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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 [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. In the report, the Secretary-General 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 18 September 2023 ([A/78/361-S/2023/678](#)).

II. Relevant developments

3. At the beginning of their third year in power, the de facto authorities further consolidated their administration in political, security and economic areas and managed internal disagreements over key governance issues and community grievances. While ignoring calls for greater inclusivity, they increased outreach efforts towards the population, including by the Taliban leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada. Women's rights remained curtailed in all spheres of public life, with no change in the de facto authorities' policies on female education and employment, which included the continued severe restrictions imposed on Afghan female personnel working for the United Nations. UNAMA continued to receive credible allegations of human rights abuses and violations, which it continued to verify, report and engage on with the de facto authorities. Security incidents linked to the armed opposition and attacks by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) continued. The country continued to face unprecedented levels of humanitarian need with over two thirds of its population requiring assistance amid significant shortfalls of funding,



exacerbated by recent large-scale earthquakes in the western region, the large-scale forced return of undocumented Afghans from Pakistan and an uncertain economic outlook, characterized by the significant risk of a downturn.

A. Political developments

4. During the reporting period, the Taliban leadership increased its high-level outreach to a broader range of constituencies, with a stated emphasis on fostering unity and closing the gap between the de facto authorities and the population. The Taliban leader's reported visits to Uruzgan Province on 14 September and Nimroz Province on 21 September represented a break from his domicile in Kandahar. He also reportedly visited two hospitals in Kandahar Province on 19 and 29 September.

5. During the reporting period, de facto Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi continued to undertake outreach meetings during the absence from duties of de facto Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Kabir. Most outreach by de facto officials was conducted subnationally through the de facto Ministries of Education, Higher Education, the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, Tribal and Border Affairs and Information and Culture. In addition to the focus on subnational governance, several key de facto officials met with representatives from the Shia Hazara and Sikh populations, who were allocated seats in the Kabul Municipality. However, women were largely excluded from those outreach activities, and key issues such as a pathway towards more inclusivity and female education and employment were not explicitly addressed in the outreach.

6. In response to the large-scale earthquake in Herat Province on 7 October, several senior Taliban leaders visited the affected districts, including de facto Deputy Prime Ministers Hanafi and Abdul Ghani Baradar, and the de facto Ministers for Defence and for Public Health. In addition, the Taliban leader sent a delegation to deliver a message of support to the affected population.

7. Responding to the announced forced returns of undocumented Afghans from Pakistan, on 26 October the Taliban leader established the de facto High Commission for Returnees, led by de facto Deputy Prime Minister Hanafi and including 31 high-ranking de facto officials, to address the challenges related to Afghan returnees. In less than a week, the de facto authorities set up most of the decreed structures and launched an "all-of-government" approach to address the mass returns from Pakistan. The response plan also designated 12 subcommittees to deal with a range of related issues, including transport, health, education, employment, land and shelter. The de facto Ministry of Defence has been playing a central role in the response by transporting returnees to their provinces of origin. Besides registration, medical care and the issuance of national identity cards, the de facto authorities also provided cash grants to returnee families. As part of a larger institutional response, the de facto authorities announced the establishment of a committee to defend the rights of all Afghan refugees.

8. During the reporting period, the Taliban leader and the de facto Prime Minister, Mohammad Hasan Akhund, continued to appoint individuals seen as loyal to the leadership. At the national level, this included the appointment of a new second vice-governor of the de facto Central Bank, Mohammad Akhund, on 22 October. Subnational appointments included: 6 de facto provincial governors, 4 deputy provincial governors, 2 provincial capital mayors, at least 35 subnational directors and 9 provincial judges. At least 40 national directors within de facto ministries were reshuffled. In the security sector, six new provincial chiefs of police, two deputy chiefs of police, four new provincial chiefs of the de facto General Directorate of Intelligence and one corps commander were appointed. On 19 September, the de facto

Chief of Police of Kabul Province reshuffled 26 positions under his authority. Across various ministries and municipalities, the de facto authorities have launched professional and technical training sessions focused on strengthening administrative capacities.

9. The political opposition in exile remained fragmented but became more active in challenging the Taliban on domestic and foreign affairs issues. During the reporting period, it held internal meetings in advance of planned meetings in Moscow, Dushanbe and Vienna from late November to early December.

10. The governance framework remained undercodified. On 17 September, the de facto authorities' spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid, assured the population that the de facto authorities' approval of a constitution would address some of the existing governance challenges. In reaction, Shia clerics expressed fears that the ongoing process would not address their interests. The spokesperson also announced on 29 September that the budget was being distributed to de facto ministries and provincial administrations, without specifying budget figures or a midterm review.

11. In September, de facto officials announced the establishment of provincial ulama shuras (councils) in Bamyan, Daykundi, Ghor, Logar, Wardak and Nuristan Provinces, thereby completing their establishment in all 34 provinces and bolstering the local conflict resolution capacity in some of them. None, including those in the predominantly Shia-populated provinces of Bamyan and Daykundi, include Shia or female members. On 20 September, the Afghanistan Shia Ulama Council called on the de facto authorities to review the membership of the recently announced shuras. Shia representatives in other provinces also requested Shia representation in their provincial ulama shuras.

