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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 resolutions [2626 \(2022\)](#) and [2678 \(2023\)](#), 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 27 February 2023 ([A/77/772-S/2023/151](#)).

II. Relevant developments

3. The Taliban continued to maintain and consolidate power in Afghanistan. This has created a period of relative absence of armed conflict but also a continued curtailment of Afghans' fundamental rights and freedoms, especially for women and girls. The United Nations operations in Afghanistan were directly affected during the reporting period when the de facto Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed UNAMA leadership of severe restrictions on Afghan female personnel working for the United Nations. The Taliban leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada, exerted growing influence over governance decisions at national and subnational levels. Security incidents linked to the armed opposition and attacks by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) continued. UNAMA continued to receive credible allegations of human rights abuses and violations, including against former government officials and security personnel, in violation of the general amnesty announced in August 2021, as well as against individuals accused of affiliation with armed resistance groups and ISIL-K. The de facto authorities continued to report strong revenue and trade performance, amid reports by the de facto authorities of reduced corruption and



increased eradication of opium poppy fields. Projections indicate limited prospects for growth and poverty reduction, as there is very limited investment in development and millions of Afghans are dependent on international humanitarian assistance flows. The humanitarian situation remains dire, with unprecedented levels of need across all 34 provinces, and a critical shortage to date of humanitarian funding for 2023.

A. Political developments

4. On 5 April, the de facto Foreign Minister, Amir Khan Motaqi, verbally notified the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of UNAMA of a decision to impose severe restrictions on national female staff working for the United Nations with immediate effect. Exemptions were to apply only in the health and primary education sectors. The United Nations issued statements of condemnation on 5 and 11 April, stating that it would request United Nations national personnel, women and men, not to report to United Nations offices, with only limited and calibrated exceptions made for critical tasks. This posture remains in place for UNAMA and is under constant monitoring. On 12 April, Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid stated that the Taliban expected that the United Nations would comply with the severe restrictions, while reaffirming the commitment not to interfere in United Nations work. UNAMA continues in all its interactions with the de facto authorities to seek a reversal of the severe restrictions.

5. On 1 and 2 May, the Secretary-General convened a meeting of special envoys on Afghanistan to reinvigorate international engagement around common objectives. Feridun Sinirlioğlu, who was appointed in April as special coordinator of the independent assessment mandated by the Security Council in its resolution [2679 \(2023\)](#), attended the meeting as an observer. Participants highlighted the need for a strategy of engagement that allows for the stabilization of Afghanistan but also for addressing important concerns shared by the international community. These include the lack of inclusive governance; violations of human rights, in particular those of women and girls; the persistent presence of terrorist organizations; and drug trafficking.

6. While different countries placed different priorities on these concerns, there was a general recognition that they are intertwined. The meeting echoed the call by the Security Council, in its resolution [2681 \(2023\)](#) of 27 April 2023, for full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women and girls in Afghanistan. Ahead of the meeting of the special envoys, Japan and the United Arab Emirates, with support from the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), facilitated consultations between a diverse group of Afghan women and Member State representatives based in New York. Afghan women renewed their call for their full, equal and meaningful participation in all decision-making forums related to Afghanistan. Similarly, UNAMA, together with United Nations partners, hosted virtual meetings with a diverse group of Afghan women in the diaspora, both prior to and after the meeting of the special envoys, in addition to ongoing consultations with Afghan women across the country, to ensure that the needs and views of Afghan women are taken into consideration in all efforts and activities led by the mission. The Taliban leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada, continued to increase his influence on governance decisions at national and subnational levels. He decreed new appointments and reshuffles of senior de facto officials. All appointees were male and predominantly Taliban affiliates. At the national level, this included the appointment of former de facto Minister of Finance, Hedayatullah Badri, as de facto Governor of the Afghan Central Bank on 22 March, while the post of de facto minister of finance remained vacant; and the appointment of four de facto deputy ministers in the Ministries of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Energy and Water, Hajj and

Religious Affairs, and Borders and Tribal Affairs. On 16 May, the Taliban leader appointed the de facto Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Kabir Mohammed Jan as acting de facto Prime Minister, owing reportedly to the illness of the incumbent, Mohammad Hassan Akhund. Subnational-level appointments included nine de facto provincial governors, five deputy provincial governors, at least 20 district governors and two provincial capital mayors. About 50 directors at national and subnational levels were replaced. On 4 April, the Taliban spokesperson noted that part of his office had been transferred to Kandahar. On 1 April and 4 May, the de facto Supreme Court announced 22 new judicial reshuffles, including 10 in de facto provincial courts of appeal, new heads for de facto municipal primary courts and military and primary court judges in Helmand, Herat and Ghazni Provinces.

7. The de facto authorities reportedly continued to pay the salaries of civil servants, including female civil servants, most of whom were asked not to report to work following the Taliban takeover. On 11 April, the Head of the Treasury Department of the de facto Ministry of Finance reported that the Ministry had allocated 4 billion afghanis (approximately \$45.7 million) to pay the pensions of retired government employees, subject to approval by the Taliban leader. On 17 April, the de facto Office of Administrative Affairs announced seven months of salary payments for former employees of the High Council for Peace and National Reconciliation.

8. Following approval of the fiscal year 1402 national budget by the de facto Cabinet on 28 February, the de facto Ministry of Finance announced on 9 April that a first allotment had been approved for spending, subject to the budget's final approval by the Taliban leadership in Kandahar.

