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The situation in Afghanistan

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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 [2596 \(2021\)](#), in which the Secretary-General was requested to submit a written report to the Security Council by 31 January 2022 on strategic and operational recommendations for the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), in the light of recent political, security and social developments.

2. In addition, 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 2 September 2021 ([A/76/328-S/2021/759](#)).

II. Relevant developments

3. Afghanistan faces multiple crises: a growing humanitarian emergency, a massive economic contraction, the crippling of its banking and financial systems, and the fact that an inclusive Government remains to be formed. It is projected that over 24 million people will require humanitarian assistance in 2022, compared to 18.4 million in 2021. Following the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban on 15 August and the disintegration of the Government, the de facto authorities formed an all-male “caretaker cabinet” and announced appointments across security and government structures at the national and subnational levels. The overall level of conflict has decreased significantly, along with the number of civilian casualties, greatly facilitating humanitarian access. Despite assurances by the de facto authorities of general amnesties for former members of the Afghan government and security forces, as well as those who worked with international military forces, UNAMA received credible allegations of killings, enforced disappearances and other violations affecting the right to life and physical integrity of those individuals. Similarly, the



fundamental rights and freedoms of Afghan women and girls have been severely curtailed, despite pledges by the de facto authorities to protect women's rights within sharia, including the right to education. The United Nations and, in particular, UNAMA engaged continuously with the de facto authorities to advocate the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, to form an inclusive administration that reflects the diversity of the Afghan people and to take resolute action to counter the threat of terrorism.

A. Political developments

4. Following its takeover of Kabul on 15 August, the Taliban announced, on 7 September, an all-male "caretaker cabinet" and other key positions at the national and provincial levels. Haibatullah Akhundzada remained the leader of the Taliban movement, while Mohammad Hassan Akhund was named Prime Minister of the de facto administration, and Abdul Ghani Baradar and Abdul Salam Hanafi were named Deputy Prime Ministers. A third Deputy Prime Minister, Abdul Kabir Mohammed Jan, was named on 4 October. Senior officials at the subnational level, including provincial governors, chiefs of police, heads of departments, mayors and district governors, were also appointed.

5. Despite widespread calls for greater inclusion to reflect the ethnic, political and geographic diversity of Afghanistan and incorporate women, as at 20 December, all 34 provincial governors were male and predominantly Pashtun, with limited representation of other ethnic groups. Numerous reshuffles of subnational positions took place to address internal divisions, but all appointees continue to be Taliban affiliates, mainly religious scholars and clerics, many of whom are on the sanctions list pursuant to Security Council resolution [1988 \(2011\)](#).

6. On 28 September, the de facto authorities suspended the constitution of 2004, creating a legal vacuum, pending the announced review of the compliance of existing laws with sharia. Only a few decrees and general guidance notes have been issued. On 19 September, the de facto authorities released a guidance note in which media outlets were advised to avoid publishing issues that were contrary to Islam and sharia; regulating, inter alia, dress codes for female journalists; and banning women from acting in films. On 3 December, the Taliban leader issued a decree on the rights of women, which included upholding their right to consent to marriage and instructing the de facto Supreme Court to adjudicate cases involving women. While welcomed by some, the decree was criticized for failing to address the full spectrum of women's rights, including granting women the right to work and girls the right to education beyond grade six, or 11 to 12 years of age. In a general guidance note issued on 7 December, the Taliban leader instructed de facto provincial governors to contact Afghans who were likely to attempt to migrate abroad and address their concerns. In another note issued on 18 December, he emphasized the importance of unity and cooperation in the security and public service sectors. On 26 December, the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice issued a guidance note in which it stated that women seeking to travel anything other than short distances should not be offered public transportation unless accompanied by a close male relative.

7. On 12 December, the Taliban spokesperson and de facto Deputy Minister of Information and Culture, Zabihullah Mujahid, stated that the "Islamic Emirate" would hold a meeting with Afghan ulama on how to govern the country, noting that the ulama "will share their views on controversial issues, including women's rights". The Taliban continue to use many of the structures formed under the previous Government. On 24 December, the office of the de facto cabinet announced a decision to retain the Independent Commission for Overseeing the Implementation of the Constitution, as well as the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission,

although the name of the latter was to be modified. The de facto cabinet also decided to retain the secretariats of the lower and upper houses of the National Assembly, despite the Assembly ceasing to be operational, while abolishing the State Ministry for Parliamentary Affairs. It further announced the dissolution of the State Ministry for Peace, as well as the independent election management bodies, which would be reconstituted if needed, according to the deputy spokesperson for the de facto authorities. There has been no formal decision on the Ministry of Women's Affairs and provincial Departments of Women's Affairs, whose former premises now house offices of the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice.

8. In the justice sector, a de facto Minister of Justice and a de facto Chief Justice and head of the Supreme Court have been appointed. The applicable legal framework remains unclear, although a review of the compliance of existing legislation with Islamic law is ongoing. On 16 December, the Taliban leader issued a decree appointing 32 directors, heads of departments, judges and other key officials related to the de facto Supreme Court. On 25 December, he appointed a de facto Attorney General, who committed to promoting the accountability and independence of his office under sharia. While numerous judicial positions have been filled across provinces, former judges, prosecutors and lawyers have not been integrated into the justice system of the de facto authorities. Women remain excluded from working in the justice sector.