12. The education narrative shifted away from female access to secondary and tertiary education towards an emphasis on eliminating the gap between religious and modern education. On 6 November the de facto Minister for Foreign Affairs, Amir Khan Motaqi, stated in a media interview that the issue of female education was being assessed by the de facto Ministries of Education and Higher Education. The de facto authorities continued to promote madrasas as an important element of their education programme. The de facto Minister for Education made public appearances throughout Afghanistan, emphasizing the teaching of both modern and religious studies in public schools and madrasas to eliminate the gap between them. Provincial de facto authorities initiated the construction of new madrasas for both male and female students, with more planned in the future, but with girls remaining restricted to primary-level education at schools.

13. The de facto authorities continued to reshape the modern education system, providing new learning opportunities for Taliban members and restricting opportunities for women and girls. The de facto Ministry of Education is reportedly in the process of reassigning male and female teachers previously employed at the teacher training centres abolished in July to other departments, schools and madrasas. On 4 September, the de facto national examination authority announced the results of the country's annual university entrance exam. None of the participating 84,234 high school graduates were female.

14. According to the de facto authorities, salaries of all civil servants, including women ordered to remain at home, continued to be paid. The de facto Ministry for Martyrs and Disabled Affairs announced in early September that it had processed payments for the families of martyrs and disabled persons of the Republic and de facto authority periods, though pensions of retired Republic-era government employees remained unpaid.

15. Between 7 and 13 September, the Supervision Board of the de facto Ministry of Justice's Directorate of Defence Lawyers reportedly inspected 83 law firms in Kabul City, closed 10 of them for allegedly operating illegally and issued summonses to their proprietors. On 10 September, the de facto High Directorate of Supervision and Prosecution of Decrees and Edicts issued a circular directing its provincial offices to report violations of a decree that prohibits nepotism within the de facto institutions. Nevertheless, the terms of the circular allowed de facto officials to employ their relatives in specific roles, including as cooks, drivers and bodyguards.

16. From 18 August to 30 October, UNAMA facilitated 45 outreach meetings in 16 provinces on governance-related issues, including on human rights and service delivery. The meetings gathered de facto authorities, civil society organizations, the media, youth and other community members. Together with local members of the ulama and tribal elders, the de facto authorities had mediated 10 local disputes throughout Afghanistan since 18 September. UNAMA observed 117 meetings conducted by local de facto authorities with communities, including on local needs and inter-tribal tensions. Youth voiced concern over the lack of employment opportunities, and representatives of civil society over the shrinking civic space and intimidation of civil society organizations, the media and female workers. Between 5 October and 6 November, UNAMA also supported a local civil society organization in the facilitation of six dialogue events on the impacts of climate change in Afghanistan and possible solutions.

B. Security

17. Between 1 August and 22 October, the number of conflict-related security incidents was consistent with the same period in 2022. The United Nations recorded 1,414 security-related incidents, a 2 per cent increase from the 1,384 incidents recorded during the same period in 2022. Available data indicate that armed clashes decreased by 41 per cent, from 104 to 61 incidents; detonations from improvised explosive devices by 72 per cent, from 65 to 18; and assassinations by 50 per cent, from 74 to 37. The north-eastern, western and eastern regions accounted for 49 per cent of recorded incidents, with Herat, Kabul, Kunduz and Nangarhar the most affected provinces. Arrests by the de facto authorities increased by 25 per cent compared with the same period in 2022.

18. The armed opposition posed no challenge to the Taliban for territorial control during the reporting period. Compared with the same period in 2022, actual attacks on the de facto authorities were fewer in number, despite an increase in the number of claimed attacks by groups on social media. The Afghanistan Freedom Front was the most active group during the reporting period, although its attacks remained small in scale, while the National Resistance Front was much less active than in 2022, carrying out no attacks in its traditional stronghold of Panjshir. Four additional armed political opposition groups announced their existence during the reporting period – the Afghanistan National Guard Front, the National Mobilization Front, the National Battle Front and the Afghanistan United Front – with no attacks claimed by the latter two groups.

19. During the reporting period, attacks claimed by or attributed to ISIL-K decreased, though there has been an uptick since the second half of October. Between 1 August and 7 November, the United Nations recorded 8 ISIL-K attacks in three provinces, compared with 27 attacks in six provinces during the same period in 2022. The group continued to target the Taliban and civilians, particularly the Shia community, conducting an attack on a Shia place of worship in Pul-e Khumri (Baghlan) on 13 October, on a sports club in the Shia-majority area of Dasht-e Barchi (Kabul City) on 26 October, and on a bus in the same area on 7 November. ISIL-K

propaganda continued to appear online in an expanded range of languages, and the group's attempts to recruit foreign nationals and Afghan citizens continued.

20. Tensions leading to security incidents along the country's borders continued, mostly between Afghanistan and Pakistan. On 6 September, an exchange of fire between border guards over the construction of a border post near the Torkham border crossing killed 6 and wounded 12, leading to the crossing's closure until 15 September. On 4 October, Pakistani border forces and de facto security forces exchanged fire at the Chaman border crossing, killing two civilians and wounding three. The cross-border activities of the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) heightened these tensions, particularly following a series of attacks in the Chitral District (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province) of Pakistan by TTP affiliates who entered Pakistan from Afghanistan in early September. Several exchanges of fire between TTP members and Pakistani forces across the border took place in Paktiya, and Pakistani forces fired mortars across the border into Kunar on at least seven occasions during the reporting period.

