks against Hazaras and Shia Muslims, as well as other targets, by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan.

Despite improvements in revenue collection and the fight against corruption — and it would be interesting to know how they benefit the millions in need — the economy remains in free fall. As we heard from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to the sanctions regime under resolution 1988 (2011), drug production, opium planting and trafficking are very much present. So a growing humanitarian crisis, further exacerbated by climate change, global food and energy markets, could have regional spillover effects.

We express our full support for the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in its efforts to implement its mandate in such an extremely challenging environment. We strongly encourage the Mission staff not to be disheartened by the difficulties and to always bear in mind that however little they may be able to achieve, for the citizens of Afghanistan they represent hope and encouragement. UNAMA must insist that the authorities fully respect the commitments that derive from the treaties to which Afghanistan is a party. An inclusive Government, respect for human rights and a genuine fight against terrorism should be the red line in any engagement with the Taliban.

The draconian and misogynistic Taliban rule does not reflect Afghans' religion, culture or values. The ruthless rulers are simply disfiguring Afghanistan into Talibanistan, making it a gender-apartheid regime.

We cannot give up. We cannot abandon the people of Afghanistan to such desolation. We cannot contemplate how 38 million people are deprived of their rights and dispossessed of their future.

The Taliban seek recognition; they do not hide it. They must earn it by representing the people, all the people, not just themselves. That is why the work of UNAMA is crucial, and it needs to be reviewed and adapted continuously, as necessary.

Mr. Mythen (Ireland): I want to thank Ambassador Kamboj for her briefing in her capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). I also thank Special

Representative Otunbayeva and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings. I thank Ms. Seraj for speaking to the reality of life under the Taliban for the Afghan people, a truly dire reality for so many, as attested to by Ms. Seraj.

Today is the last opportunity of Ireland's current Security Council term to address the situation in Afghanistan — a situation that has deteriorated gravely these past two years, beyond what we had imagined or feared. But we must recognize that it devolved exactly as the Afghan people had warned it would.

The Council has moved from calls two years ago for inclusive dialogue in the pursuit of peace to calls now to end the abuse and repression of the Afghan people. Warnings from Afghan women that peace talks would fail without their full, equal and meaningful participation have been replaced by demands for the Taliban to halt the persecution, erasure and violence perpetrated against Afghan women and girls — “erasure”, a word that Ms. Seraj used so movingly, and “*mahram*” too. Girls have been denied the right to education for 435 days. The concerns of the international community for the protection of Afghan civilians have escalated to pleas for the Taliban to prevent the further suffering, starvation and subjugation of a people on the brink.

The principal responsibility of the Security Council is the maintenance of international peace and security. Yet there is no peace in Afghanistan — not for the Afghan people or for humanitarians delivering life-saving assistance. Neither is there peace and security in the region, with cross-border terrorism, weapons proliferation and narcotics trafficking. We are failing in that responsibility. We are failing to hold the Taliban truly and fully to account. We are failing to uphold the rights and dignity of the Afghan people.

Once more, the Council meets to hear of intensifying abuses being perpetrated by the Taliban against the Afghan people — surveillance, arbitrary arrest, detention and targeted attacks against Afghan civilians, particularly Hazara and other religious minorities, human rights defenders and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons, as well as the abhorrent return of the practices of public floggings and public executions.

While the Taliban consolidate control through abuse and violence, the Council has a responsibility to recognize and call out those actions. Ireland condemns

those abuses in the strongest terms, and we call on the Taliban to put an end to its tyranny of its own people, the Afghan people.

These stark human rights abuses take place against the backdrop of the bleak and shocking humanitarian situation outlined by Under-Secretary-General Griffiths, including climate crisis and famine. While resolution 2615 (2021), providing exemptions for humanitarian assistance, may have prevented systemic collapse in Afghanistan, more than two thirds of the Afghan people remain in severe humanitarian need. Levels of emergency food insecurity in Afghanistan are now among the highest in the world. Ireland reiterates our call for the Taliban to end the intimidation of women humanitarians. We also wholly condemn all instances of aid interference and diversion. There is no justification for blocking life-saving and life-sustaining support.

Ireland commends the tireless efforts of Afghan human rights defenders and civil society leaders advocating for their agency and their rights. We salute in particular the brave women of Afghanistan. Their rights are inalienable. They cannot, and must not, be traded away now in exchange for promises of improvement in future. We encourage the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan to heed their calls for greater participation in negotiations and dialogue processes and call on the international community to create avenues for direct engagement with Afghan women. The international community must match the courage and the bravery of the Afghan people with our own courage. The Security Council must use the tools available to it in support of the Afghan people, their needs and their rights and to hold the Taliban accountable for their actions.

The humanitarian, security and human rights crises in Afghanistan are strikingly clear. Our mandate as a Council is equally clear. And our response as a Council must also be clear and unambiguous, particularly with regard to the Taliban. For our part, Ireland will remain actively engaged on this issue in support of the Afghan people, even as we step away from the Council.

Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Special Representative Otunbayeva and Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths for their briefings, and we appreciate the thoughtful briefing by Ms. Mahboubia Seraj.

As this is the last meeting on Afghanistan in which Mexico will participate as an elected member for this term, I would like to take stock of the past two years.

Afghanistan bears witness to the fragility that characterizes some peacebuilding and peace consolidation processes. When we joined the Council in January 2021, hopes were pinned on the ongoing peace negotiations. The fall of Kabul put an end to aspirations for a more inclusive and representative country. Today the prevailing situation is one of outright deterioration. The edicts being promulgated in Kabul indicate that this trend is very likely to continue.

The international community has been clear in its call for the formation of a Government that includes women and minority representatives. Such calls have not been successful.

We recognize the need for direct engagement with the Taliban. We believe in dialogue and preventive diplomacy, and we also believe that this should be realistic and patient, as the Secretary-General's proposes in his report (S/2022/916). However, we are convinced that it cannot be ignored that, as time passes, so do the opportunities and aspirations of many people.

The lack of cohesion and inclusiveness with which the Taliban has exercised power has led to increasing resistance from armed groups. As long as critics and dissidents continue to be excluded and oppressed, there is unlikely to be peace and stability in Afghanistan.

We follow with concern decisions to reform the legal and judicial systems, which do not seem to be conducive to progress. We deplore the extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, forced marriages and other human rights violations. What is needed is an impartial and independent judicial system.

Afghanistan continues to be the scene of terrorist attacks against schools, places of worship and diplomatic missions, among others. We condemn those attacks in the strongest terms and reiterate our concern about the lack of results in combating terrorism. Cooperation with the countries of the region and the international community is essential to put an end to this scourge.