9. At the subnational level, on 21 February, the de facto Ministry of the Interior reported that the administrative structures of 12 provinces had been modified to adjust and add new districts, including the establishment of de facto district administrative offices, with the stated intention to enhance service delivery. According to de facto authorities, this brings the total number of districts from 391 to 420 across the country. The Taliban leader continued to establish provincial ulama shuras to perform administrative oversight and address local conflicts. Based on public announcements and information conveyed by the de facto authorities to UNAMA, at least 22 ulama shuras have been formally established to date.

10. Senior representatives of the de facto authorities carried out provincial and district visits focusing on community outreach and on economic projects, including rural roads, dams and agricultural support. The de facto commission to prevent land-grabbing and recover usurped land reportedly recovered 500,000 *jeribs* (100,000 hectares) across the country, including 16,000 *jeribs* (3,200 hectares) in Kabul, according to Taliban sources.

11. The political opposition outside Afghanistan, comprising exiled former Republic officials and political figures, continued to issue proposals for an intra-Afghan dialogue, seeking international support for their efforts while advocating against Taliban recognition. Opposition figures convened several meetings abroad to articulate their proposals. These included the Afghanistan Future Thought Forum, held in Doha from 10 to 12 April, and a second conference, held in Vienna on 24 and 25 April. The Commission for Return and Communication with Former Afghan Officials and Political Figures reported the return of 20 military academy graduates from India and 13 former Republic officials from Türkiye, Europe and the United States of America.

12. The de facto authorities maintained their efforts to transform the institutional and legal framework of the former Republic. On 8 March, the Taliban leader issued a decree abolishing the de facto Attorney General's Office, replacing it with a newly created de facto Grand Directorate of Monitoring and Follow-up of Decrees and

Orders. On 21 March, the de facto Office of Administrative Affairs informed UNAMA that technical experts had been recruited to assist in the ongoing law review process, while on 25 April, the Taliban spokesperson reiterated that the process of the drafting of a constitution based on sharia law was ongoing. During the reporting period, the Taliban leader issued three decrees on anti-corruption and nepotism, prohibiting the de facto officials from participating in government contracts (on 12 March) and employing their sons and relatives in institutions under their responsibility (on 18 March), and regulating government land distribution, lease and sale (on 20 March). The de facto courts commenced re-examining cases adjudicated before the Taliban takeover, as the de facto authorities claimed that those decisions were tainted by corruption and contrary to sharia.

13. The Taliban leader asserted greater direct influence over the de facto security organs. This included the reshuffle of six provincial and seven district chiefs of police, five army corps commanders, one provincial General Directorate of Intelligence director, the resignation and reported move of some special forces commands to Kandahar and several battalion rotations.

14. UNAMA facilitated a total of 25 outreach meetings in 16 provinces on governance-related issues, including on principles of good governance, service delivery and girls' access to education, between local de facto authorities, ulama, civil society organizations, media, youth and other community members. UNAMA observed 42 meetings that were conducted by local de facto authorities with communities on local needs and intertribal tensions. Community representatives consistently voiced concerns over shrinking civic space and intimidation of civil society organizations, media and female workers. The enforcement of the severe restrictions on United Nations Afghan female personnel has impacted United Nations outreach to Afghan stakeholders, particularly women.

B. Security

15. There was a slight decrease in the overall number of conflict-related security incidents between 1 February and 20 May, compared with the same period in 2022. The United Nations recorded 1,650 security-related incidents, a 1 per cent decrease from the 1,668 incidents recorded during the same period in 2022. Available data indicated that armed clashes had decreased by 50.4 per cent, from 133 to 66 incidents; suicide attacks increased from zero to three incidents; detonations from improvised explosive devices decreased by 35.8 per cent, from 92 to 59 incidents; arrests increased by 8.7 per cent, from 494 to 536; and assassinations decreased by 40 per cent, from 99 to 59. Reported criminality remains high, with robbery, theft and murder the most recorded incident types. Some 22 disputes were recorded over land, pastureland and water distribution. The north-eastern, western and eastern regions accounted for 53 per cent of all recorded incidents, with Nangarhar, Herat and Kunduz being the most affected provinces.

16. During the reporting period, the number of armed opposition attacks and armed clashes with the de facto authorities declined compared with the same period in 2022. UNAMA recorded claimed attacks by three main armed resistance groups operating in Afghanistan. The National Resistance Front, Afghanistan Freedom Front and Afghanistan Liberation Movement claimed responsibility for attacks in eight provinces. The de facto security forces under the de facto Ministry of Defence continued to carry out operations targeting opposition fighters, including an operation on 11 April against Afghanistan Freedom Front in Salang district, Parwan Province, in which eight opposition fighters were reportedly killed.

17. The number of attacks claimed by or attributed to ISIL-K decreased. Between 1 February and 20 May, the United Nations recorded 11 attacks by the group in 5 provinces, compared with 62 attacks in 12 provinces during the same period in 2022. Incidents claimed by ISIL-K included a suicide attack on 8 March in which the de facto Governor of Balkh Province, Mohammad Daud Muzamelin Mazar-e Sharif, was killed; an improvised explosive device detonation at a cultural centre targeting a gathering of journalists in Mazar-e Sharif on 9 March; and a suicide attack targeting a checkpoint near the de facto Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul City on 27 March. The de facto security forces continued to carry out operations to counter ISIL-K, including in Kabul, Herat, Balkh, Faryab, Jawzjan, Nimroz, Parwan, Kunduz and Takhar Provinces.

