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

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [68/11](#) and Security Council resolution [2626 \(2022\)](#), in which the Secretary-General was requested to report every three months on the situation in Afghanistan and the implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), including at the subnational level.

2. The report provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan, including political, humanitarian and human rights efforts, since the issuance of the previous report, dated 28 January 2022 ([A/76/667-S/2022/64](#)).

#### II. Relevant developments

3. The Taliban de facto authorities faced a growing number of governance and security challenges, including diverging opinions within the movement itself, the emergence of additional armed opposition groups, renewed attacks by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) and border tensions with several of its neighbours. Many of their decisions further curtailed fundamental human rights, especially for women and girls. Meanwhile, humanitarian needs continued to grow, as some 24.4 million people, or 59 per cent of the population, were in need of humanitarian assistance thus far in 2022, up from 18.4 million at the beginning of 2021. The United Nations continued to advocate for aid beyond humanitarian assistance and launched a system-wide transitional engagement framework to meet basic human needs through the restoration of essential services, livelihoods and community systems, and, with its partners, the development of a new aid architecture for Afghanistan.



## A. Political developments

4. The Taliban de facto authorities have continued to restructure state institutions and replace former government personnel with Taliban affiliates, often trying to accommodate various groups and address internal tensions through these appointments. In January, the de facto authorities downsized and merged the previous Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission with the de facto Office of Administrative Affairs. On 7 April, the de facto Ministry of Justice announced the abolishment of the department of political parties, thereby foreclosing their registration. On 4 May, the Independent Human Rights Commission, the Oversight of the Implementation of the Constitution Commission and the secretariats of the upper and lower houses of Parliament were abolished. Despite calls from Afghans, regional countries and the international community for greater ethnic, political and geographic diversity as well as the inclusion of women in de facto administrative structures, the 25-member “caretaker cabinet” (comprising 21 Pashtun, three Tajik and one Uzbek), and the 34 de facto provincial governors (27 Pashtun, four Tajik, and one Uzbek, Turkman and Pashayi) remained all-male and Taliban-affiliated. Many of the de facto cabinet members have religious backgrounds and limited administrative experience and are on the sanctions list pursuant to Security Council resolution 1988 (2011).

5. Civil servants, including female civil servants, many of whom have not been allowed to report to work, continued to be paid. As of May 2022, staff in 60 out of 63 budget units, including 23 ministries, 28 independent directorates and line departments in all 34 provinces, had reportedly received salaries up to February. The de facto Ministries of Public Health and of Defence and de facto National Directorate of Security faced challenges in processing salaries for staff on the civil service payroll due to limited capacity.

6. In the absence of external financial support, the national budget is financed entirely by internal revenues. Following the 11 January announcement of 53.9 billion afghanis (Af) (\$518 million) for the first quarter of 2022, the de facto authorities declared on 14 May that their national budget for fiscal year 1401 (2022) totalled 231.4 billion Af (\$2.65 billion), including 203.4 billion Af (\$2.33 billion) earmarked for operations and 27.9 billion Af (\$302 million) for development. The announcement added that the revenue target is 186.7 billion Af (\$2.14 billion), leaving an anticipated 44.7 billion Af (\$512 million) deficit. To stimulate economic development, the de facto authorities reached out to business actors and foreign investors and enforced revenue collection, including through customs and taxation.

7. The de facto authorities made a series of policy decisions, declared to be in adherence with “Islam and Afghan traditions,” but some appeared to contradict earlier assurances, including the 23 March announcement of the continued closure of secondary education for girls. On 29 April, on Eid al-Fitr, at the end of the holy month of Ramadan, the Taliban leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada, issued a statement outlining the de facto authorities’ commitment to “all sharia rights of men and women”, highlighting in particular economic development, security, efforts to ensure equal access to education and health care, as well as the return of Afghans from abroad and efforts related to national unity. On 11 May, de facto Deputy Prime Minister Kabir chaired the first meeting of the Commission for Return and Communication with Former Afghan Officials and Political Figures, which subsequently adopted its terms of reference and announced the intention to convene a loya jirga. On 18 May, representatives of the thus far fragmented political opposition from diverse ethnic groups met in Türkiye under the umbrella of the High Council of National Resistance for the Salvation of Afghanistan, calling on the Taliban to ready themselves for negotiations.

8. At the subnational level, after terminating all representative bodies, including provincial councils, ulama and other shuras on 6 March, the de facto authorities began establishing new provincial Ulema shuras, comprising Islamic scholars and tribal elders. As of 18 May, the new shuras have been established in 10 provinces (Badghis, Farah, Ghor, Herat, Kandahar, Nimroz, Paktika, Panjshir, Samangan and Zabul). These shuras are reportedly mandated to implement Sharia law, build trust between the de facto authorities and the people, resolve local disputes and oversee the activities of provincial administrations under the guidance of the de facto Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs.

9. Engagement by central, provincial and district de facto authorities with other constituencies, in particular minority groups, former government officials and women, remained limited. De facto provincial departments for the “promotion of virtue and prevention of vice” issued additional verbal policy instructions regarding dress codes, congregational prayers and gender segregation in public places, as well as enforcement and monitoring mechanisms. De facto authorities also continued to clamp down on peaceful protests across the country, in particular those held by women calling for their rights to be upheld. Protests over socioeconomic issues, particularly those related to the decision by the United States of America on the assets of Afghanistan, appeared to have been condoned by de facto authorities. A few pro-Taliban protests calling for the recognition of de facto authorities were also reported.