The risks associated with the illicit trafficking, stockpiling and diversion of small arms and light weapons, as well as ammunition and explosives in Afghanistan are also of concern. We commend the

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for its important work on this and other complex and sensitive issues.

Regrettably, the rise in gender-based violence is increasingly obvious in many of the situations considered by the Council. However, none is as tragic as that in Afghanistan. The decisions of the Taliban restrict the rights of women and girls and are aimed at erasing women and girls from public life. Mexico reiterates that the campaign to subjugate and subordinate women is simply unacceptable. Therefore, we will continue to advocate for the promotion of the human rights of women and girls, while prioritizing their right to education.

As we have heard, Afghanistan faces an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. The number of people in need of assistance has increased exponentially, and it is estimated that by 2023, that number will exceed 28 million. Mexico reiterates that humanitarian aid cannot be less important than political considerations. All humanitarian workers, including women, must be able to carry out their work expeditiously and safely.

We trust that in March next year, when UNAMA's mandate is renewed, the Mission will be able to continue working to promote human rights in a country in which, unfortunately, the institutions created to protect such rights have seemingly vanished. The Afghan people deserve all our support, especially in regaining their dignity.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): Like others, I would like to start by thanking Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva for their briefings. I thank the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for all its ongoing work to support the Afghan people in such challenging circumstances. I also thank Ms. Mahbouba Seraj for returning to brief us again.

As we have heard, in the midst of one of the harshest winters on record, two thirds of Afghanistan's population face severe hunger. The 2023 Afghanistan humanitarian response plan is expected to be the largest in United Nations history and reflects the scale of the challenge. The United Kingdom remains steadfast in its support for the Afghan people. As the second largest donor to this year's humanitarian response plan, we have disbursed more than \$600 million in humanitarian and development assistance for Afghanistan since April

2021. We continue to work with the World Bank and others on measures to put the Afghan economy on a more sustainable footing.

I would like to highlight three priorities. The first is humanitarian aid. While 97 per cent of Afghans are in poverty and two thirds are in dire humanitarian need, the priority is for aid to reach those in need. Therefore, the Taliban should end interference in United Nations operations immediately and, in particular, give assurances on the safety and access of humanitarian workers, in particular female humanitarian workers, who, as we have heard, are particularly constrained by the *mahram* requirement.

The second priority is human rights. The Taliban continue to fail to live up to their commitments to the Afghan people. As we have heard, the repression of human rights is widespread. There are reports of honour killings and child marriage, and floggings and executions have returned. As we heard from Ms. Seraj, in recent months, violations of the rights and freedoms of women and girls, already the most drastic in the world, have sharply increased. Those policies are a systematic attempt to erase women and girls from all spheres of social, economic, political and public life. The United Nations has estimated that excluding women from the workforce already costs the Afghan economy up to \$1 billion. Without fair and impartial justice systems and access to education, there can be no self-reliant, prosperous Afghanistan.

The third priority is counter-terrorism. We have heard from the Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) about the deteriorating security situation, and Ms. Seraj endorsed that point. We have heard that the number of sanctioned individuals among the Taliban has increased. We have heard about Al-Qaida, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan and Da'esh. Members of the Council have suffered terrorist attacks in Afghanistan. We should be clear that while the Taliban are failing to meet their counter-terrorism commitments, they cannot expect to see sanctions relief or acquire legitimacy in the eyes of the international community or the Afghan people.

In conclusion, it is truly a situation that, as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General said, is fraught with challenges. The Taliban are manifestly failing to live up to their commitments and meet the needs of the Afghan people for peace, prosperity and

security. We should be in no doubt that we need a robust international response that delivers humanitarian aid but also delivers on the mandate of UNAMA.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): Our collective aspiration for the people of Afghanistan, more than 15 months since the Taliban authorities took over the country, continues to be frustrated by the State practices and policies that have been adopted since August 2021. We believe that Afghanistan, with its known history as an ancient buffer State in global politics and an early member of the Organization, deserves its rightful place in the comity of nations.

We therefore encourage the continuing role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and support the leadership of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Roza Otunbayeva in promoting respect for the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the Afghan people, including women and girls; scaling up responses to existing and new humanitarian emergencies; working towards economic recovery and facilitating dialogue between communities and the de facto authorities, especially at the subnational level, on inclusive, participatory and responsive governance.

We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her briefing today. We also thank Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths for his briefing on the humanitarian situation and the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj, for drawing our attention to the continuing implications of the Taliban sanctions regime on the situation in Afghanistan. We remain grateful to Ms. Mahboubia Seraj for her clear and gendered voice, which reminds us that women cannot be erased from the progress and future of Afghanistan.

The resolution of the situation in Afghanistan is one that requires the support of us all. We cannot afford to be indifferent to the reported 23 per cent rise in security-related incidents, including allegations of human rights abuses and violations against former Government officials, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, the detonation of improvised explosive devices, assassinations, clashes and the ill-treatment of innocent civilians.

For the Afghan people to look into the future with any degree of optimism or confidence, the Council must prioritize the security and economic challenges facing

Afghanistan. Indeed, we should be concerned about the deterioration of the security and economic situation in that country and mobilize its leaders, regional Powers and the international community in supporting coherent and coordinated international action for the country's national peace process and economic development. In that regard, we note the outcome of the sixth summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia, which took place on 13 October in Astana, in Kazakhstan. We welcome the President of Uzbekistan's proposal for forming an international group of high-level negotiators to engage the de facto authorities.

It is important that we collectively underscore to the de facto authorities that even if they are unable to satisfactorily fulfil the socioeconomic aspirations of the Afghan people, they should not worsen their plight by depriving them of their rights and dignity. They must therefore be strongly encouraged to assume their responsibilities by facilitating the rule of law, respecting the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the Afghan people and promoting inclusive governance. The Taliban must be reminded that Afghan women and girls, like all Afghans, should be treated with respect and decency in all aspects of life. In that regard, we reiterate the numerous calls from the international community urging the Taliban to respect the right of all girls and women to an education, to employment and to participation in public and cultural life. We urge the Taliban to abide by all the international human rights obligations and commitments incumbent on Afghanistan and to fully implement the human rights standards to which Afghanistan has voluntarily acceded.

We note the challenging humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, which is projected to affect some 28.3 million Afghans, and urge the scaling up of funding to deal with the shortfall so as to meet the humanitarian needs for the rest of this year and beyond. We encourage UNAMA in its active role in maintaining its field presence at the existing levels in order to protect vital links between international and local actors, create local competencies and facilitate access for humanitarian organizations.