21. The circulation of weapons, ammunition and explosives remained a security concern within Afghanistan and for Member States in the region. UNAMA continued its engagement on the issue of small arms and light weapons, meeting de facto officials in Kabul, Kunduz and Badakhshan and representatives of regional Member States to support efforts to address the issue. The de facto security forces reported seizures of trafficked weapons and weapons belonging to members of the former Afghan National Defence and Security Forces in 14 provinces.

22. Between 1 August and 22 October, the United Nations documented 24 incidents directly affecting its personnel, including 11 cases of intimidation, 4 crime-related incidents, 1 arrest and 8 other incidents affecting United Nations compounds and property. This represents a decrease from the 27 incidents recorded during the same period in 2022.

C. Regional cooperation

23. Regional actors continued bilateral and multilateral engagements on Afghanistan. On 31 August, a delegation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation met de facto Deputy Prime Minister Kabir and the de facto Minister for Foreign Affairs in Kabul. The delegation reportedly advised the de facto authorities to use the experience of the Islamic world in all fields, including on female education and employment.

24. On 29 September, a Moscow format meeting on Afghanistan was held in Kazan, Russian Federation, with China, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as members and Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates as guests. A delegation led by the de facto Minister for Foreign Affairs also attended. The subsequent "Kazan Declaration" acknowledged the de facto authorities' efforts to combat drug-related crimes and terrorism and the overall security improvement in Afghanistan, while expressing concerns about restrictions on female employment and education and calling for efforts to forge a broad-based, inclusive government.

25. Trade and transit continue to feature prominently on the regional agenda. Between 4 and 10 November, a high-level delegation led by de facto Deputy Prime Minister Baradar visited the Islamic Republic of Iran to discuss economic and political ties. On 7 October, the de facto Minister for Foreign Affairs attended the third Trans-Himalaya Forum in China. He reiterated the potential of Afghanistan as a regional centre of economic connectivity and the potential of the Wakhan corridor to

connect Afghanistan and China. On the margins of the Forum, he met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, Wang Yi, who stated that China was willing to help Afghanistan in developing its relations with neighbouring countries and with regional economic cooperation, while expressing the hope that the de facto authorities would take measures on counter-terrorism. He also met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, Jalil Abbas Jilani, who agreed to resolve any problems between the two countries based on dialogue and understanding. On 18 October, the de facto Minister for Commerce and Industry, Nooruddin Azizi, participated in the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing and requested the formal integration of Afghanistan into the Belt and Road Initiative. In addition, the head of the de facto Afghan Railway Authority visited the Islamic Republic of Iran from 28 August to 2 September, and visited the Russian Federation on 25 and 26 October to attend the Astrakhan International Forum on the International North-South Transport Corridor, to discuss railway connectivity.

26. An Uzbek high-level delegation led by Deputy Prime Minister Jamshid Khodjaev visited Kabul on 28 and 29 October to discuss economic ties. On 15 September, the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, proposed a joint working group to study the impacts of the Qush Tepah canal on water resources in Central Asia. The de facto authorities reported on the launch of new trade routes, including an air corridor between Kabul and Shanghai, China, on 8 October, and a hybrid corridor between Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China after a pilot project was implemented in late 2022.

27. On 13 September, the new Chinese ambassador to Afghanistan, Zhao Xing, presented his diplomatic credentials to the de facto Prime Minister. On 27 October, the de facto Ministry of Foreign Affairs designated Badrudin Haqqani as the de facto Chargé d'affaires of the embassy in the United Arab Emirates. The Taliban spokesperson reported a total of 17 appointments of de facto chargé d'affaires at Afghan embassies abroad since August 2021, noting the provision of consular services. During the reporting period, consular services also reportedly resumed in Malaysia, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Spain.

28. On 24 October, the Islamabad-based Center for Research and Security Studies organized a virtual international conference entitled "Women's rights in Afghanistan – regional perspectives and role of Islamic world" featuring women leaders from Afghanistan, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The conference emphasized the importance of including women in decision-making processes for peace and prosperity.

29. UNAMA continued to engage the de facto authorities on regional cooperation and hosted regular coordination meetings with Kabul-based ambassadors. From 6 to 8 November, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Roza Otunbayeva, participated in an international conference entitled "Women in Islam: status and empowerment", organized by the Organization for Islamic Cooperation in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. UNAMA also continued its cooperation with the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia and attended the annual meeting of deputy foreign ministers of Central Asian countries, organized by the Centre and held in Bishkek on 27 and 28 November.

III. Human rights

30. Unexploded ordnance and deliberate attacks employing improvised explosive devices remained the key contributors to civilian harm in Afghanistan. During the reporting period, UNAMA documented at least 190 civilian casualties (65 killed, 125 wounded). Among the casualties were 53 children (26 killed, 27 wounded), with most

child deaths and injuries caused by unexploded ordnance. Three attacks targeting the Shia community in Kabul and Baghlan Provinces, all claimed by ISIL-K, caused the majority of civilian casualties during the reporting period (39 killed, 87 wounded).

31. Between 1 July and 30 September, the country task force on monitoring and reporting on children and armed conflict documented at least 400 grave violations against at least 120 children (approximately 100 boys and 20 girls). The most prevalent violations included incidents of denial of humanitarian assistance, killing and maiming, mostly due to explosive ordnance, and recruitment and use.