9. In the security sector, the establishment and operationalization of the security ministries, notably the Ministry of Interior Affairs and the Ministry of Defence, have been priorities for the de facto administration. Sirajuddin Haqqani and Mohammad Yaqoub Omar, son of the late Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, were appointed as the de facto Minister of Interior Affairs and the de facto Minister of Defence, respectively. The de facto authorities declared that the security sector priorities were serving to address the threat of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan, combat the armed resistance in and around Panjshir province and deal with criminality, border skirmishes, deforestation and counter-narcotics. Uniformed women who previously served in the security sector have been excluded from service. On 11 October, the de facto cabinet established a purging commission to remove "unwanted persons" from the ranks of the Taliban, targeting those engaging in criminal behaviour or who are perceived not to represent Taliban values. Approximately 700 individuals have reportedly been dismissed so far.

10. The administrative and technical capacity of the de facto authorities has been depleted by many former government officials either fleeing the country or going into hiding, as well as by the restrictive policies of the de facto authorities regarding women and by uncertainties about their ability to pay civil servants. In the light of reported acts of reprisals, most former officials are reluctant to return to work despite encouragement by the de facto administration and assurances of an amnesty. The inconsistent payment of salaries and the lack of funds have similarly led to the stalled delivery of basic services. Education for girls continues to be severely curtailed in much of the country, owing mainly to the lack of a clear policy granting girls the right to education but also owing to a shortage of teachers, the reluctance of some families to send girls to school, and economic hardship, as well as inconsistent Taliban policies at the local level. On 20 November, the Ministry of Finance announced that revenue collected between September and November had exceeded 27 billion Afghani (approximately \$300 million), from which it planned to pay the salaries of government employees. By 31 December, staff in 61 out of 63 budget units, including 23 ministries and some line departments in all 34 provinces, reportedly received salary arrears for September and October; however, challenges persisted in the actual processing of salary payments.

11. Currently, the political opposition to the Taliban, which is largely situated outside Afghanistan, is fragmented. A few prominent political actors remain in the country and are occasionally consulted by the Taliban.

12. On 22 September and 12 October, the Group of 20 held extraordinary meetings of ministers for foreign affairs and of leaders, respectively, to discuss the situation in Afghanistan. While most countries had closed their diplomatic representations in Kabul and moved their embassy to Doha since 15 August, the engagement of the international community with the Taliban has gradually increased. On 5 October, the Special Representative of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for the Afghan Transition, Simon Gass, visited Kabul. On 18 November, the Special Envoy of Germany for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Jasper Wieck, and the Special Envoy of the Netherlands for Afghanistan, Emiel de Bont, as well as the Ambassador-designate of Germany to Afghanistan, Markus Potzel, visited Kabul. On 27 and 28 November, a European Union delegation led by the Special Envoy of the European Union for Afghanistan, Tomas Niklasson, held a dialogue with the de facto authorities in Doha. On 29 and 30 November, a delegation led by the Special Representative of the United States of America for Afghanistan, Thomas West, met with senior Taliban representatives in Doha. On 2 December, a Taliban delegation led by the de facto Minister for Foreign Affairs, Amir Khan Motaqi, met with the representatives of 16 countries in Doha, calling upon all countries to “open a new chapter of positive relations”. On 6 December, the General Assembly approved the decision of the Credential Committee to defer the decision on the representation of Afghanistan at the United Nations. On 12 December, the de facto Minister of Justice, Sheikh Abdul Hakim Shar’i, called upon foreign countries to recognize the de facto Afghan government, claiming that the “Islamic Emirate” had met international standards.

13. Senior United Nations officials and senior UNAMA leadership engaged regularly with the de facto authorities to advocate the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, to form an inclusive administration that reflected the diversity of the Afghan people and to take resolute action to counter the threat of terrorism. UNAMA has also engaged with provincial-level de facto officials on the safety and security of United Nations premises, assets and personnel, as well as on issues of fundamental rights, in particular the right of girls to education and the right of women to participation.

14. UNAMA continued to engage with political and civil society stakeholders, including the Civil Society Joint Working Group and a number of women’s organizations, to gauge their access to the de facto authorities and the attitudes of those authorities to inclusion, participation and civic space. Civil society representatives expressed concerns regarding the closure of offices and the seizure of some of their assets. Women raised concerns over the curtailment of their participation in public and political life and freedom of movement; increased gender-based violence; forced marriages; the imposed dress code; the restriction of freedom of expression and of assembly; the restriction of the role of women in humanitarian delivery; and the closure of women’s shelters. They stressed the dire economic situation disproportionately affecting women and called for funding to be made available. They further requested the international community to encourage the Taliban to support enhanced civic space, including the protection of women’s rights.