18. Border incidents decreased. A total of 14 incidents occurred in the area between Afghanistan and Pakistan, including clashes on 20 February at Torkham crossing and on 13 March in Barmal district, Paktika Province. Six incidents occurred along the border with the Islamic Republic of Iran, including the arrest and subsequent release of an Iranian border police officer on 27 February by the de facto security forces; an armed clash between the de facto security forces and Iranian border police in Nimroz on 5 March, reportedly over cross-border smuggling; and incidents on 15 March and 7 May in Nimroz, where Iranian border police allegedly shot at Afghans attempting to cross the border into the Islamic Republic of Iran. At least four incidents were reported along the Tajik border, including on 21 and 24 February, 28 April and 9 May, related to narcotics smuggling.

19. On 22 February, a senior Pakistani delegation led by the Minister of Defence, Khawaja Mohammad Asif, and Inter-Services Intelligence Director Lieutenant General Nadeem Anjum visited Kabul to discuss security, among other issues, amid allegations of ties between the de facto authorities and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and the de facto authorities' closure of the Torkham border crossing from 19 to 25 February. On 1 March, an unclaimed explosion killed 1 person and injured at least 10 in a hotel allegedly frequented by members of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan in Matun district, Khost Province.

20. UNAMA continued to evaluate risks associated with small arms and light weapons. The Mission finalized a risk reduction framework which will guide future efforts by UNAMA and interested stakeholders to reduce the risks posed by the illicit trade in and excessive accumulation and diversion of small arms and light weapons, related ammunition and explosive material in Afghanistan and the region.

21. Between 1 February and 20 May, the United Nations recorded 101 seizures of weapons caches across 30 provinces. On 2 April, the de facto Ministry of the Interior set a one-month deadline for all civil and military de facto members carrying weapons to register them with the de facto Ministry of the Interior Directorate of Public Services.

22. Between 1 February and 20 May, the United Nations documented 62 incidents directly affecting its personnel, including 26 cases of intimidation, eight crime-related incidents, 11 arrests and 15 incidents affecting United Nations compounds, offices and property. The total represents a decrease from the 79 incidents recorded during the same period in 2022. Citing the extension of the 24 December ban on Afghan women working for non-governmental organizations to the United Nations, on 11 February, the de facto authorities prevented all United Nations female national staff (affecting a total of four women, including one United Nations contracted security staff member) from accessing the UNAMA Jalalabad office. A total of five national female staff working with two United Nations agencies in Nangarhar Province were prevented from accessing their organization's offices on 28 February and 6 March, as was one agency national female staff in Kandahar on 17 May.

C. Regional cooperation

23. Regional countries and organizations continued bilateral and multilateral engagement with the de facto authorities. Discussions covered various issues, such as inclusive governance, human rights, including women's rights and freedoms, counter-terrorism, border security, counter-narcotics and economic cooperation.

24. Several regional formats were convened. On 7 March, special envoys of the India-Central Asia Joint Working Group on Afghanistan announced support for an inclusive government in Afghanistan, human rights and women's rights, counter-terrorism and humanitarian assistance. From 6 to 9 March, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to Afghanistan, Tariq Ali Bakheet, visited Kabul and Kandahar to discuss the follow-up to the 11 January meeting of the Executive Committee of the Organization. On 16 and 17 March, the Council of Foreign Ministers of OIC, meeting in Nouakchott, committed to supporting women's rights to education and work in Afghanistan in line with Islamic principles, providing humanitarian support and combating terrorism. On 5 May, ministers for foreign affairs of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, meeting in Goa, India, agreed to resume the activity of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Afghanistan Contact Group, which had been suspended following the Taliban takeover.

25. Senior de facto officials attended a number of multilateral meetings. On 13 April, foreign ministers of neighbouring countries of Afghanistan met in Uzbekistan and adopted the Samarkand Declaration, calling upon the de facto authorities to establish an inclusive government and implement women's and minorities' rights; a coordinated mechanism for humanitarian assistance; and strengthened common measures to fight terrorism and drug trafficking. The de facto Foreign Minister, Amir Khan Motaqi, attended the meeting. On 6 May, de facto Foreign Minister Motaqi, accompanied by de facto Minister of Commerce and Industry Nooruddin Azizi, participated in the fifth trilateral meeting with the Foreign Ministers of Pakistan and China, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Qin Gang, respectively, which concluded with a joint statement reflecting the intentions of the parties to advance political engagement, counter-terrorism cooperation and trade, investments and connectivity under the trilateral framework.

26. Bilateral engagements focused primarily on security, economic, trade and connectivity issues as well as girls' education. On 22 February, a Pakistani delegation led by Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif visited Kabul for talks on strengthening border security. On 20 March, the Qatari Assistant Foreign Minister Lolwah Al-Khater, de facto Minister of Education Habibullah Agha and representatives of the United Nations Children's Fund met in Doha to discuss the future of education, including girls' education, in Afghanistan. On 22 March, an Uzbek delegation led by Abdulaziz Kamilov, Special Representative of the President for Foreign Policy, met the de facto Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Ghani Baradar, de facto Defence Minister Yaqoob Mujahid and the de facto Foreign Minister in Kabul to discuss bilateral and regional economic projects, border security and cooperation in water resources management. On 15 April, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Trade and Integration of Kazakhstan, Serik Zhumangarin, visited Kabul to discuss the subjects of trade, investments and a joint chamber of commerce. On 12 May, the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani, held talks with de facto Prime Minister Mohammad Hassan Akhund in Kandahar. They discussed the current economic and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

27. The de facto authorities continued to engage on foreign investment and connectivity. They announced, inter alia, the establishment of an investment consortium including Russian, Iranian and Pakistani companies and engagement with a Chinese company on lithium mining and economic infrastructure on 22 February and 13 April, respectively. On 5 March, the Islamic Republic of Iran inaugurated its permanent trade centre in Kabul. The de facto authorities initiated work on the Andkhoi–Sheberghan railway on 13 March, inaugurated a transit route for Turkmen petroleum to Pakistan through Kandahar on 29 April, announced plans for a new railway line connecting Central to South Asia via Mazar-e Sharif, Herat and Kandahar on 1 May and tested the first train between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan on the Herat–Khaf railway on 9 May. On 13 May, officials from Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan opened a coordination office for the Trans-Afghan railway line in Tashkent.