The continued retention of the Central Bank of Afghanistan's international financial reserves in the amount of \$9.5 billion amid the present socioeconomic challenges in Afghanistan is unjustifiable. While we note the well-intentioned establishment of the \$3.5 billion Afghan Fund to help stabilize Afghanistan's

economy, we believe that more should be done — and quickly — to help Afghan society recover as soon as possible and rebuild its people's resilience.

Before concluding, let me reiterate my delegation's condemnation of the attack on the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Kabul, as well as the recent attempted assassination of a Pakistani diplomat. The international community's presence in Afghanistan is there to assist that important nation in rediscovering its strength and capabilities. Attacks on diplomatic missions and their agents are unacceptable. Providing terrorist groups with a safe haven will not benefit the Taliban and cannot and must not be countenanced.

Finally, it is Ghana's desire to see Afghanistan become a peaceful, stable, prosperous and responsible nation capable of addressing the socioeconomic aspirations of its people. We therefore call for an end to the senseless violence that we see there and reiterate our belief that all efforts by the Taliban should be directed towards the pursuit of inclusive and sustainable peace, which is central to achieving the development that they desire. Only the Afghan people can assure the rebuilding of their country and chart the course of their future. We stand ready to support them in reclaiming a path to their destiny.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, for her assessment of the situation in Afghanistan, and to welcome her to the Security Council Chamber for the first time in her current capacity. The role of her Mission is all the more significant in the current circumstances. We also listened attentively to the head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Martin Griffiths; the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) on the Taliban, Mrs. Ruchira Kamboj; and the civil-society representative, Ms. Mahbouba Seraj. We are pleased that the countries of the region are also able to participate in today's discussion.

We regret the news today of a major fire in the Salang mountain tunnel in Afghanistan, with at least 30 people killed and another 30 injured and with updates on the victims still coming in. We express our sincere condolences to the Afghan people for this tragedy.

We took note of the report of the Secretary-General's report on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2022/916) and would like to make the following points.

Almost a year and a half ago, fateful events took place in Afghanistan that drastically changed the course of history in that long-suffering country. Twenty years of war concluded with the rise to power of the Taliban and the hasty retreat of foreign troops. Instead of enjoying their long-awaited peace, the Afghan people were hit with a humanitarian and economic crisis on an unprecedented scale, in addition to other long-standing problems and sanctions. Meanwhile, the sorry results of the inglorious international campaign, including the numerous war crimes committed by United States and NATO forces, are being carefully swept under the rug as though they had never happened, with some going so far as to threaten sanctions. However, plenty of evidence of those crimes has been collected. Russia's Foreign Affairs Ministry has prepared a white paper on it that can be found on the Ministry's website. We are ready to share its contents with anyone who wants.

At the same time, we are seeing our Western colleagues, led by the United States, continue to evade their responsibility and pass the buck by blaming the Taliban for the current deteriorating situation in the country. They lack the courage to acknowledge the reality that has developed since 15 August 2021 and the fact that the country's de facto authorities are indeed at its helm, making it objectively impossible to resolve Afghanistan's problems without cooperating with them.

The current internal political situation in Afghanistan is truly difficult, with worrisome security risks. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)-Khorasan Province terrorist group, which has emerged and grown in influence in the country over the past 20 years, is deliberately fanning the flames of the situation with increasing acts of terrorism victimizing representatives of religious and ethnic minorities, including women and children. There is also a concerning new trend of attacks on embassies and their employees. Against that backdrop, we cannot fail to notice another vile incursion of militants that recently took place in a hotel in Kabul where Chinese tourists were staying. ISIL clearly aims to instil an atmosphere of fear and demonstrate the inability of the Taliban authorities to control what is happening. In particular, we consider that a threat to the security of the staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the humanitarian workers working on the ground.

The narcotics problem is also of concern. It is clear that the efforts of the de facto authorities to curb this threat are inadequate. Given the widespread hunger and poverty in the country, it is important to create conditions that will help farmers. Afghanistan needs support not just in words but through action, with the participation of the international community and partners in the region.

We are also continuing to closely follow the socioeconomic situation in the country. We note the importance of the adoption of resolution 2615 (2021), aimed at expanding channels for the provision of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan without preconditions. However, it is clear that those measures have not been enough. Western donors remain uninterested in extending assistance beyond basic needs and early-recovery programmes. They loudly proclaim the importance of helping the Afghan people, including women and girls, while categorically rejecting the slightest opportunity to contribute to the country's development, including by rebuilding schools and hospitals and constructing roads connecting provinces and cities with agricultural areas. In that context, the situation regarding the unfreezing of assets seems particularly outrageous. The attempts by the United States and other major donors to use Afghan funds as a pretext for pursuing their own agenda are immoral. The creation of obstacles and artificial conditions will lead nowhere. We call for the immediate return of the stolen funds to the Afghan people, including the women and girls about whom our colleagues have spoken today.

It seems that the United States and its partners have failed to see that their methods of influencing regimes that they do not like through unilateral sanctions, political and economic pressure and endless ultimatums have long ago ceased to have any effect and lead only to the growing belief that countries must find their own path to self-sufficient development without expecting Western financial assistance. We can see that Kabul also understands that there is no alternative to that path for Afghanistan.

In order to build a lasting peace in Afghanistan, it remains imperative to continue a pragmatic dialogue with the new authorities. It is necessary to patiently work with the Afghan people to build a State that is politically and ethnically inclusive, free of terrorism and narcotics and economically stable and developed, while it respects and safeguards the rights of all its citizens, including religious and ethnic minorities, women and

girls. The country requires international support in all those areas. The effectiveness of the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan also depends on adherence to a comprehensive approach.

Russia has consistently advocated developing cooperation with Afghanistan on issues involving a comprehensive settlement. Our Embassy in Kabul continues to operate. Together with our regional partners, we are working to develop a common approach to the situation in Afghanistan. That is also the purpose of the Moscow format, the most recent meeting of which was attended by the invited representatives of Qatar, Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia and held in Moscow on 16 November. At the meeting, participants representing Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan discussed all the relevant issues, including the prospects for economic development in the country and the surrounding region. A united call was made for unfreezing all blocked assets. We also firmly called on the United States and NATO to compensate Afghans for the damage incurred over the years.