B. Security

15. During the reporting period, the security dynamics changed significantly following the Taliban declaration, on 6 September, of the end of its military offensive against government forces. There has been a significant decline in the overall number

of conflict-related security incidents as well as civilian casualties since then. Between 19 August and 31 December, the United Nations recorded 985 security-related incidents, a 91 per cent decrease compared to the same period in 2020. The number of security incidents fell significantly after 15 August, from 600 to fewer than 100 incidents per week. Available data indicate that armed clashes decreased by 98 per cent, from 7,430 to 148 incidents; air strikes by 99 per cent, from 501 to 3; detonations of improvised explosive devices by 91 per cent, from 1,118 to 101; and assassinations by 51 per cent, from 424 to 207. There has been an increase in other types of security incidents such as crime amid a rapid deterioration of the economic and humanitarian situation. The eastern, central, southern and western regions accounted for 75 per cent of all recorded incidents, with Nangarhar, Kabul, Kunar and Kandahar the most conflict-affected provinces. Despite the reduction in violence, the de facto authorities encountered several challenges, including an increase in attacks against their members. Some of the attacks are attributed to the National Resistance Front comprising some figures from the former Government and opposition. These groups have been operating primarily in Panjshir Province and the Andarab district of Baghlan Province but have not made significant territorial inroads. Armed clashes are regularly documented, along with forced displacement and communication outages. Intra-Taliban tensions along ethnic lines and competition for positions have also resulted in violence, such as the armed clash between Taliban forces in Bamyan city on 4 November.

16. The de facto authorities made efforts to consolidate their control of the border areas amid concerns of neighbouring countries that extremist groups might launch attacks on their territories from Afghan soil. Tensions and security incidents have been reported in the areas of Afghanistan bordering Iran (Islamic Republic of), Pakistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, including incidents between Taliban and Iranian border forces on 21 August and 1 November, and a deadly stampede at the Afghanistan-Pakistan border crossing in Spin Boldak on 31 October. Tensions between Tajikistan and the de facto authorities escalated with the deployment of Taliban and Tajik forces and reports of the presence in northern Afghanistan of ISIL-KP cells and of Afghan opposition figures associated with the National Resistance Front.

17. Attacks claimed by or attributed to ISIL-KP increased and expanded beyond the movement's previous areas of focus in Kabul and eastern Afghanistan. Between 19 August and 31 December, the United Nations recorded 152 attacks by the group in 16 provinces, compared to 20 attacks in 5 provinces during the same period in 2020. In addition to the de facto authorities, the group also targeted civilians, in particular Shia minorities, in urban areas. ISIL-KP claimed responsibility for suicide attacks on a Sunni mosque in Kabul on 3 October and on two Shia mosques in Kunduz and Kandahar cities on 8 and 15 October, in addition to an attack on a military hospital in Kabul on 2 November. Two attacks in western Kabul on 10 December targeting a predominantly Shia/Hazara neighbourhood remain unclaimed. The de facto authorities claim to have prioritized operations against ISIL-KP and report surrenders of its affiliates.

18. Between 19 August and 31 December, the United Nations documented 196 incidents directly affecting the United Nations, primarily its personnel, including 111 cases of intimidation, 39 crime-related incidents, 10 arrests and 30 incidents affecting United Nations compounds, offices and property. The total represents a significant increase from the 34 incidents recorded during the same period in 2020. At the same time, United Nations agencies continued their operations countrywide with all major and some minor routes assessed and cleared for use.

C. Regional cooperation

19. Regional countries continued to call for the formation of an inclusive Government of Afghanistan; humanitarian assistance; human rights protection, including for women and minorities; the combating of the narcotics trade and terrorism; and action to address the protracted situation of Afghan refugees. Six countries neighbouring Afghanistan convened a virtual meeting of their special representatives on 5 September, followed by a meeting of ministers for foreign affairs on 9 September, both chaired by Pakistan, at which the Taliban was urged to form an inclusive Government and to ensure that international terrorist groups would not gain a foothold in the country. On 27 October, at a meeting held in hybrid format virtually and in Tehran, the six Ministers for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation reiterated their concern over the situation in Afghanistan and called for a broad-based political structure.

20. On 12 September, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, visited Afghanistan to discuss with the de facto officials ways to promote peace in Afghanistan and the operation of Kabul airport. He noted the importance of concerted efforts to combat terrorist organizations that threatened the stability of Afghanistan and urged the authorities to engage all Afghan parties in national reconciliation.

21. On 16 and 17 September, the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization met in Tajikistan. They agreed on the need for increased humanitarian aid and for maintaining dialogue with the de facto authorities.

22. The special envoy of China and the special representatives of Pakistan and the Russian Federation met with the de facto Taliban Prime Minister in Kabul on 21 September. They also met the former President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, and the former Chief Executive Officer of Afghanistan, Abdullah Abdullah, who indicated that discussions had covered current developments in the country and the need for peace, stability, women's rights, universal education and an inclusive Government, as well as regional cooperation.

23. On 7 October, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, Abdulaziz Kamilov, visited Kabul to discuss humanitarian assistance and energy and transportation projects with de facto officials. On 16 October, a Taliban delegation visited Termiz, Uzbekistan, to discuss economic ties, electricity and railway connections and other bilateral issues. On 14 November, the Special Representative of the President of Uzbekistan for Afghanistan and officials from the Ministry of Transport of Uzbekistan visited Mazar-e Sharif to discuss bilateral projects, including airport rehabilitation.