28. During the reporting period, de facto diplomatic personnel assumed positions in the Afghan embassy in Tehran on 27 February and the Afghan consulates general in Istanbul, Türkiye, on 28 February and Dubai on 14 March. On 25 March, Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid posted that Taliban appointees currently served in several Afghan embassies, including China, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Turkmenistan and Qatar, in addition to consulates in Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates.

29. UNAMA continued to promote regional cooperation, including by hosting monthly meetings of Kabul-based regional ambassadors to coordinate engagement with the de facto authorities on the reversal of the bans on women and girls, counter-terrorism and human rights. From 8 to 10 March, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (Political) for Afghanistan in UNAMA held consultations in Islamabad with Pakistani officials and representatives of the Pakistani expert community on the current situation in Afghanistan. On 19 April, UNAMA participated in an international conference to review challenges and opportunities for water diplomacy and cooperation between Central Asia and Afghanistan organized by United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia in Almaty.

III. Human rights

30. From 4 February to 20 May, UNAMA documented 292 civilian casualties (88 persons killed and 204 wounded). Improvised explosive devices and unexploded ordnance were the leading causes of civilian harm.

31. Between 1 January and 31 March, the country task force on monitoring and reporting verified 315 grave violations against 165 children. Killing and maiming remained the most prevalent violations committed against children, representing 85 per cent of all verified violations.

32. UNAMA continued to document extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture and ill-treatment carried out by the de facto authorities against former government officials and members of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. UNAMA documented at least four extrajudicial killings, at least 63 arbitrary arrests and detentions and at least 12 instances of torture and ill-treatment during the period. Human rights violations carried out by the de facto authorities against individuals accused of affiliation with armed resistance groups, primarily the National Resistance Front, and with ISIL-K were documented during the period, among which were at least six extrajudicial killings, at least 127 arbitrary arrests and detentions and at least eight instances of torture and ill-treatment.

33. On 5 May, UNAMA issued a report on corporal punishment and the death penalty in Afghanistan.¹ The report found that one public execution and at least 43 public floggings had taken place between 13 November 2022 and 30 April 2023. On 4 May, in a video published by the de facto Supreme Court, de facto Deputy Chief Justice Sheikh Abdul Malik Haqqani stated that the leadership of the de facto authorities had advised all courts that decisions regarding *qisas* and *hudud* punishments should be made carefully, according to the principles of sharia, and submitted for “leadership approval” prior to implementation. He also stated that since the establishment of Islamic courts across the country, de facto courts had issued approximately 175 sentences of *qisas* punishment, 79 sentences of *diyah* (blood money), 37 sentences of stoning, 4 sentences of collapsing a wall onto the convicted person, 103 *hudud* punishments and 1,562 *tazir* punishments.

34. Civil society activists, in particular for speaking up about the rights of women and girls, faced arbitrary arrests. On 11 February in Kabul, women’s rights activist Nargis Sadat was arrested by the de facto authorities, reportedly in connection with her advocacy. She was released on 10 April. Between 6 and 8 March, in Kabul and Ghor Provinces, women-led protests against restrictions on women were dispersed by the de facto authorities. On 26 March in Kabul, 25 women organized a protest in which they demanded their rights to education and work. The protest was dispersed by the de facto security forces and resulted in the arrest of four women who were released the following day. On 27 March in Kabul, Matiullah Wesa, head of PenPath, a civil society organization campaigning for the reopening of girls’ schools, was arrested by officials of the de facto General Directorate of Intelligence. Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid stated in a media interview that Mr. Wesa had been detained for investigation in relation to “suspicious information about him” and for “organizing meetings and making contacts that were a cause of concern”. At the time of writing, he remains in custody.

35. The de facto authorities continued to interfere with the work of media actors. In February, telecom networks were ordered to block the Persian and Pashto websites of Voice of America and Azadi Radio. On 14 February, in Kabul, the de facto security forces raided a television station for unknown reasons. The de facto Ministry of Information and Culture introduced guidelines for those who run YouTube channels, including the requirement to obtain a licence and pay a business tax every three years.

36. The de facto Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice and its provincial departments continued to enforce existing restrictive measures, such as for barber shops. The de facto Ministry restrictions on 14 February and 21 March included prohibition against celebrating Saint Valentine’s Day and Nowruz (Persian New Year). Special measures were enforced for the month of Ramadan, including shops’ closure during prayer times (in northern Balkh and Kunduz Provinces), and prohibition of women from entering restaurants with gardens (western Herat Province). The de facto authorities declared 21 April as Eid al-Fitr, which was the last day of Ramadan under the Shia calendar. On 21 April, in Daikundi, de facto department staff and police forced Shia followers to break their fast at vehicle checkpoints.