10. The justice system, including the courts, remained challenged by structural, resource and capacity constraints and by a lack of clarity regarding the applicable legal framework. As a result, court proceedings tended to be delayed, increasing the number of pretrial detainees. On 7 April, the de facto Minister of Justice instructed a committee, headed by his deputy, to expedite the review of all existing laws to ensure their compliance with sharia and Afghan traditions. Another commission was established on 30 March, to prevent and resolve land disputes. On 20 April, the de facto authorities appointed 58 new judicial staff across provincial and district courts, mostly in the southern region, replacing former judicial personnel. UNAMA remains engaged with the de facto authorities in the promotion of the rule of law in accordance with international human rights norms and standards, particularly in relation to women’s access to justice and the promotion of women and children’s rights.

11. On 15 May, the de facto Ministry of Defence announced that 130,000 troops were recruited under the framework of a new National Army, organized in eight corps commands, including the central corps command in Kabul. Police recruitment and training continued, under the auspices of the de facto Ministry of Interior. Ongoing reshuffles at the deputy ministerial level and below within the Ministries of Defence and Interior highlighted the efforts by the Taliban leadership to accommodate its commanders and supporters. The security personnel of the former government have been largely dismissed, except for technical staff and specialized military personnel. Nearly all women have been dismissed from the security forces, except those serving in detention facilities and assisting with body searches. The majority of troops, in particular in the lower ranks, have received stipend payments only and not salaries.

12. Engagement by senior United Nations officials and the UNAMA leadership with the de facto authorities continued, focused on advocating the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, in particular the right of girls to education and the right of women to work and equal participation; the establishment of representative and participatory governance reflecting the diversity of the Afghan people; and resolute action to counter the threat of terrorism. UNAMA has also engaged with de facto officials on the issue of the economy and continued to work with the Central Bank of Afghanistan and international financial institutions, as well as donors, to facilitate commercial and financial activity in the country.

13. UNAMA continued to implement local peace and outreach initiatives to assess the changing nature of political and civic space in Afghanistan. Civil society and political actors expressed concerns regarding restrictions imposed on their work, including office closures and asset seizures, and regarding the protection of rights and freedoms, especially for women and minority groups. The Mission also worked with women, youth, religious scholars, community elders and civil society to advocate for dialogue to prevent local conflicts and promote local conflict resolution mechanisms.

14. On 6 February, the de facto authorities released a detailed plan to monitor and control the activities of domestic and international non-governmental organizations for the distribution of urgent humanitarian assistance. On 7 May, the de facto Ministry of Economy announced that a national-level committee had been established to monitor humanitarian aid delivery. The United Nations and civil society have engaged with the de facto authorities on upholding humanitarian principles and maintaining civic space.

## B. Security

15. The security situation in Afghanistan is becoming increasingly fragile, after an initial period of significantly reduced conflict-related security incidents following the Taliban takeover on 15 August 2021. ISIL-K and armed groups opposed to the Taliban intensified their attacks during the reporting period. The de facto security forces responded by stepping up preventive but intrusive security measures, such as widespread house searches. The findings of the 29th report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to resolutions [1526 \(2004\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities indicated that “there are no recent signs that the Taliban has taken steps to limit the activities of foreign terrorist fighters in the country. On the contrary, terrorist groups enjoy greater freedom there than at any time in recent history” ([S/2022/83](#), para. 57). The de facto authorities rejected the report’s findings.

16. There has been a decrease in the overall number of conflict-related security incidents and civilian casualties compared with the same period in 2021. Between 1 January and 21 May 2022, the United Nations recorded 2,105 security-related incidents, a 467 per cent decrease from the 11,945 incidents recorded during the same period in 2021. Available data indicate that armed clashes decreased from 6,463 to 164 incidents; airstrikes fell from 508 to 5; detonations from improvised explosive devices decreased from 1,147 to 123; and assassinations decreased from 465 to 122. As a result of the deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation, crime-related security incidents remained consistently high, with 474 such incidents reported, compared with 525 crimes reported during the same period in 2021. The western, eastern, central and southern regions accounted for 66 per cent of all recorded incidents, with Herat, Nangarhar, Kabul and Kandahar being the provinces most affected.

17. The presence of armed groups opposed to the Taliban expanded, although their membership and capabilities are difficult to assess. UNAMA is aware of at least a dozen such groups operating in 18 provinces. The National Resistance Front and the Afghanistan Freedom Front, the two most active and visible groups, have staged attacks primarily in Panjshir and Baghlan provinces. Attacks and clashes were also reported in the northern provinces (Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz and Samangan), the central region (Kapisa, Parwan and Kabul), the south-east (Khost) and the south (Kandahar). UNAMA has been unable to verify most attack claims. The Taliban maintain that these groups do not constitute a significant challenge to their rule. In early May, the Taliban announced a redeployment of de facto security forces from

border areas in the south to Panjshir, Baghlan and Takhar in response to continuing armed opposition activities.