24. On 15 October, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, said that the formation of an inclusive Government and the rights of women and girls had been discussed at a meeting with a Taliban delegation led by the de facto Minister for Foreign Affairs. Mr. Çavuşoğlu stressed the need to release the frozen financial assets of Afghanistan to avoid the economic collapse of the country and asked concerned countries to show flexibility.

25. On 17 October, a delegation from Kazakhstan headed by the Special Representative for International Cooperation, Erzhan Kazykhanov, visited Kabul to discuss humanitarian assistance and the resumption of trade and economic ties with Afghanistan. The Minister of Trade and Integration of Kazakhstan headed a delegation to Kabul on 25 December to discuss bilateral trade ties.

26. On 20 October, special representatives of China, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan,

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as a delegation led by the de facto Second Deputy Prime Minister of Afghanistan, Mr. Hanafi, met in Moscow for consultations on Afghanistan. Participants agreed on the need for a consolidated international effort towards providing humanitarian and economic assistance to the Afghan people.

27. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Hussain Qureshi, visited Kabul on 21 October to discuss the management of border crossings, humanitarian aid and counter-terrorism with de facto officials. A delegation led by the de facto Minister for Foreign Affairs conducted a return visit to Pakistan from 10 to 13 November. On 11 November, a meeting of the extended troika, comprising China, Pakistan, the Russian Federation and the United States, was hosted in Islamabad to discuss the situation in Afghanistan.

28. On 25 October, a Taliban delegation met the Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, Wang Yi, in Doha. A Taliban spokesperson stated that the sides had discussed the political and economic situation in Afghanistan and agreed to create three joint committees.

29. On 30 October, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, Rashid Meredov, visited Kabul. He discussed projects including the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India natural gas pipeline with de facto officials.

30. On 10 November, India hosted the third regional security dialogue on Afghanistan in New Delhi, with national security advisers from countries neighbouring and in the region of Afghanistan. In their Delhi Declaration, participants reiterated their support for a peaceful, secure and stable Afghanistan while emphasizing respect for its sovereignty.

31. On 19 December, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation held its seventeenth “extraordinary” summit of ministers for foreign affairs, in Pakistan, which was focused on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. The de facto Minister for Foreign Affairs attended the meeting. The Organization announced the establishment of a humanitarian trust fund for Afghanistan under the aegis of the Islamic Development Bank and appointed Tariq Ali Bakheet as its Special Envoy for Afghanistan.

III. Human rights

32. Despite announcements of general amnesties for former members of the Government, its security forces and those who worked with international military forces, UNAMA continued to receive credible allegations of killings, enforced disappearances and other violations regarding those individuals. Since 15 August, UNAMA has received allegations of more than 100 such killings that it determined to be credible, of which more than two thirds were alleged to have been extrajudicial killings committed by the de facto authorities or their affiliates. UNAMA also received credible allegations of the extrajudicial killing of at least 50 individuals suspected of affiliation with ISIL-KP.

33. Human rights defenders and media workers continued to be subjected to attack, intimidation, harassment, arbitrary arrest, ill-treatment and killing. Eight civil society activists were killed (three by the de facto authorities, three by ISIL-KP, and two in cases that could not be attributed), and 10 were subjected to temporary arrests, beatings and threats by the de facto authorities. Two journalists were killed (one by ISIL-KP; the other case could not be attributed) and two were injured by unknown armed men. Out of 44 cases of temporary arrests, beatings and threats or intimidation documented by UNAMA, 42 were attributed to the de facto authorities, while 2 cases could not be attributed. Many media outlets closed for financial reasons and owing to

content restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities. On 16 September, 100 Afghan journalists issued an appeal for protection guarantees, especially for women journalists, and for media outlets to be allowed to continue to function.

34. While the significant decrease in armed conflict in most parts of Afghanistan after 15 August led to a drastic reduction in civilian casualties from ground engagements and air strikes, UNAMA continued to document civilian casualties of improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war. From 15 August to 31 December 2021, UNAMA documented more than 1,050 civilian casualties, including more than 350 civilian deaths. Suicide and non-suicide improvised explosive devices, attributed almost entirely to ISIL-KP, accounted for more than 850 civilian casualties, including nearly 300 deaths, and consisted mainly of sectarian attacks targeting civilians. Explosive remnants of war caused nearly 100 civilian casualties, mainly children; targeted killings related to ongoing armed conflict resulted in more than 50 civilian casualties; ground engagements between the de facto authorities and ISIL-KP or resistance groups resulted in almost 20 civilian casualties; and one aerial attack by the United States on 29 August, targeting ISIL-KP, resulted in the deaths of 10 civilians.

35. The Ministry of Justice seized authority from the Afghanistan Independent Bar Association to issue licences to lawyers and appointed a caretaker for the Association on 24 November. The Ministry relayed to UNAMA that lawyers licensed by the Ministry would work independently and unimpeded and that women lawyers would be allowed to work in line with the necessary requirements.

36. On 23 November, the de facto Prime Minister of Afghanistan instructed the de facto authorities to respect and protect the rights of detained persons under sharia, including by limiting the duration of detention. Nevertheless, UNAMA continued to receive reports of detainees not being brought before courts or other dispute resolution mechanisms.