37. The situation of women’s and girls’ human rights and freedoms further deteriorated. On 21 March, while primary and secondary schools in cold climate provinces reopened for a new academic year, girls’ secondary schools across Afghanistan remained closed. According to the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, the recent edicts banning women and girls from all education beyond the primary level, access to parks, gyms and public baths and

¹ UNAMA Human Rights, “Corporal punishment and the death penalty in Afghanistan”, 5 May 2023. Available at <https://unama.unmissions.org/corporal-punishment-and-death-penalty-afghanistan>.

working for non-governmental organizations and the United Nations deepen existing flagrant violations of women's human rights, already among the most draconian in the world. The violations of the rights of women and girls, in their totality, are increasing their risk of exposure to violence and abuse and have serious physical and mental health implications, in addition to having a negative impact on the economy and the delivery of vital humanitarian services. A letter from the de facto Ministry of Education circulated on social media on 21 March stated that "for now [only] girls' schools ... from grade one to six" would be reopened. Similarly, while the new academic year for universities commenced from 6 March, women were not permitted to resume their studies following the de facto authorities' suspension of university education for women on 20 December 2022.

38. Women-operated organizations were targeted by the de facto authorities. For example, on 7 April, in Herat Province, the de facto Ministry of Economy informed Voice of Women Organization, a local women-led non-governmental organization, of a decision by the Taliban leader to shut down operations of the organization for its alleged conducting of activities outside its mandate, an accusation that the organization denied. The de facto Ministry instructed its personnel to seize the assets of the non-governmental organization in all 14 provinces in which it operated.

39. Incidents were reported of violence against women and girls, ranging from murder and honour killings to forced marriages and beatings, leading to an increase in reported injuries, disabilities and suicides. In response, the Spotlight Initiative deployed mobile psychosocial counselling teams in the provinces of Herat, Kandahar and Paktia, trained over 700 civil society frontline workers on gender-based violence response and sensitized over 58,000 people, including 20,000 youth, on the rights of women and girls, the consequences of child marriage and gender-based violence prevention. The de facto authorities continued to use a combination of formal and informal justice mechanisms to address civil and criminal matters, including reported cases of violence against women and girls. These mechanisms are non-uniform and do not address concerns over women's access to justice.

40. In April, UNAMA, UN-Women and the International Organization for Migration consulted Afghan women on their current situation, including on the recent severe restrictions on Afghan women working for the United Nations. In total, 350 women from diverse backgrounds were consulted across 20 provinces. Almost all Afghan women consulted (98 per cent) said that the restrictions on education and employment had a negative effect on women and girls. Consultations highlighted that the ban and severe restrictions on women working for non-governmental organizations and the United Nations, respectively, have a negative impact on households and communities. Some 80 per cent of women noted a decrease in income generating activities in the last three months. Women's unemployment has further exacerbated their situation in the home, increasing the use of negative coping strategies (such as child labour, child marriage and displacement), decreasing their influence in decision-making, worsening relationships with male family members and increasing the likelihood of domestic violence. Above all, Afghan women depicted a deep mental health crisis and social rupture. Their plea was for the international community not to abandon them to their fate but to make women's rights the key marker for all decision-making on engagement in Afghanistan.

41. As of 5 April, following the Taliban's severe restrictions on Afghan women working for the United Nations, UNAMA paused its technical advice and awareness-raising sessions provided to the de facto Office of Prison Administration and provincial prisons and its engagement with detainees in several prisons, including Pul-e-Charkhi prison in Kabul, which required male and female national staff.

42. Notwithstanding continued efforts to reduce the incarcerated population, from mid-March, approximately 800 of an estimated 2,000 detainees due to return from the Islamic Republic of Iran were admitted to Afghan prisons, further straining the prison system. Financial constraints and halted donor funding continued to have a significant impact on the ability of the de facto Office of Prison Administration to meet international standards, including the systematic provision of adequate food and hygiene supplies, vocational education and training, and health care.

IV. Economic development, donor coordination and aid effectiveness

43. Reported revenue and trade performance remained relatively strong during the reporting period. Available data indicate that State revenue during fiscal year 1401 (ending in March 2023) reached approximately \$2.2 billion, with a tax-to-projected gross domestic product ratio of 13.8 per cent. Revenue collection relied primarily on taxes collected at borders (amounting to approximately 55 per cent of overall revenue). Non-tax sources account for 51 per cent of domestic revenues, driven in part by coal extraction and exports, mainly to Pakistan. On 17 April, the de facto authorities announced the extension of a tax reduction for small businesses, from 1.5 to 0.5 per cent. They launched a national survey on tax laws on 3 May and announced 27 measures, including some additional tax cuts or exemptions for specific industrial, commercial, agricultural and educational sectors, on 15 May.

44. Unofficial customs data indicate that exports reached \$1.9 billion in 2022, against an annual average of \$0.8 billion during 2019–2021 and \$0.5 billion in the first quarter of 2023, a 7 per cent increase compared with the first quarter of 2022. The same data indicate that imports stood at \$1.8 billion, a 32 per cent increase. Export increases were driven by coal (26 per cent, with a 23 per cent overall share) and textiles (28 per cent, with a 15 per cent overall share). Pakistan and India remain the largest export markets of Afghanistan (accounting for 60 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively, of total exports), while the Islamic Republic of Iran remains the most significant import country of origin (22 per cent), followed by Pakistan (18 per cent), China (15 per cent) and the United Arab Emirates (13 per cent). The trade deficit widened in the first quarter of 2023 to \$1.3 billion, a growth of 45 per cent on a year-over-year basis.

45. Between 4 February and 18 April 2023, the Afghan currency appreciated by 5.4 per cent against the United States dollar. Inflationary pressures eased substantially, from 18.3 per cent year on year in July 2022 to 3.5 per cent in February 2023. The Central Bank announced an easing of withdrawal limits for individuals and corporations on 3 April.