32. Following the issuance of the Mission's report on human rights violations against former government officials and former Afghan National Defence and Security Forces members on 22 August, de facto Deputy Prime Minister Hanafi said, with regard to the amnesty, that any act of revenge was considered a crime and perpetrators would be prosecuted. However, during the reporting period, UNAMA documented at least 10 extrajudicial killings, 21 arbitrary arrests and detentions and eight instances of torture and ill-treatment of former government officials and members of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. UNAMA also recorded four extrajudicial killings, 79 arbitrary arrests and detentions and 15 instances of torture and ill-treatment of individuals accused of affiliation with the National Resistance Front and ISIL-K.

33. The de facto authorities continued to implement public judicial corporal punishment. UNAMA recorded public floggings of at least 24 men and 4 women. On 17 September, in Zabul Province, eight men and one woman were lashed between 20 and 39 times and sentenced to between five and six years of imprisonment by the de facto court, after being found guilty of offences including illicit and/or immoral relationships, adultery, robbery and theft.

34. The de facto authorities continued to use arbitrary arrests and detentions, the forced closure of media outlets and censorship to restrain dissenting opinions. In September and October, the de facto General Directorate of Intelligence arrested three members of the Spontaneous Movement of Afghan Women and their relatives. They remain in detention with no charges being brought against them. In September, in Daykundi Province, the de facto General Directorate of Intelligence arrested three media workers of Radio Nasim on allegations of spreading propaganda against the de facto authorities and suspended the operation of the station. The media workers were released and rearrested on 7 October. Two of them were released on 18 October and the third on 23 October on bail. In addition, on 18 October, French-Afghan journalist Mortaza Behboudi was released after more than nine months in detention. On 26 October, the head of the non-governmental organization PenPath, Matiullah Wesa, who campaigned for girls' education and was arrested on 27 March, was released. On 19 September, the Media Violations Commission met to discuss the de facto authorities' plan to evaluate media with political party affiliations.

35. The de facto Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice continued to issue new instructions and enforce existing ones. On 26 August, the de facto Minister announced that women were banned from visiting Band-e Amir National Park in Bamyān Province. Since the August announcement on the prohibition of sorcery, arrests have been documented of those accused of violations.

36. The de facto authorities continued to enforce restrictions against women and girls. Women's access to tertiary education and girls' education beyond grade six remained formally suspended, although anecdotal reports indicate that girls are attending classes in girls' madrasas in some parts of the country, overseen by the de facto Ministry of Education. In September, the de facto Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice announced, in at least two provinces (Khost and Zabul), that women were forbidden to visit local markets or shops without a mahram (male escort).

Beauty salons that continued to operate beyond 25 July, in contravention of the 25 June edict, were the target of harsh responses by the de facto authorities, including assaults on persons and demands that clients wash off their makeup and promise never to visit a salon in the future.

37. On 20 September, UNAMA issued a report on the treatment of detainees in the custody of the de facto Ministry of Interior, the de facto General Directorate of Intelligence and the de facto Office of Prison Administration. According to the report, detainees in the custody of the de facto Ministry of Interior and the de facto General Directorate of Intelligence routinely experienced torture and other forms of ill-treatment in custody, predominantly in connection with the conduct of investigations and the questioning of detainees, with no accountability for perpetrators. In addition, these entities almost systematically violated fundamental legal and procedural safeguards, including forbidding access to lawyers, family, doctors or de facto court judges by detainees while in custody. UNAMA is engaging with each de facto entity on the implementation of its recommendations, including on investigations and accountability. The de facto Ministry of Interior established a committee under the de facto Office of the Minister to review the findings and consider the implementation of the recommendations of the report.

38. Notwithstanding continued efforts to reduce the incarcerated population, by mid-October, the de facto Office of Prison Administration reported a population of just over 17,000 detainees, surpassing the 10,000 ceiling that it had sought to maintain since mid-2022. Financial constraints and discontinued donor funding continued to have an impact on the ability of the de facto Office of Prison Administration to meet international standards, including the systematic provision of adequate food and hygiene supplies, vocational education and training, and health needs.

39. In early November, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNAMA convened consultations and individual tele-surveys that reached 392 Afghan women across 32 provinces. For Afghan women, reversing the restrictions on the education of women and girls continued to be the top priority, followed by improvements in income opportunities and the economy. Education and employment were seen as key to reversing declining mental and physical health outcomes associated with poverty, early and child marriage, child labour, domestic violence and migration. The women consulted emphasized the positive impact that education levels and employment had in improving their position and influence on household and community-wide decision-making. They believed that the United Nations and international representatives who worked at the local level were best placed to advocate directly to the de facto authorities and called on them to continue advocating for the removal of all restrictions on women and girls to the de facto authorities. They also requested that international actors link international aid to improved conditions for women and facilitate opportunities for Afghan women to speak directly to the de facto authorities. In addition, they highlighted the importance of focusing on practical strategies to increase their political participation, including through legal protections, economic empowerment and the reinstatement of women in the civil service.

IV. Economic development, donor coordination and aid effectiveness

40. The economic situation remained uncertain and fragile. According to the October 2023 edition of the World Bank publication entitled “Afghanistan development update”, the Afghan economy contracted by 6.2 per cent in 2022,

following a 20.7 per cent contraction in 2021. Midterm projections foresaw stagnation or further contraction with persistent widespread poverty, and noted the decreased domestic demand and significant downside risks, including reductions in aid levels.