37. The ravaged economy has exacerbated the coping mechanisms of families, giving rise to critical concerns for the protection of women and children from exploitation and abuse, including trafficking, the selling of children, child marriage, the recruitment and use of children by armed forces, and child labour. With the female labour force largely confined to the home and the persistence of general unemployment for both women and men, unconfirmed reports indicate that this reality has contributed to a rise in domestic violence. Survivors currently have no recourse to formal justice, given the still unclear legal and judicial system in force across Afghanistan, nor to services supporting survivors of gender-based violence. Since 15 August, the United Nations has received reports that the ranks of the de facto authorities continue to include children, as well as reports of the attempted recruitment of children by ISIL-KP.

38. The de facto authorities clamped down on peaceful protests (including by women claiming their right to work, to freedom of movement, to education and to political participation) and issued an instruction on 8 September prohibiting unauthorized assemblies. Between October and December, protests largely abated, although some continued, mainly involving teachers and health and other workers protesting the non-payment of salaries. Women's groups increasingly resorted to holding peaceful assemblies behind closed doors and using social media to disseminate their advocacy messages.

39. While the de facto authorities have initiated attempts to regularize property ownership, local conflicts related to land and property rights continued to emerge, including reports of forced evictions, mostly of minority groups, facilitated or tolerated by the de facto authorities.

40. In a statement issued on 18 September, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission reported that it had been unable to operate since 15 August. The announcement followed the searches and takeover of various Commission offices across the country, including its headquarters in Kabul.

IV. Coordination of donor assistance

41. With the Taliban takeover, the implementation of development cooperation frameworks was suspended. The United Nations, including UNAMA, continued to convene high-level discussions with humanitarian and development donors to encourage the financing of essential services in order to address the basic human needs of the Afghan people while fully respecting existing sanctions regimes. On 22 December, the Security Council adopted resolution 2615 (2021), in which it stated that neither the provision of humanitarian aid nor the work of institutions involved in supporting, financing and processing critical humanitarian aid relief in Afghanistan violated existing United Nations sanctions. On the same day, the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the United States Department of the Treasury issued three general licences to facilitate the continued flow of humanitarian assistance and other support for Afghanistan, in addition to the two general licences issued on 24 September. In the text of the “frequently asked questions” issued with the licences, it is indicated that the licences are issued in support of resolution 2615 (2021), specifically to facilitate the implementation of the transitional engagement framework of the United Nations for Afghanistan. In the framework, priorities are defined for addressing basic human needs, including humanitarian assistance, essential services, and social investments and community-level systems.

42. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) established a special trust fund for Afghanistan to manage donor funds for joint United Nations programmes focused on the continued delivery of essential services, livelihoods and community resilience to help households, communities and the private sector to cope with the situation. In the health sector, the Sehatmandi project, through which the provision of public health services is outsourced to non-governmental organizations, was funded through UNDP in October and through the United Nations Children’s Fund and the World Health Organization by means of the Central Emergency Response Fund for the three months to the end of January 2022. The three agencies implemented projects in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan, supporting more than 2,300 health facilities in remaining operational. More than 3.1 million people, including 1.1 million children and 782,000 women, as well as 2.5 million people treated on an outpatient basis, have been provided with health services. The project also supported the payment of the salaries of some 26,000 health workers, including 7,300 women, as well as the procurement of medicines, laboratory reagents and other health products worth \$2.9 million.

43. The gross domestic product of Afghanistan has contracted by an estimated 40 per cent. The trading of goods, services and financial assets is severely limited; civil servant salaries cannot be paid in full, if at all; and fuel and food prices have risen sharply. In an effort to support income generation for poor Afghans who do not yet require humanitarian assistance, UNDP launched an area-based approach to development emergency initiatives. It is centred on creating sources of income through cash-for-work projects, local markets and livelihood opportunities with a particular focus on agribusiness, regenerative agriculture infrastructure, and services critical to food security.

V. Humanitarian assistance

44. In 2021, almost half of the population was in humanitarian need owing to the impacts of conflict, drought and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Donors provided nearly \$1.5 billion in response to the two 2021 humanitarian appeals for Afghanistan. This included \$762 million, or 126 per cent, of the \$606 million required for the flash appeal, and \$730 million, or 84 per cent, of the \$869 million sought for the humanitarian response plan. By the end of 2021, humanitarian partners had reached almost 18 million people with life-saving, multi-sector assistance in 384 of 401 districts. Since September, humanitarian partners have reached at least 8.9 million people with food; 143,921 children with community-based education; 162,229 people with household items; 1,385,999 people with health care; 238,223 children under five years of age with treatment for acute malnutrition; 48,886 people with individual protection assistance; and 507,728 people with water, sanitation and hygiene assistance. Furthermore, health actors ensured the continuity of basic primary health-care services in more than 2,300 health facilities between October 2021 and January 2022. The outlook for 2022 remains grim, with 24.4 million people (59 per cent of the population) projected to be in humanitarian need, compared to 18.4 million in 2021 and with a humanitarian funding requirement of \$4.5 billion.

