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Seventy-eighth year

Provisional

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New York

President: Mr. De La Gasca/Mr. Montalvo Sosa. (Ecuador)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Spasse
Brazil.	Mr. França Danese
China	Mr. Geng Shuang
France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Gabon	Mrs. Ngyema Ndong
Ghana	Ms. Oppong-Ntiri
Japan	Mr. Yamazaki
Malta	Mrs. Frazier
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Russian Federation.	Mr. Nebenzia
Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Nusseibeh
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Phipps
United States of America.	Mr. Wood

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2023/941)

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The meeting was called to order at 9.35 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2023/941)

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Director for Coordination, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; and Ms. Shaharзад Akbar, Executive Director of Rawadari.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/941, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Otunbayeva.

Ms. Otunbayeva: I am aware that the Security Council has already considered the situation in Afghanistan several times over the past month, including on the situation of women and on the independent assessment prepared by Ambassador Sinirlioğlu (S/2023/856, annex). In a world of multiplying crises, I am grateful for this ongoing attention to Afghanistan. Many Afghans inform me that they fear being forgotten, as they have been in the past. I strongly believe that my role, and that of the United Nations Assistance

Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), is to prevent that from happening.

We have just celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the General Assembly on 10 December 1948. Afghanistan was an original signatory to the Declaration. But the key features of the human rights situation in Afghanistan today are a record of systemic discrimination against women and girls, repression of political dissent and free speech, a lack of meaningful representation of minorities and ongoing instances of extrajudicial killing, arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture and ill-treatment. Despite the recent release of two women activists, a number of human right defenders and media workers continue to be arbitrarily detained.

The lack of progress in resolving human rights issues is a key factor behind the current impasse. Accepting and working to uphold international norms and standards, as set out in the United Nations treaties that Afghanistan has ratified, will continue to be a non-negotiable condition for a seat at the United Nations, as the Special Coordinator made clear and as we continually remind our interlocutors in Afghanistan.

UNAMA has a dialogue on human rights with the de facto authorities. In some areas there are openings, such as on the treatment of detainees. We see that many of the de facto authorities are open to further engagement with UNAMA and to seeking an awareness of human rights standards. Dialogue and direction are furthered through the findings and recommendations of the UNAMA human rights reports, the most recent of which details how the de facto authorities respond to complaints of gender-based violence against women and girls.

The humanitarian situation remains of grave concern. We are entering another winter, in which more than 20 million people will depend on aid. Given this year's drop in funding and, by extension, provision of assistance, many needy Afghans will be more vulnerable than they were this time last year. The representative of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs will provide a separate briefing with greater detail, but I wanted to use my voice to stress the urgency of this issue.

The de facto authorities continue to maintain a generally good level of security. Unexploded ordnance remains a significant concern in Afghanistan, especially for children. Relations between the de facto Directorate

of Mine Action Coordination and the United Nations have improved, and the suspension limiting any form of cooperation was lifted in October.

The Shia community remains at disproportionate risk of harm. Three recent attacks against Shia communities, killing 39 people, were documented in the period covered by the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2023/941). All these attacks were claimed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant–Khorasan Province. Three further targeted attacks on Shia clerics in Herat killed nine members of the Shia community.

At the same time, the countries of the region remain deeply concerned about additional possible threats emanating from inside Afghanistan. In particular, Pakistan remains convinced that the de facto authorities have done too little to contain the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, which has claimed major recent terrorist attacks inside Pakistan.

Last week, I visited Islamabad and raised there the issue of the expulsion of undocumented Afghans living in Pakistan. Many of these Afghans had fled after the collapse of the republic. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees issued a "no return advisory" for Afghanistan in August 2021 and renewed it in February 2023, citing the humanitarian and human rights situation in Afghanistan. This applies to all Afghans, regardless of their legal status. The policy and the reasons for it have led to a deterioration of relations between the two countries. It is essential that both sides take measures to prevent further deterioration and begin working on issues of common interest. I have conveyed this to Kabul and Islamabad.

Nearly half a million Afghans have returned at the onset of winter. I have been to the border, where a consortium of humanitarian actors are working constantly, alongside the de facto authorities, to provide assistance. This has proven to be an effective cooperation, and the de facto authorities have responded with great professionalism, despite lacking resources. The returnees are the poorest of the poor — 80,000 of them have nowhere in Afghanistan to go. The human rights consequences for women and girls forced to return are particularly severe.

The quality of education in Afghanistan is a growing concern. The international community has rightly focused on the need to reverse the ban on girls' education, but the deteriorating quality of education, and access to it, is affecting boys as well.