41. State revenue for the first seven months of the current fiscal year, starting on 21 March, totalled around \$1.5 billion (Af 105 billion), a marginal increase of 1.2 per cent compared with the same period in 2022 and 5.0 per cent short of targets. The trade deficit increased to \$4.4 billion, even as the afghani had appreciated by 12.7 per cent against the United States dollar since July. The increasing deficit reflected continuously rising imports, which reached \$5.7 billion, a 27 per cent growth compared with the same period in 2022. Exports amounted to \$1.3 billion, a slight decrease of 0.5 per cent compared with the same period in 2022. Year-on-year inflation reached a deflation of -9.1 per cent in September.

42. There were indications of a marginal improvement in household incomes and expenditures from July to September due largely to humanitarian response efforts and decreasing food costs. However, income poverty has an impact on half of the population. Data from July to September collected by the World Bank suggested that 89 per cent of the surveyed population identified food as their biggest need. The surge in the labour force exceeded the slackening demand, leading to a twofold rise in unemployment and a 25 per cent increase in underemployment.

43. The banking sector improved slightly following increased deposits, but faced profitability, liquidity and instability concerns and the loss of corresponding banking relationships. Most transactions were conducted through informal channels. The microfinance sector continued to contract, with 50 per cent fewer active borrowers since August 2021, adversely affecting women.

44. The de facto authorities continued to pursue domestic and foreign investment. They received a delegation from the Afghan-American Chamber of Commerce from 1 to 6 September and announced the establishment of an interministerial committee on 16 September to support investment. They reported the signature of nine large-scale mining contracts between 31 August and 15 October, for an estimated \$7 billion. De facto Deputy Prime Minister Baradar also inaugurated the construction of the second phase of the Qush Tepah canal on 11 October.

45. Engagement on funding and priorities continued. From 6 to 12 September, the Deputy Special Representative, Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator a.i. visited Berlin and Stockholm to discuss humanitarian and basic human needs and donor priorities and to advocate for basic human needs funding. On 27 and 28 September, the Afghanistan Coordination Group met in Istanbul, Türkiye. Participants noted the lower levels of donor funding commitments for 2024 and the need for medium-term financing for a transition from humanitarian assistance to basic human needs funding, and agreed to mobilize resources by exploring new mechanisms, including climate adaptation funds. The Group acknowledged the need to revitalize the private sector and address climate change resilience as a cross-cutting issue across funding streams.

46. The Steering Committee of the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan met in Istanbul on 25 September, extending its regional joint programmes until 2025 in accordance with the Strategic Framework for Afghanistan for the period 2023–2025. The Special Trust Fund had received \$189.4 million in contributions as at 31 October, and despite challenges, continued to support integrated responses to the basic human needs of the most vulnerable Afghan communities.

47. The cash import facility established by the United Nations to support humanitarian operations, using a transparent, low-cost channel to provide international funding, transferred \$3.23 billion between 1 December 2021 and

15 October 2023 (\$1.4 billion since January 2023), benefiting 19 United Nations entities, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and 55 approved international non-governmental organizations. The cash also continued to indirectly support the stabilization of the Afghan currency.

48. UNAMA continued to coordinate with the de facto Central Bank through technical working groups and discussed, inter alia, international payments, microfinance, Islamic banking and the Afghan Fund. On 30 October, the Afghanistan Microfinance Association, in coordination with UNAMA and other United Nations entities, convened a conference on microfinance in Kabul, attended by the de facto Governor of the Central Bank, the Minister for Commerce and Industry and the Deputy Minister for Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock. The conference gathered all stakeholders to discuss challenges, prospects and opportunities for the sector. United Nations entities presented their contributions and the role they could play in strengthening the sector, as well as in empowering women and fighting poverty.

49. Coordination of the United Nations common risk-management approach continued. On the margins of the Afghanistan Coordination Group meeting on 29 September, the World Bank and the United Nations held their third workshop on joint risk management, also attended by donors, to provide updates and explore collaboration on risk management. On 22 November, the United Nations conducted an inter-agency workshop on enterprise risk management, followed by the biannual update of the common risk assessment on 29 November.

50. Support to mine action coordination, prioritization and information management was paused from 6 April to 2 October while appropriate arrangements were negotiated with the de facto authorities. The project, now known as the Mine Action Technical Cell, subsequently resumed, ensuring that operators worked safely and focused on clearing explosive ordnance that obstructed land use and affected basic human needs. Increased access to previously inaccessible areas has led to an increase in civilian casualties. Children, especially boys, remain the most vulnerable to explosive ordnance, due to riskier behaviour linked to the scrap metal trade. Furthermore, 496 schools and 119 health facilities were identified as being within one kilometre of an explosive hazard, highlighting the requirement for robust and coordinated mine action sector responses.

51. The United Nations made progress in addressing and preventing sexual exploitation and abuse. The Afghanistan network for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse aligned with a working group on accountability to affected people in September to perform evaluations involving 10,000 community members affected by such issues. This enabled the network to develop a research-based and gender-sensitive programme, including a hotline for advice in local languages. A joint mission visited Herat Province from 15 to 20 October to address sexual exploitation and abuse risks in emergency responses while engaging community members and health-care partners.

52. The Spotlight Initiative programme against gender-based violence, set to conclude on 31 December, provided over 100,518 psychosocial support and counselling services from August to October. The United Nations, donors and implementing partners met on 24 and 25 October to develop a concept for continued programming.