45. Afghanistan is experiencing one of the worst food insecurity and malnutrition crises globally. The country is facing a second drought in four years and the worst of its kind in 27 years. An estimated 22.8 million people are projected to be at “crisis” and “emergency” levels of food insecurity until March 2022. Almost 9 million of these will be at “emergency” levels of food insecurity – the highest number in the world. Half of all children under five years of age are facing acute malnutrition. Since January, humanitarian partners have provided more than 270,000 metric tons of food and \$38 million in cash to nearly 16 million people. Humanitarian partners also provided emergency wheat cultivation package assistance to 1 million people between July and November. Partners have provided safe drinking water, sanitation facilities and hygiene options to almost 4 million people.

46. As at 22 December, 157,820 people were confirmed to have contracted COVID-19, while some 7,337 had died since the start of the pandemic. This is likely underreported, as only 813,313 tests have been conducted countrywide. Testing capacity has expanded to 9,500 tests per day; however, treatment capacity remains limited. Also as at 22 December, more than 4.54 million people had been partially vaccinated, with close to 3.76 million people fully vaccinated. Vaccination among women and vulnerable groups remained disproportionately lower. Between mid-August and December, there were 7,778 clinically confirmed cases of measles among children under five years of age. The United Nations vaccinated over 2 million children against measles during the same period.

47. The number of impediments to humanitarian access has dropped since September, owing largely to the decline of conflict in the country. However, some 2,050 access-related challenges were recorded in 2021 – the vast majority before 15 August, when the conflict reached its most recent apex – compared to 1,104 in 2020. While humanitarians continue to face some interferences, with at least 376 access constraints reported between 1 September and 17 December, humanitarian access restrictions notably decreased to half of the previous monthly averages in October and November, with 97 and 99 incidents, respectively.

48. Between 1 January and 19 December, conflict displaced over 669,682 people, in addition to the 5 million who remain displaced since 2012. The number of people displaced by conflict since 15 August is 2 per cent of the total figure. Conflict-related trauma cases decreased by more than 60 per cent between September and November

compared to the same period in 2020. Children made up around 6 per cent of those suffering blast injuries. Between August and December, over 90,000 people received trauma care.

49. Between 1 January and 31 December, a record total of 1,263,707 people crossed into Afghanistan, of whom 768,197 were deported. Refugee returns remained small in number, with only 1,304 crossing into Afghanistan. Between 1 August and 31 December, 485,621 undocumented Afghan migrants and 72 refugees returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran, 20,871 undocumented Afghans and 12 refugees returned from Pakistan, and 10 refugees returned from other countries.

50. In 2021, Afghanistan experienced 4 cases of wild polio virus type 1 and 43 cases of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2. Four nationwide polio vaccination campaigns were conducted in 2021, each targeting 9.9 million children and using both house-to-house and mosque-to-mosque vaccination approaches. During the most recent campaign, in November 2021, more than 8.5 million children were vaccinated, of whom 2.4 million were vaccinated for the first time in over 3 years.

51. The extremely high level of explosive ordnance contamination, comprising explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices, poses a threat to civilians and humanitarian personnel. Between July and December 2021, the Mine Action Service and its partners cleared over 1 million square metres of contaminated land, safely removing thousands of explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices to the benefit of hundreds of communities. In addition, 108,650 people, including 14,504 women and girls, received explosive ordnance risk education.

VI. Counter-narcotics

52. According to the November 2021 research brief of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the area under opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan was estimated at 177,000 hectares. This was a 21 per cent decrease from 2020 but was offset by an increase in the opium yield per hectare. Estimated opium production in 2021 was 8 per cent higher than in 2020, indicating that production had exceeded 6,000 tons for an unprecedented fifth consecutive year. Income from opiates in Afghanistan amounted to between \$1.8 billion and \$2.7 billion in 2021. The total value of opiates, including domestic consumption and exports, stood at between 9 and 14 per cent of the country's gross domestic product. However, much larger sums are accrued along illicit drug supply chains outside Afghanistan. The illicit drug economy has become increasingly complex, with methamphetamine manufacture in Afghanistan increasing sharply in recent years.

53. Continued uncertainty since August 2021 has driven up opium prices, increasing incentives for cultivation and leading to concern over increased drug trafficking. The average opium price for 2021 was \$62 per kilogram, 13 per cent higher than in 2020. Prices doubled in August compared to May 2021 as an immediate reaction to the changed political situation in Afghanistan.

VII. Mission support

54. As at 31 December, vacancy rates in UNAMA were 15 per cent for international staff, 19 per cent for United Nations Volunteers, 7 per cent for National Professional Officers and 5 per cent for national staff, compared to approved rates of 6 per cent, 7 per cent, 3 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively. The proportion of female staff was

32 per cent for international staff, 45 per cent for United Nations Volunteers, 13 per cent for National Professional Officers and 10 per cent for national staff.

55. Following the precautionary reduction of the Mission's presence in response to Taliban advances and the subsequent lifting of the relocation and evacuation status, personnel started to return to duty stations in September. A small number of staff continue to perform functions in the office established temporarily in Almaty, Kazakhstan. On the basis of an assessment of the COVID-19 situation in Afghanistan, in October, the footprint of personnel reporting to work was increased from 50 to 70 per cent, subject to changes in the prevailing security situation. Ongoing contingency planning is focused on COVID-19 caseloads and security risks to United Nations personnel and operations.