18. Attacks claimed or attributed to ISIL-K decreased. However, the geographical spread of the attacks widened. Between 1 January and 21 May, the United Nations recorded 82 attacks by the group in 11 provinces, compared with 129 attacks in 6 provinces during the same period in 2021. The group targeted mainly civilians, in particular Shia minorities in urban areas. ISIL-K claimed improvised explosive device attacks on 1 April on a recreational area in Herat; on 21 April on a Shia mosque in Mazar-e Sharif city, a minibus transporting de facto Civil Aviation Authority employees in Kunduz and a de facto security vehicle in Kabul city; on 22 April on a madrasa in Kunduz; on 28 April on two minibuses in Mazar-e Sharif city; on 30 April on a minibus in Kabul; and on 22 May at a commemorative ceremony of the sixth anniversary of the death of Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour. Unclaimed attacks with possible involvement of ISIL-K include explosions on 19 April at two schools in western Kabul and on 29 April at a Sufi mosque in Kabul. Public messaging by de facto authorities seeks to reassure the population that they are in full control of the country, but the access of journalists to sites of attacks is often restricted and hospitals instructed not to reveal the numbers of those killed and injured.

19. Tensions intensified along the Afghan border with Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and others, in particular the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. An increase in security incidents involving Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and possibly other militant groups operating from Afghanistan escalated on 8 April during clashes between Pakistani and de facto security forces in the border area with Nimroz province. On 16 April, Pakistan conducted airstrikes in Khost and Kunar provinces, resulting in civilian casualties. Tensions with the Islamic Republic of Iran over border and water disputes resulted in confrontations between de facto security forces and Iranian forces on 7 March, in the Keng district of Nimroz province, and on 23 April, in the Islam Qala area of Herat province. Other security incidents include an 18 April rocket attack at the border with Uzbekistan, claimed by ISIL-K, a 28 April shooting and arrest by Tajikistan border forces of individuals illegally entering Tajikistan, and a 7 May rocket attack at the border with Tajikistan, also claimed by ISIL-K.

20. The capacity and willingness of the de facto authorities to appropriately manage weapon and ammunition stocks under their control remains unclear.

21. Between 1 January and 21 May, the United Nations documented 111 incidents directly affecting its personnel, including 41 cases of intimidation, 30 crime-related incidents, seven arrests and nine incidents affecting United Nations compounds, offices and property. The total represents a significant increase from the 52 incidents recorded during the same period in 2021.

### **C. Regional cooperation**

22. The Taliban de facto authorities intensified diplomatic and economic engagements with regional organizations and countries. Although no country currently recognizes the de facto authorities as a government, some States have accepted diplomats appointed by the de facto authorities, in a process that the Taliban have described as “silent recognition”.

23. On 29 January, Pakistan’s then-National Security Adviser, Moeed Yusuf, travelled to Kabul for talks with de facto Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi and de facto Minister for Foreign Affairs Amir Khan Motaqi. Discussions reportedly focused on enhancing cooperation on issues such as trade, transit and the extension of bilateral political and economic relations.

24. On 22 February, the de facto Prime Minister, Mohammad Hassan Akhund, met the visiting Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan and Minister of Investments and Foreign Trade, Sardor Umurzakov, to discuss bilateral cooperation and the implementation of development projects. Mr. Umurzakov called for steps towards launching projects such as the Mazar-e-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railroad and Surkhan-Pul-e-Khumri electricity transmission line. On 23 February, Uzbekistan hosted a meeting of European Union and Central Asian special envoys for Afghanistan. In a statement, the participants reaffirmed cooperation opportunities between the European Union and Central Asia in support of the Afghan people, as well as security and stability in the region.

25. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation reopened its office in Kabul on 4 March. On 8 and 9 March, the Organization's Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Tariq Ali Bakheet, visited Kabul for talks with the de facto authorities. On 21 March, on the margins of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Council of Foreign Ministers at its forty-eighth session, the Organization established the Afghanistan Humanitarian Trust Fund.

26. On 11 and 12 March, Mr. Motaqi and de facto Minister of Information and Culture, Khairullah Khairkhwa, travelled to Türkiye to participate in the Antalya Diplomacy Forum. On the sidelines of the Forum, the Taliban delegation met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. They also held a trilateral meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, and the United States Special Representative for Afghanistan, Thomas West, to discuss the issue of the frozen assets of Afghanistan, among others.

27. On 24 March, the Russian Presidential Special Representative for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, visited Kabul to meet with Mr. Motaqi and the de facto Minister of Interior, Sirajuddin Haqqani. They reportedly discussed strengthening bilateral ties and the extension of Moscow's cooperation with Afghanistan. Mr. Kabulov also met with the former President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai.

28. On 24 March, the State Councillor and Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, Wang Yi, visited Kabul to meet the de facto Deputy Prime Minister, Abdul Ghani Baradar, and Mr. Motaqi. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement expressing China's support for Afghanistan, its hope for the formation of an inclusive government and its opposition to political pressure and economic sanctions on Afghanistan. The de facto authorities stated that China expressed readiness to invest in mining and other economic projects.

29. On 28 March and 25 April, Mr. Motaqi, accompanied by a high-level Taliban delegation, met the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, in Doha. Discussions focused on political and economic issues and the operation of the Kabul airport. On 30 April, Mr. Motaqi also met with the Minister of Social Development and Family of Qatar, Mariam Al-Misnad, who underlined her country's readiness to provide humanitarian aid to the Afghan people.