V. Humanitarian assistance

53. Afghanistan continued to face unprecedented levels of humanitarian need, with over two thirds of the population requiring assistance in 2023. The situation was

compounded by a deteriorating protection environment and three 6.3 magnitude earthquakes in Herat Province in October, directly affecting more than 150,000 people across multiple districts. Owing to both cultural norms and restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities, women are more likely to stay at home than men. Consequently, according to an analysis by the Gender and Humanitarian Access Working Groups, women represented 58 per cent of adult casualties and 60 per cent of injured persons, as they were inside at the time of the first quake. The effects of the earthquakes risk further eroding women's mental health and overall well-being. Furthermore, thousands of undocumented Afghans have been forcibly returned from Pakistan at both the Torkham and the Spin Boldak border crossings since mid-September. The effects of three consecutive preceding years of drought continued to drive acute food, livelihood and water insecurity amid intensifying climate pressures, despite a marginal respite in food insecurity.

54. Following the December 2022 ban on Afghan women working for non-governmental organizations and the subsequent restrictions on United Nations female national staff imposed in April 2023, the survey by the Gender and Humanitarian Access Working Groups in July found that 20 per cent of 150 responding organizations reported that female staff were still working from home. Some progress was made in resuming women's participation in the field and office, with 45 per cent of women organizations receiving funding since the ban – a 12 per cent increase from the most recent survey in May. However, organizations continued to report administrative impediments to women's participation. The impact varied geographically and affected community engagement and protection services in some areas. Perception surveys of affected communities found that women faced increased difficulty accessing assistance compared with the past two financial quarters. The humanitarian community continued negotiations to reinforce and expand local agreements on exemptions of the ban with the de facto authorities. The United Nations is fostering women's economic empowerment by offering grants, credit facilities, technical assistance and essential resources to more than 18,000 women-led and -owned businesses to fulfil their fundamental human needs.

55. Despite challenges, the humanitarian community is addressing pressing needs by implementing enhanced risk mitigation measures and utilizing common tools to ensure minimum standards for quality programming. However, the revised Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan for 2023, aimed at assisting 21.3 million people across Afghanistan, remained severely underfunded. As at 11 November, the Plan had received only 35 per cent of the required \$3.23 billion. Furthermore, as at 21 November, only \$37.5 million of the initial \$173.6 million earthquake response plan, launched on 16 October and revised on 16 November to support 275,000 earthquake-affected people, had been received. Humanitarian actors reached 242,400 affected people with direct assistance, which rose to 257,800 people when considering the provision to 142 villages of safe drinking water. To address the influx of returnees, the Afghanistan-Pakistan "border consortium appeal" was developed to assist an estimated 720,000 undocumented individuals and 50,000 voluntary repatriations through July 2024.

56. Between January and August, 23.7 million people received humanitarian assistance – although not the full quantities planned that would adequately address their needs, owing to funding constraints. Some 19.5 million people were provided with food and livelihood support; 11.2 million people with health care; 4.3 million children and nursing mothers with support to prevent and address acute malnutrition; 7.6 million people with water, sanitation and hygiene assistance; 2.0 million children with access to education; 486,000 people with emergency shelter and household items; and 1.9 million people with at least one form of protection assistance.

57. Between July and September, more than 1.8 million people benefited from support to household food security, including more than 1 million with home gardening packages; 254,534 with livestock protection support; 117,992 with crop cultivation and alternative livelihood support; 28,308 with backyard poultry production; 15,792 with small farm equipment; 211,561 with cash-for-work to rehabilitate community infrastructure; and 183,064 elderly persons, people with disabilities and women or children who are heads of households with unconditional or multipurpose cash. Emerging threats such as the Moroccan locust outbreak and animal diseases affected the already fragile food security and livelihood situation. Some 1.5 million cattle were vaccinated against lumpy skin disease across 34 provinces, supporting 110,492 households. Moroccan locust surveys were conducted, covering 3,864 hectares of land across 11 provinces.

58. Between 1 January and 21 October, 190,724 cases of acute watery diarrhoea with dehydration (57 per cent in children under the age of 5) were reported, compared with 209,055 cases (55 per cent in children under the age of 5) from May to October 2022. There were 22,408 suspected measles cases (71 per cent in children under the age of 5), compared with 71,090 suspected cases (78 per cent in children under the age of 5) during the same period in 2022. Between January and September, the United Nations vaccinated more than 2 million children against measles across all districts. In 2023, six cases of wild poliovirus type 1 were recorded, compared with two cases in 2022.

59. The number of conflict-related trauma consultations decreased by 24 per cent between July and September compared with the same period in 2022, with 2,624 people having received trauma care compared with 3,468 in the previous period. Between January and September, more than 553,700 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition were admitted and treated in 128 in-patient and 3,168 out-patient medical facilities. Around 400 mobile health and nutrition teams reached populations in remote areas, providing around 350,000 consultations every month.

60. Between 22 July and 7 November, 551,460 people entered Afghanistan – 352,440 from the Islamic Republic of Iran and 199,020 from Pakistan. Between 22 June and 6 November, more than 294,800 undocumented returning Afghan migrants passed through IOM reception centres in Herat, Nimroz, Nangarhar and Kandahar. More than 228,900 of those trying to return to Afghanistan had been pushed back from its borders, and over 322,500 had made spontaneous returns. Since 15 September, coinciding with an announcement by Pakistan of a policy targeting the deportation of undocumented Afghans, more than 370,000 returnees, mainly spontaneous but also forcibly returned, have been recorded from Pakistan. The daily average of returnees surged from less than 200 people in early October to some 20,000 by early November before stabilizing at approximately 5,000. About 70 per cent of the returns are through the Torkham crossing point, while the remaining 30 per cent are through the Chaman crossing point.