We note the potential of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization mechanism to coordinate efforts to broaden Afghanistan's economic integration within economic structures in the region, as well as to promote security and stability in the country. A periodic comparison of positions also takes place within the framework of other regional structures, including the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Through humanitarian and socioeconomic channels, since November 2021, 108 tons of humanitarian shipments, including food — flour, vegetable oil, tea, sugar, rice and canned milk — and basic goods, such as blankets and medicines, were delivered to Kabul. In March, during the visit of a Russian inter-agency delegation to Kabul, 17 tons of medicines were delivered to the Afghan side. In July, in responding to the consequences of the earthquake in the south-eastern part of the country, humanitarian aid in the amount of 40 tons of medicines, basic goods and food were delivered to Kabul. In October, another 65 tons of relief supplies were delivered. At the same time, active steps are being taken to develop trade and economic cooperation between our countries. We intend to continue providing assistance to the Afghan people.

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, and Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths for their briefings. I welcome the participation of Ms. Mahbouba Seraj at this meeting and thank her.

I would like to address three points.

First, the human rights situation continues to deteriorate in Afghanistan. Women and girls continue to be denied their most basic rights and are systematically excluded from public spaces. Four hundred and fifty-four days have elapsed since girls were denied access to secondary school. More than 1 million girls have been intentionally deprived of an education. The latest measures, such as the exclusion of women from Kabul's parks, public baths and stadiums, further restrict their freedom of movement. We are also deeply concerned about today's reports of the possible exclusion of women from universities. Scenes of repeated floggings, stonings and other public punishments, as well as the public execution of a man in the city of Farah on 7 December, in defiance of basic rights, are particularly shocking. The same is true of the increasingly severe restrictions on the freedoms of opinion, expression and assembly. We cannot allow ourselves to become inured to the daily violations of human rights, for which the Taliban are, and must be held, responsible. Let us remember that the country's economy cannot be revived if Afghan women are deprived of education, work and their freedom of movement.

Secondly, the security situation remains very worrisome. We have seen an increase in deadly attacks in Afghanistan. Recent developments, the continued presence of Al-Qaida and Da'esh's resurgence confirm our fears. Those groups have already found refuge in Afghanistan. We are also following very closely developments in the narcotics situation — be it opium or methamphetamines — and its impact on the security of the region. In that regard, we recall the critical role of the work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, particularly in support of Afghanistan's neighbours.

Thirdly — and this is my last point — France will remain committed to standing by the Afghan population by providing humanitarian aid and defending fundamental freedoms, in particular women's rights.

The Taliban cannot shirk their responsibilities. It is up to them to respect the demands of the international community, as set out in resolution 2593 (2021),

the implementation of which remains unrealized. Compliance is an unconditional prerequisite for any form of international recognition and is critical to improving the living conditions of the Afghan people.

France stands ready to support the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in fulfilling its mandate, support the women and men who work alongside the Afghan people, in particular in defence of human rights, and meet the basic needs of the population. France remains committed to providing humanitarian aid. At the national level, since August 2021, we have disbursed €123.5 million in aid for projects that are currently under way and an additional €100,000 in aid to the victims of severe weather events. We continue our support for the French Medical Institute for Mothers and Children in Kabul. The European Union, together with all its member States, has also raised more than €1 billion since the beginning of 2022 and an additional €520 million in March. We will therefore remain committed to helping the Afghan people and to maintain the framework of UNAMA to work to that end.

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

I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Roza Otunbayeva and Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths for their briefings. I would also like to thank Ms. Mahbouba Seraj for her remarks, and I welcome the presence of the Foreign Minister of Norway at this briefing.

India has direct stakes in ensuring the return of peace and stability to the country, given its position as a contiguous neighbour and long-standing partner of Afghanistan, as well as our strong historical and civilizational linkages to the Afghan people. Our approach to Afghanistan, as always, will be guided by our historical friendship and special relationship with the people of Afghanistan. We are deeply concerned about the unfolding humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. In response to the humanitarian needs of the Afghan people and the urgent appeals made by the United Nations, India has dispatched several shipments of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, and we are committed to continue our help to the Afghan people going forward as well.

We supported the adoption of resolution 2615 (2021) in December 2021 to provide a humanitarian carveout. We were happy to hear today from the Under-

Secretary-General that the carveout has been effective in mitigating the impact of the humanitarian crisis. It is also important to recognize that the international community continues to have some concerns about the situation in Afghanistan, and we heard from our briefers today what those concerns are. India's main priorities in Afghanistan include providing immediate humanitarian assistance for the Afghan people, the formation of a truly inclusive and representative Government, combating terrorism and drug trafficking and preserving the rights of women, children and minorities. Those benchmarks are also set forth by resolution 2593 (2021), which guides the international community's approach to Afghanistan.

We are closely monitoring the security situation in Afghanistan and are actively engaged with the international community on issues related to Afghanistan. Terrorist attacks have targeted public spaces, such as places of worship and educational institutions, especially those of minorities, as well as diplomatic premises. That is a concerning trend. The collective approach of the international community has been articulated in resolution 2593 (2021). It unequivocally demands that the territory of Afghanistan should not be used for sheltering, training, planning or financing terrorist acts, specifically terrorist individuals and entities proscribed by the Security Council, including Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. Closely linked to the issue of terrorism is the menace of drug trafficking. It is important for us to strengthen international cooperation to disrupt and dismantle the trafficking networks.

On the political front, India continues to call for an inclusive dispensation in Afghanistan that represents all segments of Afghan society. A broad-based, inclusive and representative formation is necessary for long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan and, in turn, for economic recovery and development.

In conclusion, this will probably be India's last statement on Afghanistan during its tenure as a member on the Council. However, as a close neighbour of ours, Afghanistan will continue to remain in our hearts and we will continue to speak out in support of the Afghan people. The days when Afghanistan was used by others for so-called strategic depth are over. Such skewed approaches have only brought misery to the people of Afghanistan and mayhem in the region. Peace and stability in Afghanistan are critical imperatives for which we all need to collectively strive. India will

continue to play its role in pursuit of that objective. The interests of the Afghan people will continue to be at the core of our efforts today and always.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the United States has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I take the floor a second time to make a brief statement in response to breaking news reports from Afghanistan. We understand that the Taliban's so-called Ministry of Higher Education has just issued a decision banning women from public and private universities. The United States condemns in the strongest terms that absolutely indefensible position. The Taliban cannot expect to be a legitimate member of the international community until they respect the rights of all Afghans, especially the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls. We will continue to work with the Security Council to speak with one voice on this issue.

The President: The representative of the United Kingdom has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I take the floor, first, to join the United States in condemning the announcement by the Taliban banning women's tertiary, or university, education. That is another egregious curtailment of women's rights and a deep and profound disappointment for every single female student affected. It is also another step by the Taliban away from a self-reliant and prosperous Afghanistan.