We are receiving more and more anecdotal evidence that girls of all ages can study at madrasas. It is not entirely clear, however, what constitutes a madrasa, if there is a standardized curriculum that allows modern education subjects, and how many girls are able to study in madrasas. The de facto Ministry of Education is reportedly undertaking an assessment of these schools, as well as a review of the public-school curriculum. The de facto educational authorities continue to tell us that they are working on creating conditions to allow girls to return to school. But time is passing while a generation of girls is falling behind. Failure to provide a sufficiently modern curriculum with equality of access for girls and boys alike will make it impossible to implement the de facto authorities' own agenda of economic self-sufficiency.

In my previous briefing (see S/PV.9423), I referred to the deepening problem of climate change in Afghanistan. Since then, the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) took place in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. UNAMA had strived to arrange the participation of a technical delegation from Afghanistan. We were unable to, owing to complications of accreditation. Afghanistan is one of the countries most affected by climate change in the world, while it has contributed least to its causes. I continue to believe that the de facto authorities must be part of this global conversation.

Addressing Afghanistan's climate crisis should transcend politics. The lack of water from recurring drought has reached a level of urgency that is felt across the country — from rural districts, in which people abandon their fields for lack of irrigation water to the national capital, the aquifers of which are mostly dry, leaving millions without safe drinking water.

Afghans cannot address the enormity of this challenge alone, and its impacts will not be contained within Afghanistan's borders. The de facto authorities have demonstrated a desire to engage with the international community on this issue. They accept their responsibilities in addressing it, including honouring Afghanistan's commitments to the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement. I urge all of us to find ways of including Afghanistan in future meetings on climate change.

Another area in which there is great scope for cooperation is on counter-narcotics. As the United

Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has reported, the de facto authorities successfully reduced the cultivation of opium by 95 per cent, addressing a long-standing international concern. In Kabul, I created a working group of ambassadors based there to organize an international response to provide assistance to affected farmers and to drug addicts. We need, however, greater international attention and focus on the issue from donors and the region.

I would now like to address the report of the Special Coordinator, Ambassador Sinirlioglu, and UNAMA's thoughts on the way forward. I welcome the independent assessment. It has provided needed clarity on a number of issues, backing up UNAMA's assessments. Most importantly, it provides a clearly articulated endpoint — an Afghan State fully reintegrated within the international system, without going through a further cycle of violence, and in accordance with international law. There is something in the report for each stakeholder to dislike, but I have urged all of them to focus on the larger objective.

In that regard, we noted that the de facto authorities deemed the appointment of a special envoy to be unacceptable. The de facto Minister for Foreign Affairs explained that the long history of United Nations special envoys in Afghanistan was not positive. In general, the de facto authorities' response to the report indicates a preference for bilateral approaches rather than multilateral ones. They continue to maintain that the ban on girls' education and women working are internal matters, despite their contravention of current treaty obligations. That approach, I fear, will prolong the impasse that the assessment is intended to resolve.

Our future approach must be guided, I believe, by two factors.

First, there must be a durable and more detailed international consensus on Afghanistan. I hope that we can achieve that at the next planned special envoys meeting.

Secondly, we must make far greater use of the de facto authorities' willingness to engage in dialogue with members of the international community. Dialogue does not legitimize. It can be used to express disapproval, yet encourage change. We have often spoken of the need to learn lessons from our engagement since August 2021. One lesson, I believe, is that there has simply not been enough of it. There must be more direct engagement with the de facto authorities, including in Kabul.

I am very grateful to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for organizing the seminal International Conference on Women in Islam, held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, last month. The demonstration of unity from the Islamic world on women's rights was essential. That demonstration will surely have a cumulative positive effect over time.

Notwithstanding the impasse on women's rights, UNAMA has had certain successful interactions in the areas of climate, microfinance, counter-narcotics and drug addiction, demining, private-sector development, human rights and governance. Those are areas that directly affect the lives of millions of Afghans. Technical assistance is required at the working level to the de facto ministries delivering services in those areas. For their part, the de facto authorities need to understand the value of the multilateral offer that has been put before them by the Special Coordinator. It elevates the issue of Afghanistan at a time when other issues are filling the international agenda and clarifies a pathway to finally resolving Afghanistan's relationship with the international community. Compromises, however, will be required from all sides.

I will continue to make every effort, with all the resources that I have, to encourage stakeholders towards the arena where compromises can be made.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Rajasingham.