30. On 30 March, China hosted the third meeting of the ministers for foreign affairs of the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, which was also attended by the Russian Federation and Afghanistan. In a joint statement, the participants highlighted the importance of national reconciliation in Afghanistan through dialogue, the establishment of a broad-based and inclusive government, friendly relations between Afghanistan and all countries, in particular its neighbours, and the role of the United Nations in providing humanitarian assistance. On the margins, a meeting of the extended troika of special envoys for Afghanistan took place, as did a meeting between the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of China and of Pakistan with Mr. Motaqi, during which the latter expressed support for the Belt and Road Initiative.

31. In April, the de facto authorities and Iranian officials increased diplomatic engagement following the circulation of social media reports on the alleged ill-treatment of Afghan refugees and migrants in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as ensuing violent protests in front of the Iranian embassy in Kabul and the Iranian consulate general in Herat on 11 April. In telephone conversations on 19 April and 1 May, Iranian Minister for Foreign Affairs Amir-Abdollahian and Mr. Motaqi discussed the situation of Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran and security for Iranian diplomatic missions in Afghanistan. On 12 May, Iranian officials and the de facto authorities held talks in Taybad, Iran, and agreed to increase coordination between the two countries' security forces.

32. On 24 May, in Kabul, the de facto authorities signed a contract with the United Arab Emirates-based company GAAC Solutions, for ground handling and related services at Afghan international airports. Negotiations with Qatar and Türkiye reportedly continue on more comprehensive services.

### III. Human rights

33. Despite assurances by the de facto authorities that a general amnesty for individuals affiliated with the former Government and its security forces was being implemented, UNAMA continued to receive credible allegations of killings, enforced disappearances and other violent acts targeting these individuals and individuals accused of affiliation with the National Resistance Front and ISIL-K. Between 1 January and 22 May, UNAMA documented at least 40 extrajudicial killings, at least 30 cases of torture and ill-treatment and at least 80 arbitrary arrests and detentions of individuals in those categories. These included at least 10 extrajudicial killings of individuals accused of affiliation with the National Resistance Front by the de facto authorities, a marked increase compared with the previous reporting period.

34. The de facto Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice has increased the enforcement of a wide range of rules and directives relating to extramarital relationships, dress code, attendance at prayers and listening to music. UNAMA recorded cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishments and extrajudicial killings carried out by the de facto authorities against individuals accused of failing to adhere to such rules and directives. Among these were at least seven extrajudicial killings of individuals (five women, two men) accused of extramarital relationships and at least 30 instances of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments such as public floggings, beatings and verbal abuse.

35. Despite a drastic reduction in civilian casualties following the Taliban takeover on 15 August 2021, since 1 January, UNAMA has documented attacks resulting in at least 801 civilian casualties (275 killed and 526 wounded), almost half of which occurred between 17 and 29 April, as a result of a spate of improvised explosive device attacks in Kabul, Kunduz and Balkh provinces combined with cross-border attacks in Khost and Kunar. Explosive remnants of war continued to cause civilian casualties, with 51 deaths and 76 injuries recorded, and children account for three quarters of those killed and wounded.

36. Human rights defenders, journalists and media workers continued to face threats, arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detention and ill treatment. In January, one female civil society activist was shot dead in Balkh province. Since 1 January, UNAMA has documented 27 cases of arbitrary arrests of human rights defenders and seven cases of threats by the de facto authorities. Journalists and media workers were also targeted, with 54 cases of arbitrary arrests and 27 instances of ill treatment or threats, all attributed to the de facto authorities apart from four unattributed cases of beating.

37. The de facto authorities have increasingly restricted the exercise of human rights such as freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of opinion and expression, quelling dissent and restricting civic space in the country. The arbitrary arrests and prolonged incommunicado detentions of journalists, human rights defenders and protesters, carried out by the de facto General Directorate of Intelligence, have had a chilling effect on freedom of the media and civic space. In addition, journalists were regularly prevented from covering incidents or peaceful protests. The de facto authorities also took programming by several international broadcasters off the air and prohibited the screening of foreign content, in particular soap operas. Civil society actors and human rights defenders have largely stopped their activities in most provinces, citing fear of the repercussions. Journalists and media workers have increasingly resorted to self-censorship to cope with the new media environment, while continuing acute financial challenges have also contributed to the closing of media outlets and the shrinking of media space.

38. Afghan women and girls have been particularly affected by a number of decrees issued by the de facto authorities. Following months of closure, in February, public universities reopened for both women and men throughout the country. On 23 March, as schools reopened for the new school year, and following a de facto cabinet meeting held in Kandahar, the Taliban leader announced the continued closure of secondary schools to girls, affecting an estimated 1.1 million girls across the country and increasing the risk of exploitation and abuse, including child marriage. The announcement was met with protests by civil society activists, teachers and students across the country, and disapproval, including by religious scholars, who called on the de facto authorities to reverse the decision. According to unverified reports, despite the ban, girls' public and private high schools reopened in some instances across nine provinces, with at least the tacit consent of local de facto authorities. Some children did not return to school even where it was permitted owing to economic difficulties or restrictions on female dress code and movement in public. The United Nations is expanding community-based primary education, and the de facto authorities are opening schools, in particular in previously hard-to-reach areas that do not have formal public schools. The de facto Ministry of Education announced the recruitment of some 7,000 teachers and administrative staff, including 2,777 vacancies reserved for women.