Secondly, we have heard again today attempts to point the finger at the West for the situation in Afghanistan. Rather than politicizing the plight and suffering of ordinary Afghans, those finger-pointers may want to focus instead on bolstering their support to the United Nations chronically underfunded humanitarian appeal.

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

Mr. Faiq (Afghanistan): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening us here today, and I congratulate India on its successful leadership of the Security Council this month. I also thank Special Representative of Secretary-General Otunbayeva

for her briefing, as well as Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths, for his comprehensive remarks about the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. I also want to extend special thanks to Ms. Mahbouba Seraj for her loud and clear messages on behalf of the women of Afghanistan and her frank and candid briefing about the situation in the country. My thanks also go to the Secretary-General for his report (S/2022/916).

Allow me to express my appreciation to the outgoing members of the Council — particularly Norway as the penholder of Afghanistan file — for their constant and persistent support to and solidarity with the people of Afghanistan. I also want to take this opportunity to support and welcome in advance the expression of interest by the United Arab Emirates and Japan to take over as co-penholders of Afghanistan file. I also express my condolences and prayers to the families of the victims of the incident that happened on Saturday in Salang, of which exact number of fatalities is not yet confirmed owing to the restrictions on the media.

I regret to begin my remarks with the very unfortunate news about the directive just announced by the Taliban banning all women from attending universities throughout Afghanistan. As if the situation were not already dire enough, that announcement now marks a new law in violation of the most fundamental and universal human rights of all of humankind.

Today we are meeting once again in this Chamber to assess the situation in Afghanistan. Yet still, after 16 months since the Taliban's forced takeover of power, there is no hope for a positive change and progress in the overall social, economic, security and political situation in Afghanistan. That is largely due to the Taliban's failure to address the current crisis, break the impasse and engage constructively to respond to national and international calls for a fair, responsible, inclusive system of governance, policies that respect human rights and dignity, the rightful inclusion of women in all aspects of society and counter-terrorism efforts — all things that they promised to the world and the people of Afghanistan.

Instead, the de facto authorities have returned to the draconian, cruel and inhumane practices of their previous rule. Last month, they ordered Afghan judges to enforce their hardline interpretation of sharia law, including flogging, amputation and public executions. Last week, the Taliban publicly flogged more than a dozen men and women whom they had deemed guilty

of moral crimes in Ghor, Parwan and Farah provinces. One such crime involved a woman going shopping alone, without a male chaperone. In Farah province, the de facto authorities recently carried out the execution of an alleged murderer in front of hundreds of spectators. Moreover, there is no transparency in the judicial system to support the rights of individuals accused of such crimes. The judicial and legal system that had been reformed and improved since 2003 is no longer functional. The Taliban speak about making amendments to various laws of the country, but they have not been able to publish any official gazette introducing new laws.

They also continue to suppress the freedom of speech and of the media through arbitrary arrests and detentions, particularly targeting women and other critics protesting the hardline oppressive measures. By the same token, credible reports have informed us of the detention and torture of thousands of people, particularly of former security forces and specific ethnic groups accused of having connections with armed groups and the Northern Resistance Front. There have also been reports of collective punishment, as well as forced displacements of people from their houses and farms in some provinces such as Sar-e Pol, Baghlan, Badakhshan and Panjshir.

Above all, despite the repeated assurances over the past 16 months, girls across Afghanistan remain barred from receiving their secondary school education, and women are refused their fundamental rights to employment and political participation. Respecting the foundational elements of human rights and embracing the political, social and civil rights of all Afghans, including the participation of women and girls in all facets of society, should be a non-negotiable prerequisite for any engagement. Let me reiterate that the oppression of people, including women, is not embedded in Afghan culture, and neither is it a tenet of Islam. It is a component of the Taliban's extremist ideology, and it must not be allowed to continue.

The Taliban are also redesigning school curriculums, removing modern culture and art and increasing religious studies with radical ideologies in their stead. This is seriously concerning as it will shape the behaviours and beliefs of future generations and lead to radicalization and extremism. In addition, it is an attempt to systematically eliminate historic, social and cultural values. In a recent public statement, the

Taliban acting Minister for Higher Education stated that the academic achievement of a Taliban should be based on the number of explosive mines he has placed.

Furthermore, in the current system of governance, there is no inclusiveness in political or technical positions. The Taliban are not willing to hire people with professional and technical backgrounds for Government positions. Almost all of the very technical positions are distributed among Taliban members, who only have knowledge of religion and share the same ideologies. Educated young people, including former civil servants and professionals, are either dismissed or unemployed. The Taliban's policies are forcing human capital to leave the country.

Meanwhile, the security situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate. Concerns that Afghanistan will become a safe haven for violent extremists have not been addressed, and the frequency and sophistication of attacks by terrorist groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province are rising. Diplomatic staff and premises, public places such as educational centres and places of worship are subject to targeted terrorist attacks, and religious and ethnic minorities including Hazaras, Sikhs and Hindus, as well as foreign nationals, are not safe. Just last week, in a terrorist attack on a Kabul hotel whose guests are mostly foreigners, civilians, including Chinese nationals, lost their lives.

The crimes of kidnapping and targeted and mysterious killings of former security forces are on the rise in the big cities. Many of these incidents are not widely known because of censorship and restrictions on media. The culture of impunity must be ended, and the perpetrators of these heinous human rights crimes must be held accountable. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan have a responsibility to monitor and report to the Security Council.

The humanitarian and economic situation remains concerning and is far from recovery. Despite the alleged increase of domestic revenue and some positive economic activity, mainly by the private sector, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance is increasing from 24 to 28 million people, as reflected in the report of the Secretary-General. The poverty rate is

rising, and the influx of refugees and migrants continues. There are reports of young people committing suicide owing to poverty and economic problems.

While the donors continue to cover the costs of essential services and provide humanitarian aid, the Taliban are consolidating their rule by collecting national revenue. There is no accountability and transparency with regard to the use of these domestic incomes and revenues. There are reports in some provinces of the poor quality of the humanitarian aid distributed to the people, and it is reported that the Taliban are using their influence to divert aid to particular provinces according to their own whims. This can and should be avoided through strict use of monitoring and reporting mechanisms by donors and the United Nations country team.

Humanitarian assistance is more important than ever in this winter season, and we must ensure both the quality of the aid being provided and the equal and unhindered distribution of the aid to the most vulnerable groups across the country. We are grateful for the diligent and continued efforts of donor countries and other international partners to provide funding and humanitarian support to the people of Afghanistan, including the recent Security Council resolutions allowing for the continuation of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan (resolution 2626 (2022)) and the exemption of humanitarian aid from sanctions (resolution 2615 (2021)). We also welcome the transfer of \$3.5 billion in frozen assets to the newly established Fund for the Afghan People, and we hope that these funds, the national reserves of Afghanistan, will be used by a legitimate government with strict and transparent monitoring for the long-term benefit of the Afghan people, not for humanitarian aid.