46. The report entitled *Afghanistan Socio-economic Outlook 2023*, the second report on the subject published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and issued in April 2023, illustrates the continued fragility of the Afghan economy and the criticality of foreign aid. Per capita expenditures of about 85 per cent of the population are below the 2020 poverty line (see p. 18 of the UNDP report). The report notes the adverse impact on economic prospects of work and education restrictions for women and girls.

47. In a rapid assessment of the International Labour Organization on 8 March 2023, it was noted that the employment-to-population ratio remains nearly 3 percentage points below pre-August 2021 levels. It is estimated that employment in the fourth quarter of 2022 is 450,000 jobs lower than in the second quarter of 2021, with youth and female employment both estimated to be 25 per cent lower, against a 7 per cent decline for men. Home-based self-employment has become the predominant form of

women's participation in the labour market. Restrictions on female secondary and university education enacted in 2022 will further contribute to the disproportionate impact on youth's employment.

48. The private sector continues to face challenges linked to political and legal uncertainty, including with respect to international banking transfers, withdrawal limits, visa issues and access to foreign markets, and unreliable electricity supply. Financial sector challenges have resulted in the heavy reliance of the economy of Afghanistan on informal payment channels.

49. The de facto authorities remain committed to their economic self-reliance agenda, promoting national production for the domestic and export market and prioritizing trade, agriculture, mining, industry and productive infrastructure. Work continued on the 285-km Qush Tepa irrigation canal, whose first phase (108 km) is now over 70 per cent completed. The de facto authorities reported having contracted 80 small-scale mines and two larger-scale mining projects in 2022 and agreements for the construction of plants generating electricity from coal or gas. On 21 February, they announced the inclusion in the budget of 11 projects, including some that had been near completion when they were suspended in August 2021.

50. In March, the United Nations country team resumed to review and finalize the Strategic Framework for Afghanistan for the period 2023–2025, which had been paused following the Taliban ban on Afghan women working for non-governmental organizations in December 2022. The Strategic Framework will provide a longer-term planning horizon, while adapting to evolving needs and restrictions and prioritizing those most vulnerable and marginalized.

51. The United Nations and key donors continued to coordinate on a biweekly basis on aid, through the Afghanistan Coordination Group and associated strategic thematic working groups. The Afghanistan Coordination Group is revisiting its Joint Framework for International Partner Support in Afghanistan (paused in December 2022), which will lay out a collaborative approach to supporting basic human needs of the most vulnerable and at-risk groups in Afghanistan over the period 2023–2025, with the aim of reducing the humanitarian caseload over time. The Strategic Framework and the Afghanistan Coordination Group Joint Framework will be closely aligned.

52. The cash import facility established by the United Nations to support humanitarian operations transferred \$2.59 billion between 1 December 2021 and 15 May 2023. During that time, 19 United Nations entities, funds or programmes, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and 48 approved international non-governmental organizations have accessed the facility. Since the initial easing of bank withdrawal restrictions in June 2022, participating organizations can choose to receive their bank notes at any bank in Afghanistan. The cash delivered has played a key role in stabilizing the Afghan currency and has provided an economic stimulus.

53. The Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan continued to provide integrated support on basic human needs to the most vulnerable communities. The Special Trust Fund worked with humanitarian actors to develop a monitoring mechanism for providing accountability on the response, including on the participation of women. On 13 March, the quarterly Steering Committee meeting was held in Dubai, preceding the quarterly Afghanistan Coordination Group meeting, and it was agreed to proceed with the support to the south-eastern region as its fourth joint regional programme. Some 3.78 million people, 41.4 per cent of whom were women, benefited from the Special Trust Fund in 2022.

54. The United Nations in Afghanistan made progress towards reducing the risk of fraud and diversion of funds. To strengthen the online system of partner and contractor information-sharing, on 17 May, agencies agreed to work on a common

approach to assessing potential implementing partners. The United Nations initiated engagement with donors on a common risk assessment at a joint workshop held on 17 and 18 March with the World Bank and the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan.

55. The de facto authorities exhibited an intent to address climate vulnerabilities and environmental concerns. In late February and early March, they inaugurated tree planting campaigns countrywide and announced plans to plant 40 million saplings across Afghanistan. The de facto National Environmental Protection Agency regularly showcases environmental awareness-raising sessions, particularly in schools. The de facto authorities regularly express concerns over, and request cooperation to address, climate shocks, including intensifying drought, flooding and the erosion of the banks of the Amu Darya river along Afghanistan's northern border.

V. Humanitarian assistance

56. Afghanistan is faced with unprecedented levels of humanitarian, climate and economic crises across all 34 provinces. Following the ban on Afghan female workers in non-governmental organizations on 24 December, rapid surveys by the Gender and Humanitarian Access Working Groups found that 67 per cent of 129 responding organizations reported that female staff were not coming to the office. Some 77 per cent of women-led organizations had either fully or partially ceased their activities and some 54 per cent did not have sufficient funding to continue activities in March 2023. The sector-specific impact of the ban is being monitored regularly by the humanitarian country team. While health, nutrition and education clusters had a broad response reach in the first quarter of 2023 as compared with the same period in 2022, response across other clusters showed either marginal or significant declines. Bureaucratic impediments and funding delays are contributing factors.

57. Gaining access to women in need has become increasingly challenging, specifically in the context of humanitarian assessments and monitoring. While some level of female engagement in assessments and monitoring is ongoing, the frequency of these activities has been affected owing to stops and checks by authorities and a feeling of lack of safety. Critical components of hygiene promotion and risk communication and community engagement-focused activities have been affected, which is particularly concerning as the country enters its spring season when outbreaks of communicable diseases such as acute watery diarrhoea and cholera are rife. Despite these challenges, the humanitarian community continues to negotiate to expand authorizations. The Humanitarian Response Plan for 2023 received only 9 per cent of the total requirement of \$4.63 billion as of 2 June.