39. Since March, women's groups have increasingly resorted to advocacy at indoor gatherings and on social media. Beginning on 25 March, women were restricted from air travel abroad without being accompanied by a male relative (*mahram*) and, as at 27 March, gender-segregated schedules for public spaces such as parks were introduced. Women's economic participation as entrepreneurs and business operators remains minimal, although in Herat there are, on an exceptional basis, attempts to develop and implement a comprehensive framework in accordance with proclaimed Islamic values to support female entrepreneurs and business operators. Women are allowed to work only in education, health and humanitarian sectors and, to some extent, at the Kabul airport and prisons. On 2 March, female civil servants and female university students were instructed to wear a *hijab* (ensuring the covering of the head and entire body) or be removed from the premises. On 7 May, the de facto authorities issued an order instructing all women to wear a *hijab* in public. The order explicitly required that they cover their faces (with the exception of the eyes) and only leave their homes in cases of necessity. The order specified that violations of this directive would lead to the punishment of their male relatives. The order provoked condemnation inside Afghanistan and internationally. A number of representatives of Afghan women in the country and diaspora issued statements that the *hijab* was already widely observed and condemning the de facto authorities for failing to address more urgent economic, security, education and health challenges.

40. Incidents of violence against women and girls, such as murder, rape and other forms of sexual violence, suicide, forced marriage and assault and battery, continue to be reported. Risks of domestic violence and vulnerabilities thereto have been exacerbated, as more women and girls remain at home. In addition to a general lack of financial independence and the imposition of the *mahram* requirement, access to justice for women in such cases has been impacted by the closure of dedicated offices on violence against women and the absence of qualified personnel, including women, in police, prosecution and the courts, for the purpose of receiving or handling such complaints. Incidents of violence against women and girls, when reported, are instead being resolved in de facto courts as personal rather than criminal matters, or being referred to traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, which typically discriminate against women. Under a redesigned model, two women protection centres have reopened in Kabul, providing safe refuge for survivors who were relocated from shelters across Afghanistan in 2021.

41. While a sharp decrease was recorded in the killing and maiming of children caused by ground engagements and aerial attacks, the armed conflict continued to expose children to serious harm. The leading causes of child casualties included explosive remnants of war (70 per cent) and suicide attacks and detonations of leftover pressure-plate improvised explosive devices (25 per cent). Increased poverty triggered by the ongoing economic crisis and unemployment are the main factors driving children to join armed groups, including the Taliban. The recruitment and use of children is exacerbated by the fact that the de facto authorities currently consider a child as any individual not showing physiological signs of puberty.

42. On 30 April, the commission to inspect prisons and detention centres and review detainees' casefiles, along with similar locally established bodies, ordered the release of approximately 1,300 inmates. Approximately 1,000 additional detainees, including drug addicts, were released on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr.

43. The penitentiary system faced continued challenges due to limited funding and delays in processing the cases of pretrial detainees before de facto courts. While the de facto Ministry of Justice has confirmed that lawyers can continue to work, and the code of conduct enshrines detainees' right to lawyers, defence lawyers report difficulties accessing clients in detention facilities in some areas and that they are often side-lined during court proceedings before de facto Taliban judges. De facto judges lack legal training, judicial or investigative experience or are illiterate, and many of them refer the majority of cases to informal justice mechanisms. In the corrections system, detainees and prisoners have limited access to legal representation. This has a negative impact on their due process rights during their judicial proceedings. As with other arrests, those of children often take place without respect for due process rights, with many juveniles having no access to defence lawyers or contact with their family members. Most prisons and existing detention places for children lack essential services, including food, proper shelters or educational or vocational support. The absence of child-friendly staff, social workers and counsellors and of a systematic oversight mechanism to ensure the protection of children in prisons puts children at potential risk of abuse.

44. Financial constraints and the discontinuation of previous donor funding have had a significant impact on detention conditions, including inmates' access to food, medical treatment, heating materials in the winter and vocational training beyond religious teachings. The de facto authorities have requested UNAMA to assist with relaying needs to donors and providing exceptional humanitarian support for vulnerable prison populations.

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

45. Available economic data confirms a greatly weakened Afghan economy, given the fiscal shock following the Taliban takeover, as well as ongoing liquidity problems and the effect of economic sanctions. According to the World Bank, the Afghan economy has lost 15 years of economic growth in the 10 months since the Taliban took power. Following a rapid depreciation in late 2021, the Afghani appreciated against major currencies in the first quarter of 2022, largely owing to inflows of humanitarian aid and controls on imports and capital outflows. Nevertheless, the prices of basic necessities remained substantially higher than a year before. Poorer households reportedly sold assets or incurred more debt to survive. One in three businesses reported having temporarily ceased operations since August 2021, resulting in a larger number of non-performing loans weighing down the already-distressed banking system. Firms and households continue to face challenges in accessing cash from bank accounts. Nearly 700,000 jobs are estimated to have been lost by the second quarter of 2022. With reduced volumes of international aid, sanctions and restricted access to international payment systems, there are few drivers for a sustained economic recovery. On 19 January, the de facto administration convened an Afghan economic conference in Kabul, at which they presented their vision for achieving self-reliance in the medium term with a focus on international off-budget aid for the humanitarian and development sectors and the private sector for revenue generation, employment generation and service delivery. The Afghanistan reconstruction trust fund has allocated \$600 million for basic human needs in the areas of education, health, agriculture and livelihoods; the education component is on hold due to the de facto authorities' decision to ban girls' education from grades 7 to 12.