While aid is a critical necessity and a priority in the short term, it is merely a bandage on a bullet wound. It is not a sustainable solution to the problems that the people of Afghanistan face. We must commit ourselves to finding a long-term solution that will reduce the need for aid in future through an accountable and legitimate system of governance. I would like to reiterate, however, that any type of development cooperation requires a legitimate and representative system in Afghanistan, one that embraces the will and ownership of the people and ensures transparency and effectiveness in all aspects of national development planning and budget execution.

Against that backdrop, the current status quo and the uncertainty about the future has frustrated the Afghan people, the region and the international community. It is time that the international community, regional countries, international donors and Afghans within the country and abroad come together to resume political settlement talks. This dialogue should aim for political stability, national unity and a permanent peace in a stable and democratic Afghanistan. We must have a renewed focus on the political component of the crisis, in addition to efforts aimed at addressing the humanitarian situation and the issue of human rights.

Lessons learned from the Doha process should help us create the blueprint of a new process for Afghan talks, and the main goal should be to ensure that the Afghan peoples' interests are placed front and centre. We must remember that Afghans will welcome the engagement only of those political figures who are not among the corrupt and criminal members of the former Governments of Afghanistan. These talks should include Afghan figures who are politically active, credible and well known for their clean backgrounds. We have a mandate as members of the United Nations to make sure that we are not strengthening a system that is taking Afghanistan backwards.

Moreover, we call on the Security Council to display the unity and consensus that is needed in the way forward for the restoration of peace and stability in the country. In addition, I would like to call on the Secretary-General to take immediate action on addressing the situation in Afghanistan. One proposal for consideration might be the appointment of a high-level panel or group of eminent persons to come up with a holistic, comprehensive and sustainable solution to the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that only a genuine national dialogue that embraces the will and aspirations of the people can lead us toward a truly representative and inclusive future. The United Nations must take the lead in facilitating and generating this dialogue. The support and consensus of the international community, and the Security Council in particular, is vital to achieving this objective.

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

Mr. Jalil Irvani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank the Indian delegation for organizing today's meeting as well as for Ambassador Kamboj's briefing as the

Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). I also thank Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General, for their updated and informative briefings. I also thank Ms. Seraj for her briefing.

Despite the efforts of the United Nations, the current situation in Afghanistan is challenging. The most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/916) indicates that 28.3 million Afghans will require humanitarian and protection assistance in 2023, up from 24.4 million in 2022 and 18.4 million at the beginning of 2021. Meanwhile, the de facto authorities have failed to keep their pledges, in particular to establish an inclusive and representative Government.

With regard to the economic situation, the Secretary-General's report states that the de facto authorities have so far implemented positive steps, including anti-corruption efforts, which can serve as a basis for a stable and recovered economic condition in the years ahead.

While humanitarian assistance is vital for Afghanistan, it is not a long-term solution, and the country's economy must take priority. If the Afghan economy's revival is conditional or political, the Afghan people will suffer and be harmed. In the meanwhile, the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan should not be overlooked or overshadowed by other conflicts.

As we have often emphasized, frozen assets belong to the people and must be unconditionally returned in order to help the Afghan economy. Regrettably, rather than accepting responsibility for its reckless withdrawal, the United States has resorted to unfounded grounds to justify its unlawful acts, including the continued blocking of assets that are critical for economic revival. Sanction regimes, however, must not obstruct attempts to rebuild the economy.

We support the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and its contact with the de facto authorities to help the Afghan people, particularly in terms of scaling up the humanitarian response and striving to end the economic calamity. At the same time, the de facto authorities must uphold their international obligations, particularly by ensuring that Afghan women and girls have access to education. For the benefit of the people, the international community must sustain its engagement with Afghanistan.

We would like to emphasize once more the serious threat that the presence of Da'esh and Al-Qaida affiliates in Afghanistan poses to the peace and security of Afghanistan, its neighbours and the whole region.

Drug trafficking is another major problem. The recent report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime is concerning and alarming. According to the report, opium cultivation has increased by 32 per cent since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, as compared to the previous year.

It is a fact that if the international community does not continue to support Afghanistan's economic recovery, the current situation will continue to create a vulnerable environment where extremists, terrorists and drug traffickers will be able to exploit and recruit vulnerable people to further their destructive objectives.

Iran, as a neighbour that hosts millions of Afghans, has used its expertise and resources to assist the Afghan people in overcoming their difficulties. Iran has generously provided the necessary assistance to the Afghan people who have lived in Iran for more than 40 years, despite receiving little support from the international community and being subjected to severe and brutal sanctions by the United States. At present, Iran offers free education and training to all Afghan students living in Iran. According to estimates, Iran needs to provide \$1 billion in annual subsidies to host and shelter 5 million Afghans.

We have said time and again that Iran and other neighbours should not bear the whole responsibility of admitting Afghan refugees. On the basis of shared responsibility, other countries, in particular those that claim to support the human rights of Afghans, especially women and girls, should accept refugees.

As emphasized by the Secretary-General in his report, peace and stability must be established based on the protection of all Afghans' fundamental rights, as well as an inclusive and democratic Government that represents the people's aspirations and interests, and comprehensive security and counter-terrorism assurances. Iran continues to support the United Nations efforts to accomplish that goal for the sake of the Afghan people.

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

Mr. Abdullayev (Uzbekistan): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open briefing. I also take the opportunity to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva, other United Nations officials and Council members for their informative statements.

I want to echo the statements with regard to the worsening humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. Indeed, the country is suffering from unprecedented humanitarian calamity. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has reached 24.4 million, which is 6 million more as compared to 2021. More than 3 million Afghans are suffering from starvation. In the near future, nearly 90 per cent of the population may fall into poverty.

At the same time, the de facto authorities have succeeded in reducing the level of armed violence and maintaining public order throughout the country. The Kabul Administration is taking active measures aimed at neutralizing the activities of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, restoring the economy, ensuring public services and developing trade and international cooperation. UNAMA has played a big role in those positive developments.

Despite the positive trends, the Taliban still show no intention of creating an inclusive Government and continue restricting the access of girls and women to education. There is no justification for closing universities to women, as we heard today. A number of countries are reasonably concerned with potential terrorist threats, as well as the acute deterioration of the situation of women.