58. Between 1 January and March 2023, 15.8 million people were reached with humanitarian assistance, including 13.5 million people with food and livelihood support, 4 million people with health care, 2.1 million children and nursing mothers with support to prevent and address acute malnutrition, 4 million people with water, sanitation and hygiene assistance, 611,000 children with access to education and education materials, 292,000 people with emergency shelter and household items and 700,000 people with at least one form of protection assistance.

59. Between 6 February and 20 May, the humanitarian community reached 1.35 million people with support to bolster household food security and strengthen resilience, including 147,000 with high-quality locally adapted certified wheat seeds and fertilizers, 717,000 with livestock protection support, 33,600 with backyard poultry production, 252,000 with home gardening vegetable production packages, 45,000 with small farm equipment, 14,000 with cash for work to rehabilitate critical community irrigation infrastructure and 138,000 elderly persons, people with disabilities and women or children who are heads of households with unconditional

or multipurpose cash. More than 150,000 cattle were vaccinated against lumpy skin disease across 97 districts, supporting 72,000 households.

60. In 2023 thus far, there have been 13,349 suspected measles cases (77 per cent were children under 5 years of age). Between 1 January and 20 May, the United Nations vaccinated more than 1 million children against measles across all districts. During the same period, 54,174 cases of acute watery diarrhoea with dehydration (55 per cent affecting children under 5 years of age) were reported. In 2023, two cases of wild poliovirus type 1 were recorded in Afghanistan.

61. The number of conflict-related trauma consultations decreased by 52 per cent between 16 January and 20 May compared with the same period in 2022, with 2,692 people having received conflict-related trauma care, compared with 5,613 in the previous period. Since the beginning of 2023, 214,000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition had been admitted and treated in 3,179 inpatient and outpatient medical facilities. More than 700 mobile health and nutrition teams continued to reach populations in remote areas, providing more than 540,000 consultations every month.

62. Between January and April 2023, a total of 430,993 people were recorded as having crossed into Afghanistan. Of those, 61,640 had been deported and 369,353 made spontaneous returns. Some 106,332 had returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran and 324,661 from Pakistan. Between 16 January and 15 May 2023, more than 265,400 undocumented returning Afghan migrants passed through the four International Organization for Migration reception centres in Herat, Nimroz, Nangarhar and Kandahar. The centres in Herat and Nimroz have not been operational since 30 March and 5 April, respectively, while those in Nangarhar and Kandahar have experienced temporary pauses in operations associated with the severe restrictions on national female staff working for the United Nations. Between January and 10 May, some 2,440 Afghan refugees, mainly from Pakistan (2,235) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (172), returned to Afghanistan under the United Nations voluntary repatriation programme. The pace of refugee returns in 2023 is higher than in the same period in both 2021 and 2022, already surpassing 1,363 refugee returns throughout 2021. Between January and April, the United Nations supported 259,000 internally displaced persons, refugee returnees and host community members in 80 priority areas of return and reintegration throughout Afghanistan.

63. The number of incidents involving interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities remained high, with 299 incidents reported between 6 February and 20 May 2023, compared with 158 during the same period in 2022. During the reporting period, 78 attacks against humanitarian personnel, assets and facilities were recorded, a decrease from 91 incidents documented in the same period in 2022. Furthermore, 118 gender-related incidents were recorded, with some 97 per cent attributed to the de facto authorities and involving, inter alia, interference with programming, incidents at checkpoints, threats against humanitarian workers, assets and facilities, and mahrams (male escorts) required for movement of female staff.

64. The Mine Action Service enabled the survey and clearance of over 9.2 km² of contaminated land, safely removing 8,000 explosive devices, including improvised explosive devices. A total of 39,000 people, including 14,000 women and girls, received explosive ordnance risk education in communities and areas of return.

VI. Counter-narcotics

65. On 8 March 2023, the Taliban issued a decree banning cannabis cultivation in Afghanistan, complementing the earlier edict of 3 April 2022 prohibiting narcotics cultivation including opium poppy. Reportedly, the price of high-quality cannabis

resin increased by 10 per cent after the latest ban was issued. Some field reports indicate much reduced opium poppy cultivation across the country and the eradication of opium poppy fields being largely carried out. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) continues to monitor opium cultivation in Afghanistan.

66. The ban on drug trafficking has not been fully implemented and opium is still being traded across the country. According to unconfirmed reports, some opium markets have been relocated from prominent spots along main roads to more discreet locations to minimize visibility.

67. Amid the continued ban on narcotics, the average national prices for dry and fresh opium at farms continue to be high, at about \$335 and \$202 per kg, respectively, more than four times the price of dry opium in July 2021. Opium prices in United States dollars have stabilized in the last five months; however, fluctuations in exchange with other national currencies have affected the drug markets. The de facto authorities have prohibited the production and trade of methamphetamine and stated that they are cracking down on all associated activities, including the destruction of confiscated materials. Nevertheless, reports from the ground suggest that illicit activities related to these controlled substances, such as production and trade, persist. Seizures in nearby countries suggest that some of these activities continue to extend across borders. On 8 March, the de facto Deputy Minister of Counter Narcotics encouraged regional countries to cooperate on combating drug and precursor chemicals trafficking, money-laundering and illicit financial flows to traffickers and to tackle opium poppy cultivation by providing alternative livelihood to farmers.