46. UNAMA coordination efforts focused on helping to address the severe economic contraction and the banking and financial crisis. UNAMA continued to liaise with the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the United States Department of the Treasury to ease the banking and economic crisis. On 25 February, the Office released an additional general licence permitting all transactions involving Afghanistan, including commercial transactions, except when sanctioned individuals are involved in the transfer of funds. UNAMA has been advocating for unfreezing Central Bank of Afghanistan assets and offered United Nations support in this regard.

47. The pipeline established by the United Nations to import cash into Afghanistan for humanitarian operations continued to function. Between 1 December 2021, when the first banknotes were flown in, and 9 May, the United Nations transferred \$825.6 million in cash. These funds were distributed directly to 19 different United Nations agencies, funds or programmes, the World Bank and 15 international non-governmental organizations in Afghanistan. That cash delivery helped stabilize the Afghani, giving some impetus to economic activity. UNAMA also facilitated some arrears payments from the Afghan electricity company to electricity suppliers in Central Asia, to prevent a power shutdown.

48. The United Nations continued to advocate for aid beyond humanitarian assistance to meet basic human needs and support efforts towards recovery and community resilience. The United Nations Transitional Engagement Framework for Afghanistan, launched on 26 January, requires \$8 billion in total, with \$4.44 billion for lifesaving humanitarian assistance, \$3.43 billion for addressing basic human needs and \$208 million for preserving social investments and community-level systems.

49. The United Nations inter-agency Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan remains a critical financing platform for the Transitional Engagement Framework, with

\$92.54 million in funding received thus far. Implementation activities, which began on 1 January, address basic human needs in support of local communities in the areas of essential services, livelihoods, community resilience, planning and social cohesion and complement humanitarian activities. A total of eight regional joint programmes are envisaged as part of the approach.

50. The United Nations, in collaboration with its partners, has been developing a new aid architecture for Afghanistan to enable effective coordination between all donors and United Nations implementing agencies. Features of the new aid architecture include an enhanced emphasis on monitoring results and impact, system-wide coordination of risk management, quarterly coordination and review meetings with all multilateral financing mechanisms, and an expanded donor coordination group. Work continued to identify strategic thematic areas and establish mechanisms for engagement with Afghan civil society, the private sector and regional countries.

51. Progress has been made to streamline risk management approaches in Afghanistan, including assessment of and response to potential fraud and corruption. A United Nations system-wide working group mapped existing risk management frameworks, available vetting tools and structures and mechanisms for continuous dialogue, collaboration and information-sharing among its entities. The working group has initiated a process of identifying and assessing common risks faced by United Nations agencies, including aid diversion, as well as mitigating actions, which will be reviewed on a regular basis.

## V. Humanitarian assistance

52. Humanitarian needs continued to rise owing to the devastating combination of decades of conflict, recurrent drought and a sharp economic decline. Some 24.4 million people, or 59 per cent of the estimated population, need humanitarian assistance in 2022, up from 18.4 million at the beginning of 2021. Between January and the end of April 2022, humanitarian partners reached 19.9 million people with at least one form of humanitarian assistance, including 19.3 million vulnerable people with humanitarian needs, 352,000 cross-border returnees, 101,000 refugees and 95,000 people affected by floods and other weather-related events. At least 18.9 million people were provided with food, 4.7 million people with health care, 3 million children under five years of age and pregnant and lactating women with treatment for acute malnutrition, 3.3 million people with water, sanitation and hygiene assistance, 374,000 children with education support, 1.2 million people with shelter and household items and 2.1 million people with protection assistance.

53. For the first time, an Afghan Women's Advisory Group has been established in Afghanistan to advise the humanitarian country team on how to better respond to the specific needs of women and girls, and to provide advice to improve the humanitarian community's engagement with the Taliban at the central (Kabul), local and provincial levels. The high-level pledging conference held on 31 March yielded \$2.4 billion in pledges. However, many of those were a combination of past, present and future funding commitments for Afghanistan and for Afghan refugees in neighbouring countries during 2022 and beyond. As at 23 May, the humanitarian response plan was only 30 per cent funded, with a shortfall of some \$3 billion.

54. Some 19.7 million people, almost half of Afghanistan's population, are facing acute hunger according to the most recent Integrated Food Security Phase Classification analysis. Some 6.6 million Afghans are facing "emergency" levels of food insecurity – currently the highest number in the world in absolute terms. The outlook for June through November 2022 foresees a slight improvement in the food security situation, with a reduction in the number of people facing acute food

insecurity to 18.9 million people. This is partially due to the coming wheat harvest from May to August and this year's coordinated scale-up of humanitarian food assistance and increased agricultural livelihood support.

55. Between 1 January and 15 May, there were 46,632 suspected cases of measles, 80 per cent of which were in children under five years of age. The United Nations vaccinated over 1.96 million children against measles between 1 January and 15 May. Thus far in 2022, Afghanistan recorded one case of wild polio virus type 1 and no cases of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2. Three nationwide polio vaccination campaigns were conducted in 2022, each targeting 9.9 million children and using both house-to-house and mosque-to-mosque vaccination approaches. During the most recent campaign, in March, more than 9.7 million children were vaccinated, 3.2 million of whom were reached at least once in 2022 for the first time in over three years, owing to the improved physical security environment. Conflict-related trauma cases decreased by 82 per cent between January and 15 May compared with the same period in 2021. Between January and May, over 74,208 people received trauma care.