Under these circumstances, in our view, we must continue to demand that the Afghan authorities fulfil the key commitments, while intensifying a dialogue with the interim Government. To that end, we propose establishing, under United Nations auspices and with its support, a high-level international negotiating group on a settlement in Afghanistan — the ING. That initiative was launched by the President of Uzbekistan Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, at the sixth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia, held in Astana on 18 October. In that regard, I would like to thank relevant Member States for the principal support for that idea.

The ING is meant to be a unique platform for dialogue with the new Afghan authorities in Kabul and to convey to them both the demands of the world community and their serious concerns regarding the violation of international norms. The ultimate goal of the ING is to negotiate with the Afghan authorities for step-by-step fulfilment of the demands of the world community and, ultimately, work out a precise algorithm of actions to be taken by the sides.

In cooperation with UNAMA, the proposed ING would develop a programme of measures on reciprocal actions, including some incentives, as the Taliban demonstrates verifiable progress. We also see a role for UNAMA in the oversight of the implementation of actions to be reciprocally agreed. Let me underscore that the ING activities are not about making concessions to the Taliban. It is about helping them to gradually normalize their relations with the world community.

The initiative is well-thought-out and based on our positive experience engaging with the Taliban since the time they came to power. In particular, through dialogue with the Taliban, we succeeded in having schools for girls opened in the northern provinces. For the first time in the past 25 years, we opened a land route for the transit of goods to the seaports of Pakistan and back through Afghanistan. Within 10 months this year, about 600,000 tons of goods were transported in both directions along that transit route without any security incidents.

We have established partnership in counter-terrorism, and now the Taliban are sharing their information by warning us about potential security risks, threats and terrorist attacks.

We have created a logistics hub in the border city of Termez in order to deliver humanitarian aid, not only to Afghanistan but also to other countries of the region. The hub is now being actively used by various United Nations agencies. In addition, the President of Uzbekistan established a special humanitarian support fund for Afghanistan in Termez in order to use the hub's potential. We call for the Council's support in granting that hub an international status under United Nations auspices.

Uzbekistan will continue to provide all possible support to the Afghan people in order to mitigate their humanitarian situation, including the supply of electricity at reduced rates.

We have provided emergency humanitarian aid to the Afghan people on several occasions. In a couple of days, a new humanitarian cargo shipment will be sent to Afghanistan. Other success stories include the restoration of work at Mazar-i-Sharif International Airport, the biggest transportation hub in the north. The educational centre in Termez provides training for more than 40 Afghan specialists and more than 200 Afghan boys and girls.

In conclusion, I want to highlight that the Afghan people have never waged wars themselves. Instead, the fire of war has always been brought to Afghan soil from the outside. That is why the global community must assume greater moral responsibility for the destiny of the Afghan people and for the future of their country. That is why we believe that, despite the existing negative elements in the actions of the Taliban, the Afghan people cannot be left to face existing challenges alone. The country must not be allowed to become isolated once again.

We are open to deliberations and suggestions to promote our initiative, as well as to further elaborate it with interested Member States in order to seek their principled support, as well as to identify a mandate for the group and then launch a joint appeal to the General Assembly. We also hope for broad support from the Organization's main organs, which would ensure international recognition of the international negotiating group as an effective political tool to address the Afghan problem.

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

Mr. Rakhmetullin (Kazakhstan): I commend the presidency of India for convening this meeting.

On behalf of my country, I congratulate Ms. Roza Otunbayeva on her appointment as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and wish her and her dedicated team every success, strength and patience. Her vast diplomatic experience, as well as her valuable knowledge of the region, will further strengthen the role of UNAMA and its place within the United Nations and international processes.

We consider it important to maintain close interaction with the de facto authorities of Afghanistan, despite the absence of their official recognition, so as

to seek remedies, with their cooperation, to the current crises in the interests of the Afghan people. We believe that taking into account the nature and specificity of the de facto authorities of Afghanistan, UNAMA should concentrate on the parts of its mandate that are least objectionable to the new Government — education, support for development and delivering humanitarian assistance throughout the entire territory of the country. That is extremely important now, as cold winter is the most damaging factor for the population. The remaining part of UNAMA's mandate, can be addressed at a later stage after establishing a more conducive environment for its activities and attaining a better understanding from the de facto Government.

Kazakhstan continues to provide humanitarian aid to the people of Afghanistan and actively cooperates with United Nations agencies, especially the World Food Programme. We are ready to supply wheat and grain and participate in various procurement projects, mainly using the humanitarian hub in Termez, in Uzbekistan.

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have initiated and implemented a joint programme with the European Union and the United Nations Development Programme in order to educate Afghan students, particularly women, in our respective universities.

In order to promote inclusive and comprehensive sustainable development as a key cornerstone for peace in the region, Central Asian countries are in favour of establishing the United Nations Regional Centre on Sustainable Development Goals for Central Asia and Afghanistan in Almaty. When fully operational, the Centre will streamline United Nations inter-agency regional and interregional coordination and management. It has the capacity to transform Central Asia into a zone of peace and security, sustainable development and prosperity, with a spillover effect into Afghanistan.

The situation in Afghanistan is conducive to the possible inflow of refugees, terrorist groups, drugs and arms into our region. The current regional security situation implies that, without proper international efforts, the territory of Afghanistan could become a hotbed for foreign terrorist fighters for the neighbouring States and far beyond. Our nation is paying particular attention to strengthening our borders and increasing coordinated interaction among special services and law enforcement agencies.

However, I would like to emphasize that we should not limit international efforts to steps undertaken exclusively by our region. The entire international community, not just Central Asia, should realize clearly that Central Asia could become a transit point for threats to infiltrate further to countries adjacent to the region and beyond. Hence, we need to apply coordinated measures in order to tackle the issue jointly with all stakeholders, Member States and international organizations.

In conclusion, Kazakhstan pledges to be fully engaged in multilateral action for stability, progress and peace in Afghanistan.

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

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): Let me begin by first congratulating Ambassador Kamboj and the Indian delegation on their skilful guidance of the Security Council during the current month. Pakistan welcomes the discussion on Afghanistan, and we would like to thank the Secretary-General for his latest report (S/2022/916), as well as Special Representative Otunbayeva and Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths for their briefings. We also welcome the briefings from the citizens of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is our immediate neighbour. Our contiguity is physical, not aggressively aspirational. We share deep bonds of faith, ethnicity and history with Afghanistan. Pakistan has suffered grievously over the past four decades from the fallout of foreign interventions and civil war in Afghanistan. Peace and stability in Afghanistan is a political and strategic compulsion for Pakistan.