61. About 60 per cent of returnees from Pakistan are children and adolescents aged 17 or younger and have no proper skills or experience to earn a living. Moreover, 14 per cent of returnees are from female-headed households. The influx has strained border points and host communities, exacerbating a fragile situation characterized by elevated unemployment rates, widespread poverty, insufficient access to basic services and inadequate infrastructure. In response, humanitarian actors have scaled up assistance, providing medical screenings, protection, counselling, legal assistance, food, transportation, and water, sanitation and hygiene services and registration services.

62. Between 26 July and 18 October, some 7,077 Afghan refugees, from Pakistan (6,927), the Islamic Republic of Iran (112) and other countries (38), returned under

the United Nations voluntary repatriation programme. The pace of refugee returns in 2023 remains significantly higher than in 2021 and 2022. The United Nations supported nearly 300,000 internally displaced persons, refugee returnees, asylum-seekers and host communities in 80 priority areas of return and reintegration throughout Afghanistan in 2023. Assistance included protection monitoring and the provision of legal assistance, psychosocial support, seasonal support, shelter and non-food items.

63. The number of incidents involving interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities remained high, with 197 incidents reported between 27 July and 11 November, against 350 during the same period in 2022. Some 29 incidents of violence and threats against humanitarian personnel, assets and facilities were recorded, a decrease from 119 incidents documented in the same period in 2022. In addition, 104 gender-related incidents were recorded, all attributed to the de facto authorities and involving, inter alia, interference with programming (88 incidents) and restrictions on female participation in humanitarian action (64 incidents). On 6 November, the de facto Ministry of Justice published a list of 90 charitable organizations and 79 unions that were prohibited from operating owing to the expiration of their licences, and would remain so until their licences were renewed.

VI. Counter-narcotics

64. The Afghanistan opium survey conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2023 revealed that opium poppy cultivation plunged by an estimated 95 per cent following a drug ban imposed by the de facto authorities in April 2022. Opium cultivation fell across all parts of the country from 233,000 hectares to 10,800 hectares in 2023, which resulted in a decrease in the supply of opium from 6,200 tons in 2022 to 333 tons in 2023. The sharp reduction had immediate humanitarian consequences for many vulnerable communities who relied on income from cultivating opium. Farmers' income from selling the 2023 opium harvest to traders fell by more than 92 per cent from an estimated \$1.36 billion for the 2022 harvest to \$110 million in 2023. Moreover, climate change has compounded the situation as scarcity of water, drought and decreased agricultural productivity has amplified food insecurity and incentivized asset sales and migration.

65. Opium prices reached a record high in August 2023, with the average national prices for dry and fresh opium hitting \$417 and \$275 per kilogram, respectively. Regional disparities in price increases were noted, with the southern region recording the highest prices. Data show that after the ban, opium reserves were being sold off while heroin production dwindled. A UNODC report in September also outlined the surge in methamphetamine trafficking and the growing threat of illegal methamphetamine production in Afghanistan. Seizures of narcotics increased from approximately 2.5 tons to 29.7 tons between 2017 and 2021, fuelling a shift from traditional opiate trafficking to methamphetamine trafficking. Between 1 August and 22 October, seizures of narcotics increased by 140 per cent compared with the same period in 2022, driven by the de facto authorities' efforts to counter the methamphetamine trade, particularly in the Ghor, Farah, Herat and Uruzgan provinces.

66. The UNODC alternative development programme benefits over 4,282 vulnerable households, leading to a 15 per cent unit yield increase in cereal crops and a 25 per cent increase in vegetable crops. UNODC collaborated with two national organizations and the World Health Organization on a project on comprehensive mental health support and drug use disorder services. In addition, UNAMA and UNODC established a working group on counter-narcotics to foster consultation and

potential actions and to promote productive cooperation with the de facto authorities on counter-narcotics-related matters.

67. On 30 September, the de facto Supreme Court published a set of penal procedures on drugs containing punishments for the cultivation, sale, transportation, production and consumption of poppy, marijuana and other intoxicants. The prescribed imprisonment terms range from one month to seven years with no option to pay a fine.

VII. Mission support

68. As at 30 September, vacancy rates in UNAMA were 10 per cent for international staff, 8 per cent for United Nations Volunteers, 19 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, respectively. The proportion of female staff was 33 per cent for international staff, 36 per cent for United Nations Volunteers, 11 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. Liquidity challenges and related measures are likely to create some challenges for the Mission going forward.

VIII. Observations

69. Afghanistan and its de facto authorities continue to grapple with the complex consequences of four decades of conflict and impediments to development. Macroeconomic performance has slowed in recent months, leading to low- or no-growth scenarios in the future. The country also faces population growth, limited domestic resources, declining aid levels and imminent climate-related risks, including water scarcity, persistent drought and flooding. Widespread hunger and malnutrition disproportionately affect women and girls, as they are targeted by the restrictions of the de facto authorities. Many of these problems were inherited by the de facto authorities and stemmed from decades of mismanagement and corruption, as well as conflicts that stifled development. Addressing those issues, however, will require inclusive, effective and accountable governance, and a resetting of the country's relationship with the international community, in order for Afghanistan to benefit from humanitarian response and sustainable, long-term solutions.