56. While there has been a significant decrease in military operations and kinetic activities since September 2021, which has enabled partners to reach previously inaccessible areas, other forms of access impediments remained at a similar level as in the first quarter of 2021. Incidents of interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities remained high, with 185 incidents reported between 1 January and 23 May, compared with 138 during the same period last year. Since the start of 2022, there were 135 recorded incidents of violence and threats against humanitarian personnel, assets and facilities. This is a slight decrease compared with the same period last year, when 115 such incidents were recorded. As at 23 May, there had been 11 incidents of levy requests reported by partners, compared with 26 levy requests recorded during the same period in 2021. There have also been incidents of female aid workers being threatened and intimidated by local de facto authorities.

57. Between 1 January and 21 May, a total of 382,992 people were recorded to have crossed into Afghanistan, 230,174 of whom were deported. Between 1 January and 21 May, 348,158 undocumented Afghan migrants returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran and 34,834 undocumented Afghans returned from Pakistan. Since 2012, some 5.8 million people have been displaced owing to conflict and natural disasters. In 2021 alone, 882,546 people were displaced owing to conflict. More than 200 refugees voluntarily returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan.

58. Explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices continue to pose a threat to civilians and humanitarian personnel. Between January and May 2022, the Mine Action Service coordinated and enabled survey and clearance of over 4,153,104 square metres of contaminated land, safely removing thousands of explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices. In addition, 253,956 people, including 71,433 women and girls, received explosive ordnance risk education. In May, the Mine Action Service rolled out a nationwide contamination survey. In consultation with the de facto authorities and relevant stakeholders, the Mine Action Service set up an independent humanitarian mine action coordination centre in Afghanistan, with all mine action teams operational as at 20 May.

## **VI. Counter-narcotics**

59. Opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan has been increasing steadily over the past two decades, with an average rise of 4,000 hectares each year since systematic monitoring began in 1994, albeit with strong yearly fluctuations. At the end of the annual opium cultivation season, in July 2021, the area under opium poppy cultivation

in Afghanistan was estimated at 177,000 hectares. This was a 21 per cent decrease from 2020, representing a contraction of 47,000 hectares.

60. On 3 April, two months before the 2022 opium harvest, the de facto authorities issued a decree prohibiting the cultivation of poppy and all types of narcotics. The decree states that the usage, transportation, trade, export and import of all types of narcotics and intoxicants such as alcohol, heroin, 3,4-ethylenedioxyamphetamine (MDMA) tablets and hashish are strictly prohibited. Although the de facto Ministry of Interior noted that a two-month grace period would be granted to enable farmers to harvest the opium gum and sell their 2022 harvest, selective eradication efforts have already been reported. During the grace period, the sale and trafficking of processed heroin and synthetic drugs are prohibited. Following the announcement, narcotic prices, in particular for opium, increased significantly. The de facto authorities have requested the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to assist with alternative livelihoods for farmers, who are concerned about the effect of the ban on their economic well-being. Existing programmes will require a comprehensive scale up to meet these needs.

## **VII. Mission support**

61. As at 30 April, vacancy rates in UNAMA were 18 per cent for international staff, 16 per cent for United Nations Volunteers, 12 per cent for National Professional Officers and 9 per cent for national staff, compared with approved rates of 8 per cent, 7 per cent, 3 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively. The proportion of female staff was 31 per cent for international staff, 40 per cent for United Nations Volunteers, 13 per cent for National Professional Officers and 9 per cent for national staff.

62. Since mid-February, COVID-19 cases across United Nations entities in Afghanistan have remained low, leading to the removal of the ceiling on the footprint of personnel. Ongoing contingency planning is focused on sustaining the surgical and aeromedical capacity set up to enhance the United Nations Level 1 clinic in Kabul.

## **VIII. Observations**

63. Ten months after the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan is confronted with growing uncertainty over its political, security and socioeconomic future. Despite efforts to establish relevant governing bodies, the Taliban have not been able to provide an inclusive structure and a consistent governing vision, alternating between a generally pragmatic approach to solving some pressing problems and, more recently, a focus on decisions regulating the social lives of citizens and generally restricting freedoms and rights. Furthermore, the decision-making process behind these regulations remains opaque, and their application is often inconsistent. The lack of a constitution and clear rule of law framework exacerbates this uncertainty.

64. The continuation of exclusionary politics by the de facto authorities is highly concerning, as it disregards the diversity that shapes Afghan society. It is essential that inclusive mechanisms be found to facilitate broad-based and participatory governance that reflects the aspirations and interests of all Afghans and leads to true reconciliation across the country. Having established a commission created to promote the return of Afghans from abroad, the Taliban are encouraged to follow through on their stated commitment to engage with a broad spectrum of actors, involving political and former government officials, women, civil society and ethnic and religious minority groups in the Commission's administration and consultative mechanisms.