We are deeply concerned about the challenging situation in Afghanistan outlined in the Secretary-General's report. Yet we continue to believe that engagement with the interim Afghan Government is the best option to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region and to realize the shared objectives of the international community — respect for human rights, especially women's rights, inclusive governance and the elimination of terrorism within and from Afghanistan.

Coercion and isolation have not proved successful in the past. They will prove to be counterproductive now and in future, as we have just learned. We need

a coherent and practical plan in order to realize the objectives of the international community through patient engagement with the interim Government.

The collapse of the Afghan economy is due to the cut-off of external economic and financial support on which Afghanistan had become dependent for 75 per cent of its economic activity. Our first priority must remain to reverse the current humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan when 95 per cent of the population exists in extreme poverty.

We welcome resolution 2615 (2021), which provides for a humanitarian carveout of the Council's sanctions regimes. We support the assistance being provided through the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and other United Nations and international agencies, as well as civil society organizations, and commend their help to the Afghan people, despite the difficult circumstances in which they operate. We urge that the Secretary-General's \$4.4 billion response plan be fully funded and that the United Nations Development Programme's special window and other avenues to maintain economic and financial activities be maintained and strengthened.

Secondly, we have to revive the Afghan economy, especially its banking system. For that purpose, it is imperative that the issue of international financial transactions and Afghanistan's frozen assets held abroad be addressed. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has given some careful thought to help revive the Afghan economy. The key is to inject the financial assets of Afghanistan, especially the \$7 billion that is held abroad, into the Afghan financial system, and thereby revive economic and commercial capacity. For their part, the interim authorities have demonstrated a capacity for efficient management to raise revenues through trade and transit, as we just heard.

Thirdly, reconstruction projects must be restarted, including the reconstruction of infrastructure destroyed during the past 20 years of conflict. Also, the implementation of the major connectivity projects — such as the Central Asia-South Asia electricity grid, the Uzbekistan railway and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline — which are all shovel-ready and can be a central component of an economic revival strategy for Afghanistan. All of Afghanistan's neighbours are willing to implement those projects. Pakistan and China have also expressed a desire to extend the China-Pakistan economic corridor

to Afghanistan. The international banking system and international companies should not be discouraged from supporting those connectivity projects.

During her recent visit to Kabul, Pakistan's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Ms. Hina Rabbani Khar, conveyed our assurances that Pakistan would continue to extend all possible humanitarian assistance for Afghan refugees, trade prospects, transit access and technical assistance to Afghanistan. However, she also made it clear to the leaders of the Afghan interim Government that we will not compromise on the issue of women's rights to education and work and other human rights. During her visit, she met with the Afghanistan Women's Chamber of Commerce. We will encourage the strengthening of ties between the respective women's chambers of commerce of our two countries.

We will also continue, together with other OIC countries to share best practices on women's role in Islamic countries, which are consistent with sharia and which we will share with the interim Afghan authorities in an effort to persuade them to turn onto the right path. In that context, we are extremely disturbed by the latest announcement of restrictions on higher education for women in Afghanistan. But we continue to believe that it is through measures of persuasion and cooperation, and not coercion, that we can succeed in overcoming the impediments to ensuring women's rights in Afghanistan. Those impediments are cultural, not religious.

There is no credible challenge within Afghanistan to the control of the Afghan interim Government. Yet greater political inclusion will serve to advance the goal of peace and stability in Afghanistan. The interim authorities are obviously averse to sharing power with their erstwhile adversaries. However, they would benefit, including in improving governance, if they could include the participation of Afghan experts who possess the expertise required to transform Afghanistan into a functioning modern State. A concerted effort to bring that about can be part of the process of engagement with the interim Government.

Obviously, a major concern for the international community — and especially for Afghanistan's neighbours — is the rise of terrorist violence within and from Afghanistan. While international media attention has focused on a much-diminished Al-Qaida, a major threat today emanates from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) and the

Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). ISIL-K recently launched attacks against the Russian Embassy, Chinese personnel in Kabul and Pakistan's Head of Mission, in which he was injured and a security guard was critically wounded. We have strongly condemned that assassination attempt and called on the interim Government to apprehend and punish the perpetrators.

ISIL-K, or Da'esh, remains a potent and growing threat for two reasons: first, it continues to receive funding from outside Afghanistan, and is thereby equipped to attract recruits; and secondly, it offers an alternate home to all those terrorist and other groups that are opposed to the interim authorities in Kabul. The international community needs to work in tandem with the interim Government to eliminate those ISIL-K/Da'esh advantages and to devise a strategy to effectively neutralize its terrorism capabilities. The TTP is perhaps the largest terrorist group within Afghanistan. Its safe havens are located in Nangarhar province, close to Pakistan's borders. Pakistan continues to suffer cross-border attacks by the TTP, which receives financing and sponsorship from external sources. The efforts of the interim Government to neutralize the TTP, efforts in which we have participated, have not succeeded. Pakistan reserves the right to take decisive action to eliminate the terrorist threat posed by the TTP.

Pakistan values the role played by UNAMA as a vehicle to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan and to address the humanitarian, economic and security challenges facing the people of Afghanistan. UNAMA's mandate can be achieved effectively only through continued engagement with the interim Afghan Government, notwithstanding the difficulties and challenges involved. UNAMA should in particular support the interim Government's efforts to collect weapons and arms from various militias.

Afghanistan's immediate neighbours have an even more critical role in promoting stability and economic revival through trade, regional cooperation and political dialogue, while addressing the complex

security environment, including the threat of terrorism, the problem of drug trafficking and smuggling and border incidents provoked by ill-disciplined local commanders. Pakistan is working on modalities to prevent border incidents with the interim authorities. It is essential for Afghanistan's immediate neighbours to maintain a unified approach, including through the six neighbours platform and through initiatives such as that from Uzbekistan, about which we just heard. We should not allow spoilers to erode such regional cooperation.

The international community must also continue to intensify its engagement with Afghanistan. Isolating the interim authorities or remaining aloof from the situation is not a winning strategy. Stabilizing Afghanistan requires concerted international cooperation. Peace and stability in Afghanistan requires cooperation among all major Powers, despite the current tensions between them. It needs the effective multilateralism that was propagated so eloquently in the Council last week.

The President: The representative of the United Arab Emirates has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mrs. Alhefeiti (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I feel obliged to respond to what we just heard about the recent Taliban decision to close universities to women and girls in Afghanistan. We express our deep disappointment about that unfair decision, and we condemn it because it deals a fatal blow against women and girls by permanently depriving them from participating in public life and in any promising future prospect. Therefore, we support the call for the Security Council to discuss that decision in detail and to hear from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General about the reasons behind it whenever possible.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 1.50 p.m.