70. The de facto authorities have made efforts which they claim narrow the gap with the population, through the establishment of provincial ulama shuras, the announced establishment of youth councils at the subnational level and increased national and subnational outreach activities. However, the exclusion of women and ethnic and religious minorities from these ulama shuras underscores the continued general lack of inclusion in governance. The de facto authorities have shown responsiveness in their handling of the large-scale earthquakes in western Afghanistan and the mass returns from Pakistan, as well as water and road infrastructure efforts amid widespread scarcity. However, the measures taken so far have not addressed the expectations of the Afghan population as communicated by them to the United Nations through its outreach activities, in particular regarding equal access by women and girls to all levels of education, basic services and justice, as well as women's employment and participation in public life.

71. The de facto authorities have launched a coordinated and pragmatic response to the mass return of Afghans from Pakistan. The return of so many people in rushed conditions and in such a short period of time is nonetheless imposing a severe strain

on the country's economy and social fabric. I call on Pakistan to reconsider its current position and to work with the de facto authorities to find a solution that takes into consideration international standards and obligations, and above all the well-being of those affected. The de facto authorities have informed the United Nations that they welcome back their citizens, but ask that returns be implemented in a way that is respectful of basic human dignity.

72. Despite dwindling financial resources and competing priorities, the international community understands the need to do more to support the people of Afghanistan. The need for assistance funding has further increased owing to the surge in requirements caused by the earthquakes and the return of Afghans from Pakistan. The United Nations continues to deliver vital humanitarian assistance in a principled manner to the country's most vulnerable communities. I implore donors to urgently renew their support and amplify their commitment to life-saving response efforts, particularly before winter arrives. I also emphatically reiterate my appeal to the de facto authorities to rescind their restrictive measures imposed on Afghan female aid workers in both national and international non-governmental organizations, as well as on Afghan female staff of the United Nations, in order to facilitate the reach and effectiveness of humanitarian operations and address the international community's concerns.

73. The de facto authorities' continued curtailment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Afghan women and girls violates their obligations under international human rights law. While girls and young women are reportedly able to access all-female madrasas, UNAMA has been unable to verify the numbers of girls studying in these institutions or the quality of the education provided, particularly with regard to whether it includes modern subjects and leads to the same opportunities as those provided to boys. In this regard, I welcome the international conference on women in Islam organized by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and hosted by Saudi Arabia. I look forward to the adoption of the Jeddah Document, affirming the equal rights and duties of Muslim women and men, at the forthcoming Islamic Summit to be held in the Gambia at the end of 2023.

74. The de facto authorities' use of arbitrary arrests and detentions of media workers and civil society activists and the censorship and suspension of media outlets to stifle all forms of dissent, which is inconsistent with the international human rights obligations of Afghanistan, remains of great concern. I welcome the recent release of some of these activists and urge the de facto authorities to immediately cease all arbitrary arrests and detentions of media workers and civil society activists for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and opinion. I also remain deeply concerned by the ongoing implementation of corporal punishment, which is inconsistent with the country's obligations under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The de facto authorities must also uphold their publicly stated commitment to the general amnesty by holding transparent and timely investigations into allegations of human rights violations against former government officials and former Afghan National Defence and Security Forces members, and by ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable.

75. I urge the de facto authorities to take heed of and implement the recommendations of the UNAMA report on the treatment of detainees, including measures to eradicate torture and ill-treatment in places of detention, to allow UNAMA unrestricted access to all places of detention and to improve compliance with fundamental procedural safeguards for those in detention. I call equally on the international community to support further engagement by the United Nations with the de facto authorities through appropriate advice and targeted awareness-raising sessions to increase knowledge and compliance of law enforcement actions with international norms. Insofar as the de facto prison authorities lack adequate resources

to meet minimum standards in line with international norms on the treatment of prisoners, the international community is encouraged to consider scaling up support for the basic needs of the incarcerated population, including the provision of food and medical, educational and clothing needs and the deployment of health and education personnel in detention facilities.

76. Issues such as climate change and counter-narcotics not only pose imminent threats to the Afghan population but also have significant regional and global consequences. I welcome the engagement of the de facto authorities in addressing climate change and their efforts on counter-narcotics, which have led to a significant reduction in opium cultivation. That said, there is an urgent need for alternative livelihoods for farmers. Principled approaches to enable the international community to make meaningful interventions in these areas of common interest should be explored to build confidence and support the Afghan people.

77. The lack of economic opportunities continues to perpetuate poverty and economic disenfranchisement. The private sector, now the main driver of growth and employment opportunities, continues to face challenges related to international payments and market access while confronting a depressed domestic demand. The United Nations stands ready to play a constructive role in promoting private sector development, including through initiatives such as revitalizing the microfinancing sector, which can also help empower Afghan women, absorb the growing labour force and fight poverty.

78. I intend to organize a follow-up meeting of special envoys for Afghanistan at an appropriate time to cement international consensus on the way forward. I thank the Special Coordinator, Feridun Sinirlioğlu, for his independent assessment and recommendations pursuant to Security Council resolution [2679 \(2023\)](#), which could provide a basis for discussing such a consensus. I also extend my deep appreciation to all United Nations personnel in Afghanistan under the leadership of my Special Representative, Roza Otunbayeva, and her team, and to non-governmental organization partners for their continued dedication and service to the people of Afghanistan in an extremely challenging environment.