VIII. Observations and recommendations

56. The situation in Afghanistan remains precarious and uncertain six months after the Taliban takeover, as the multiple political, socio-economic and humanitarian shocks reverberate across the country. The responsibility of the United Nations to the people of Afghanistan, in particular the humanitarian imperative, has endured throughout the decades of conflict. This responsibility remains as pressing today as ever.

57. The Taliban is showing efforts to present itself as a caretaker Government. The movement, however, has yet to form governing structures that reflect the country's ethnic, political and geographic diversity and include women. Efforts are constrained by the lack of resources and capacity, as well as an ideology that clashes in many ways with international norms of governance. The movement is also seeking to manage its own internal coherence. With the Taliban not having established the trust of many of the Afghan people or convinced Afghans of its capacity to govern, many continue to seek to leave their country. Moving forward, it is essential that every effort be made to reach out to all segments of Afghan society in order to establish a process that can lead to inclusive governance structures, fully reflecting the wishes and interests of the diverse Afghan society.

58. Afghanistan is experiencing a massive economic contraction. An entire complex social and economic system is shutting down, in part because of the deficiencies in governance, the suspension of non-humanitarian aid flows and sanctions.

59. The best way to promote stability and future international support is for the Taliban to avoid the isolation that characterized its previous experience in power. Developing a constructive dialogue between the de facto authorities, other Afghan stakeholders, the region and the international community that is focused on the well-being and rights of the Afghan people is therefore essential. I note positively the steps taken towards establishing such a dialogue.

60. It is critical that this dialogue address the broad range of issues related to governance – including fundamental human rights and freedoms – that will have a significant impact on the prosperity and security of the citizens and future of Afghanistan, including its relationship with the international community. The respect and protection of the human rights, freedoms and well-being of the Afghan people, regardless of gender, age or ethnicity, and their capacity to fully and equally participate in all aspects of the social, economic and political life of the country are essential elements of an inclusive, stable and prosperous society.

61. The current situation that Afghan women and girls face with regard to the full exercise of their rights and freedoms, including equal access to education, economic opportunities and justice, is deeply concerning. Over the past 20 years, a generation

of girls has enjoyed the benefits of education and the possibilities of full and productive roles in Afghan society, in government, business and other sectors. Shutting them off from these roles is not only an injustice to them but will also negatively affect the country's development and stability. I call upon the de facto authorities to take immediate steps to guarantee that Afghan women will be able to fully exercise their rights and freedoms.

62. Allegations of violations of the right to life continue to be levelled against the de facto authorities, including violations of the declared general amnesty for former Government officials and members of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. The commitments to the amnesty must be upheld to ensure respect for human rights obligations and to hold those responsible for violations accountable.

63. Reports of restrictions of the freedoms of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly and association have increased since 15 August. I urge the Taliban to ensure human rights-compliant policies, as well as independent and impartial investigations of alleged threats, violence and arbitrary arrests targeting media workers, protesters, human rights defenders, and the population at large, with a focus on vulnerable groups.

64. Forced evictions in several provinces continue to be reported, seemingly driven by decades-old conflicts over land, housing and property rights and affecting minority communities. Forced evictions may constitute gross violations of the rights to adequate housing; food; water; health; education; work; security of the person; freedom from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment; and freedom of movement. I call on the de facto authorities to halt and prevent forced evictions, provide assistance to the evicted families and develop a strategy for addressing these conflicts in line with international human rights standards.

65. I am gravely concerned about the staggering scale of vulnerability across the country. More than half of the population is in need of life-saving assistance. At the same time, the ruptures in basic services, financial systems and civil service functions are exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation. A staggering 23 million people – 55 per cent of the population – are at crisis and emergency levels of food insecurity, with some 9 million people expected to be at the “emergency” level – the highest number in the world. People are exhausting their limited reserves and being forced into harmful and irreversible coping mechanisms to survive – including putting their children up for forced labour, forced marriage and risky irregular migration, as well as selling land. The economic upheaval is occurring countrywide as urban households experience an evaporation of their income and bank-held savings.

66. Without the creative, flexible and constructive engagement of the international community, the humanitarian and economic situation in Afghanistan will only worsen. This engagement is distinct from the positions that members of the international community might take towards the de facto authorities. The United Nations remains on the ground, throughout the country, working at surge capacity to deliver humanitarian assistance and meet the basic needs of the Afghan population. During this difficult winter, with Afghan resilience stretched to its limit, it is essential for the international community to place the needs of the Afghan people first. I welcome humanitarian exemptions from the sanctions regimes already granted and call upon all donors to urgently provide additional commitments and issue general licences covering the transactions necessary for all humanitarian activities. Beyond the immediate humanitarian needs, the foundations of viable governance are fundamentally fractured, which presents a very real risk to the stability of the broader region and beyond.