68. Since February, the UNODC alternative development programme had reached more than 2,375 households, of which 47 per cent are female-headed households (a total of 16,625 beneficiaries) in Helmand, Kandahar, Nangarhar, and Laghman Provinces, which is a small proportion of the poppy-reliant farmers in need in these provinces. The programme supported farmers, including those lacking resources and skills, with improved vegetable production, poultry farming, cereal crop production, animal husbandry and dairy processing and by connecting beneficiaries to the local markets supporting improved access to food and transition to licit alternative livelihoods.

69. UNODC provided essential medicine, medical equipment, supplementary food packages, and basic hygiene kits to 24 drug treatment centres and seven drop-in centres. These donations will contribute to increased access to evidence-based, human-rights oriented quality drug treatment services for male and female drug users countrywide and to essential food, medical equipment and basic social support in four prisons, in Kabul, Kandahar, Helmand and Nimroz Provinces, including for children and infants in prison settings.

VII. Mission support

70. As of 30 April, vacancy rates in UNAMA were 10 per cent for international staff, 9 per cent for United Nations Volunteers, 17 per cent for National Professional Officers and 12 per cent for national staff, compared with approved rates of 9 per cent, 10 per cent, 4 per cent and 4 per cent. The proportion of female staff was 32 per cent for international staff, 38 per cent for United Nations Volunteers, 8 per cent for National Professional Officers and 8 per cent for national staff. The national United Nations Volunteers programme remains a critical pipeline for young Afghan women wishing to join the United Nations workforce. The Mission has taken measures to mitigate the additional hardship faced by national female personnel who are telecommuting. The UNAMA office in Almaty remained available for use.

VIII. Observations

71. For 22 months, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan has maintained internal stability, albeit with the use of repressive measures, and managed its economy, albeit at a low equilibrium level, while retaining its hold on power. While the de facto authorities' cabinet seat remains in Kabul, overarching policy decisions are attributed to and emanate from the leader in Kandahar. Implementation is monitored at the national and subnational levels, at the latter level through appointed shuras. The de facto cabinet continues to report success in the collection of revenues.

72. The Taliban have put forward an economic policy based on self-reliance. However, the ability to address the bulk of humanitarian needs is still highly dependent on international donors. The attendant currency inflow has been instrumental in averting a much more dire economic and humanitarian situation as well as the complete collapse of the economy. While the authorities report progress in the destruction of illicit crops, they have not identified or secured alternative livelihoods for farmers. Nor has there been progress in addressing the increasing trade in synthetic illicit drugs. Environmental shocks and climate vulnerability continue to exacerbate humanitarian needs and may increasingly challenge agriculture-based economic growth prospects and introduce challenges to domestic and regional peace and security.

73. As I have previously stated, the present situation is not sustainable. The Taliban leadership have further exacerbated the situation through their increased restrictions, abuses and violations of human rights, particularly those of women and girls. Donors are faced with a moral and ethical dilemma against a backdrop of competing demands for the very same aid funds in other regions. The United Nations has been challenged by the fact that contrary to the fundamental principles of the Organization and the Charter of the United Nations, the Taliban are largely excluding women from public life and service. Afghan society can only be the poorer for it, and these actions by the Taliban will invariably hold the nation back from reaching its full potential.

74. In its resolution [2681 \(2023\)](#) of 27 April 2023, the Security Council condemned the decision by the Taliban to ban Afghan women from working for the United Nations in Afghanistan. A common concern that I heard voiced in the meeting of the special envoys on Afghanistan in Doha was that the Taliban have placed unacceptable limitations on the work of the United Nations and its principles. I have been calling and will continue to call for the reversal of these unacceptable policies. Our commitment to helping the Afghan people remains strong. The effect of the severe restrictions on our operations is under constant review, as we make every effort to urge the authorities to revoke these discriminatory measures. One thing is clear, however: no female national employees of the United Nations will be replaced by men.

75. Despite relative security, serious concerns remain over the presence of foreign terrorist groups in Afghanistan. ISIL-K, a terrorist threat to the wider world, Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan and other foreign terrorist groups continue to be present on the territory of Afghanistan. Absent meaningful and inclusive sustainable development, there remains a risk that the allure of some of these extremist groups could grow.

76. The desire of the Taliban to be a part of the global community will require the Taliban to take tangible steps to protect and promote human rights. This means, among other things, ensuring inclusive governance and decision-making on matters that affect daily life. Allowing freedom of expression, including dissent, without fear of arbitrary arrests, in particular of those who speak out against the discriminatory, repressive treatment of women and girls, is crucial. I am also deeply alarmed by the

fact that judicial corporal punishments continued to be carried out by the de facto authorities.

77. The approach of the United Nations to humanitarian assistance is inseparable from the rights of recipients. Given the scale of needs and the largest humanitarian crisis in the world, assistance will continue to be provided to those who are most vulnerable. In providing this assistance, we will continue to conduct monitoring to ensure that programmes are delivered in an inclusive manner, including through the continued provision of assistance by women for women.

78. In the political, human rights and security spheres, my Special Representative and her staff continue to intensively engage with the Taliban and representatives of a broad cross-section of society in an effort to improve the situation of the Afghan people.

79. I extend my deep appreciation to all United Nations personnel in Afghanistan, under the leadership of my Special Representative, Roza Otunbayeva, and to non-governmental organization partners for their continued dedication and service under extremely challenging conditions. I look forward to receiving the report of the Special Coordinator pursuant to Security Council resolution [2679 \(2023\)](#).