65. Public reactions across the country have shown that many Afghans resent the increasing curtailment of their rights and the closing of political and civic space. The extent of the international community's engagement with the Taliban depends on the latter's ability to make good on their stated public commitments regarding respect for the rights of Afghan people. In particular, I reiterate my deep concerns about recent decisions restricting the rights of women and girls. The de facto authorities are urged to protect and expand women's rights, to restore their rights to fully participate in work and public life, to reopen secondary schools to girls and to harness the talents of women and girls to contribute to the recovery and future development of Afghanistan. I call on the authorities to uphold international obligations, including the protection of the rights of all Afghans, male and female. I strongly encourage regional and international organizations and countries to continue engaging with the de facto authorities to make these changes.

66. The security situation is becoming increasingly concerning, owing to increased activities by ISIL-K and enduring threats, including other forms of terrorism and organized crime. Further complicating security conditions is the expansion of anti-Taliban resistance forces. In the light of the historic relationship with Al-Qaida and several other terrorist groups, there is a need for the Taliban to deliver on its commitment to engage in a serious counter-terrorism dialogue with the international community. Such a dialogue can lay the groundwork for preventing the emergence of any safe haven for terrorist groups.

67. The Taliban's announced ban on all narcotics is a positive development which opens a potential area for dialogue with the international community. Concerns about the impact of the illegal drug trade remain very high, however, as the Taliban have made no plans to address this year's harvest and there is a paucity of information on seizures and arrests. There is an opportunity for further coordination within the region to contribute to stability in Afghanistan and for aiding recovery through alternative livelihoods.

68. I am concerned about ongoing violations of the Taliban's proclaimed amnesty for former members of the security forces, and the extrajudicial killings of alleged ISIL-K members and individuals accused of National Resistance Front affiliation, which constitute serious human rights violations. I call upon the de facto authorities to ensure respect for human rights obligations and demonstrate country-wide commitment to the amnesty.

69. The implementation of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments by the de facto authorities against individuals perceived of failing to comply with codes and directives is of significant concern. I am particularly alarmed by extrajudicial killings linked to accusations of the commission of "moral crimes". The fact that women make up the majority of victims of these killings is a grim backdrop to the increased limitations and denials of the fundamental human rights of women and girls. I urge the de facto authorities to uphold human rights and freedoms for all Afghans.

70. Despite the significant reduction in armed conflict since 15 August 2021, the population of Afghanistan continues to experience worrying levels of harm resulting from improvised explosive device attacks and explosive remnants of war. I reiterate my call on all parties to exercise restraint and ensure the protection of civilians, and call for further financial assistance for mine clearance.

71. Contrary to the de facto authorities' repeated public commitments to respect human rights within the framework of Islamic law, civic space has visibly shrunk in Afghanistan in the past months. The de facto authorities are reminded of international obligations that journalists and civil society activists should not face prison for the lawful expression of their ideas. The de facto authorities should also implement

human rights-compliant policies that guarantee freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association.

72. Access to justice is undermined by a lack of awareness about applicable laws and the exclusion of former judicial personnel, in particular judges, from working in the justice system. Along with capacity constraints, these factors disproportionately affect women and often result in reliance on alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. The de facto authorities are urged to clarify the applicable legislation and to comply with international obligations so that Afghans, including women, can have equal and unimpeded access to fair and effective justice.

73. Afghanistan managed to avoid worst-case famine scenarios over the past winter but still faces unprecedented levels of food insecurity and poverty. I urge donors to extend continued support for essential services and preserve community systems through which humanitarian assistance is delivered. Effective humanitarian support equally depends on unimpeded access to affected people and the full safety of all humanitarian staff, especially female staff. In addition, humanitarian workers must be operationally independent in all their activities, including in movement without armed escorts.

74. The sharp and painful economic decline and disruption in basic services – propelled by the sudden withdrawal of international development funding – make the situation even more dire. I urge the de facto authorities to take immediate action to create the conditions conducive for donor countries to resume their development efforts and projects in the country. Humanitarian aid will not be enough to reverse the deterioration in human security, and the availability of humanitarian funding may decline owing to competing emergencies. Afghans must find ways to have dignified and sustained livelihoods. Fully funded implementation of the United Nations Transitional Engagement Framework for Afghanistan and the new aid architecture for Afghanistan will be critical in this regard.

75. The de facto authorities have taken steps towards revenue generation and collection. However, with Afghanistan having been a deeply aid-dependent State, economic resources remain insufficient to effectively meet the needs of the Afghan people. It is imperative that the issue of unfreezing the country's Central Bank assets be resolved as soon as possible. Efforts taken by the private sector, including women entrepreneurs, to expand their activities are to be welcomed, and the de facto authorities are encouraged to promote private sector development, including the necessary skills training, in particular for women, youth and former civil servants.

76. The enduring presence of the United Nations in Afghanistan reflects the commitment of the international community to assist the Afghan people in their efforts to meet urgent humanitarian and human needs, support sustainable economic development and promote the protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms. A structured and unified dialogue with the de facto authorities, other national stakeholders, the United Nations and the international community is needed more than ever. Such a dialogue can build confidence between the international community and the de facto authorities, with the overall objective of improving the situation of the most vulnerable Afghan people, who continue to bear the brunt of the multiple and compounding crises facing the country.

77. I extend my deep appreciation to all United Nations personnel in Afghanistan, under the leadership of my Special Representative, Deborah Lyons, and non-governmental organization partners for their continued dedication and service under extremely challenging conditions. I am grateful to Ms. Lyons, who recently completed her assignment, for her strong leadership, dedicated service and steadfast commitment to the United Nations during what has been a particularly difficult period for the Afghan people.