67. It is more crucial than ever that we speak with one voice and with common and coordinated messages in reflecting the views of the international community. Given

Afghan and international aspirations for a better future, as well as the need to avoid the bouts of violent disputes that have plagued Afghanistan for over 40 years, an approach that integrates the political, security, socioeconomic, humanitarian and human rights aspects and priorities into one mission remains essential. Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic society whose diversity should be represented in the conduct of public affairs and the development of the country. The guiding principle for a future United Nations political presence should be to support the Afghan people.

68. I recommend that the strategic objectives of the future United Nations political presence include the following:

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

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

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

69. I recommend the following priorities:

(a) Providing outreach and political good offices with a focus on responsive and participatory governance and inclusivity, and trust-building;

(b) Continuing to coordinate and enable the provision of essential humanitarian assistance;

(c) Coordinating international donors and organizations in relation to basic human needs, including through information-sharing, and supporting efforts to increase accountability, transparency and the effective use of aid;

(d) Facilitating structured policy dialogue between the de facto authorities, other Afghan stakeholders, the region and the wider international community;

(e) Promoting, supporting and advising on the implementation of the provisions of instruments concerning human rights and fundamental freedoms to which Afghanistan is a State party and by which it is bound, as well as on the monitoring and reporting of human rights violations and abuses; and advocating for the provision of, and equal access to, essential public services, as well as to due process and justice;

(f) Providing mine action to address the threat of explosive ordnance contamination to civilians.

70. The future United Nations presence would be headed by a Special Representative of the Secretary-General at the Under-Secretary-General level and comprise two pillars: (a) political and governance; and (b) humanitarian and development. As an integrated structure, the Mission, under the leadership of the Special Representative, would work to achieve greater coherence and efficiency across United Nations interventions.

71. A Human Rights Service under the Office of the Special Representative would provide impartial reporting and engagement with all stakeholders at the national and subnational levels. The Service would monitor, report and advocate with regard to the situation for civilians, including children, and advocate the fundamental rights and freedoms of all Afghan men and women; the protection of the rights of women and girls; the prevention and elimination of gender-based violence; access to justice; and the prevention of torture and the promotion of the rights of detainees. In addition, it would monitor and report on civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights to

assist with efforts to further reduce poverty and support social cohesion, as well as to support the rights of victims and civic engagement. Where appropriate and possible, the Service would be ready to provide technical advice to duty bearers on international human rights standards.

72. The political and governance pillar would include the following entities:

(a) Political Affairs Service: this Service would monitor and report on political, security, social and economic developments, provide comprehensive analysis and liaise with the de facto authorities, political actors, civil society representatives and other stakeholders to promote political inclusion and broad participation in the conduct of public affairs. It would also carry out the monitoring and analysis of security dynamics across the country. It would include capacities to perform analysis relating to political economy, including a better understanding of the illicit economy. In addition, a justice capacity would analyse and report on developments relating to the rule of law;

(b) Governance and Community Affairs Service: this Service, including its staff in field offices, would promote inclusive and participatory governance structures at the national and subnational levels, as well as broad participation, including of women, young people, minorities and people with disabilities. It would provide advice on inclusive consultative mechanisms, as well as confidence-building and conflict management and reconciliation, and support the local coordination of assistance provided by United Nations and partners;

(c) Regional Cooperation Unit: this Unit would facilitate coordinated approaches by countries in the region to contribute to stability in Afghanistan. It would work closely with the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia on promoting cooperation between Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries, as well as with the Mission's liaison offices in Islamabad and Tehran.

73. The humanitarian and development pillar would include the following entities:

(a) Donor Coordination Section: this Section would facilitate structured policy dialogue between the de facto authorities, other Afghan stakeholders, the region and the wider international community; promote a path towards sustaining social investments; and support community-based systems for meeting basic human needs. It would work closely with the political economy analysis cell within the Political Affairs Service;

(b) Resident Coordinator Office: the head of the humanitarian and development pillar would also serve as the Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator. The Office would assist with the Resident Coordinator's coordination functions and strengthen the cooperation and integration of activities across the country;

(c) Risk Management Unit: this Unit would monitor United Nations-coordinated assistance to Afghanistan to minimize the risk of aid diversion and incidental benefits to individuals and entities targeted by United Nations sanctions;

(d) Mine Action Service: this component would provide assessments of the explosive ordnance threat and its impact on civilians to the Mission leadership, advise and coordinate explosive ordnance threat mitigation measures in support of humanitarian and development initiatives, and support the coordination of the humanitarian mine action sector.

74. It is recommended to retain the current six regional field offices (covering several provinces) and five provincial field offices, in order to enable outreach across

the country, support mandate implementation and report to the Mission's headquarters, subject to the security conditions.

75. The Mission would also continue to maintain its liaison offices in Islamabad and Tehran to facilitate regional cooperation efforts.

76. I urge the members of the Security Council to give due consideration to my recommendation for a successor political presence in Afghanistan for a period of one year. Given the evolving nature of the situation, the Mission's mandate and structure may need to be adjusted at that time.

77. I extend my deep appreciation to all United Nations personnel in Afghanistan, under the leadership of my Special Representative, Deborah Lyons, and non-governmental organization partners for their continued dedication and service under extremely challenging conditions.