Mr. Rajasingham: It is hard to put into words the extent of the daily struggle faced by so many Afghan families, but the numbers tell their own story. As we come to the end of 2023, humanitarian needs continue to push record levels, with more than 29 million people requiring humanitarian assistance — 1 million more than in January and a 340 per cent increase in the past five years. New developments continue to pile on the pressure. In October, three 6.3 magnitude earthquakes in the space of just eight days in the western province of Herat damaged 40,000 homes, 10,000 of which were completely destroyed, and affected 275,000 people. Thousands of families are now living in tents and makeshift shelters, where they are exposed to rapidly falling winter temperatures. In the eastern and southern regions, there has been a dramatic surge in the number of Afghans returning from Pakistan, following the Government of Pakistan's announced repatriation of "illegal foreigners" from 1 November.

Since then, more than 450,000 Afghans have returned, more than 85 per cent of whom are women and children. Many have been stripped of their belongings, left disorientated by days of travel and are arriving in poor medical condition. They require both immediate attention and assistance at the border and longer-term support for reintegration. Their sudden arrival could have far-reaching consequences for the whole country unless sustainable and joined-up assistance is received with support from the international community.

The needs of women and girls in Afghanistan have continued to grow at a scale and intensity commensurate with the repressive approach taken by the de facto authorities. For two years now, girls and women have been marginalized from almost all forms of public life. They have had their access to secondary and higher education systematically denied, their movements restricted and their ability to work, including in the humanitarian sector, prohibited. While no additional bans or restrictions have been imposed on women working for international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or the United Nations since I last addressed the Security Council in June, further attempts have been made to limit their role. In recent months the de facto authorities have issued a series of official letters to several NGOs and women-led organizations requesting the removal of women from leadership positions, including director, deputy director and board member roles, and as signatories for bank accounts. Partners have reported that documents signed by Afghan women or projects mentioning women beneficiaries have also been rejected. And some local agreements authorizing Afghan women to participate in humanitarian action were revoked by de facto authority departments after they had been secured.

Nevertheless, we continue to achieve some degree of practical cooperation with the de facto authorities at the local level, which is enabling Afghan women to be involved in humanitarian action. To date, at least 630 local arrangements have been agreed permitting Afghan women to participate in all manner of response activities, from assessments to registration, distribution and service delivery and monitoring. Some humanitarian programmes that were initially suspended owing to the bans have now resumed and even expanded operations. A recent in-country partner survey has revealed that, since January, just under one third of humanitarian and women-led organizations employing both Afghan women and men are now fully

operational. An additional 43 per cent of organizations reported that they are partially operating with both Afghan women and men staff. While aid delivery in Afghanistan remains far from straightforward or ideal, those are signs that principled aid delivery is both possible and ongoing.

The humanitarian community remains committed to delivering that principled assistance. Between January and October this year, the United Nations and our NGO partners provided direct life-saving assistance to 26.5 million people, including 14.2 million women and girls. In some sectors, such as education, food security and health, assistance has even increased. Adequate financial resources are required to maintain reach to women and girls moving forward. The humanitarian response has a critical funding gap of \$1.8 billion as we end this year.

In this challenging context, the humanitarian exception provided by resolution 2615 (2021) continues to play a vital role. It continues to provide important reassurance, principally to commercial actors, that the provision of services and goods necessary for delivering humanitarian assistance and supporting basic human needs — including the processing of financial transactions — does not violate United Nations sanctions. That reassurance has been critical to encourage the banking sector to transfer funds into Afghanistan, and it has eased many of the difficulties faced by humanitarian organizations in the aftermath of August 2021. Since the adoption of resolution 2615 (2021), the number of United Nations agencies and NGOs reporting difficulties in moving funds into Afghanistan has dropped from 87 per cent, where it stood two months prior to the adoption of the exception, and has now stabilized at about 50 per cent. But challenges remain, principally around banking de-risking.

Important work is ongoing to establish at a more granular level the specific bottlenecks facing humanitarian organizations — whether they are in relation to the specific currency of transferred funds, issues with intermediary banks, or the willingness of the SWIFT global financial messaging system to accept money-transfer instructions to Afghanistan. The evidence collected will be vital to working with banks and States on solutions in the coming months.

Guidance issued by several Member States has also contributed to understanding the exceptions, including the fact that when a designated person

holds a leadership position in a ministry, it does not mean that the ministry is also subject to sanctions. That is important because, as a matter of operational necessity, humanitarian actors in Afghanistan must make payments to line ministries, some of which are currently headed by designated individuals. Those payments include rent on government-owned premises and warehouses; withholding tax on national or international NGO staff income, rent and suppliers; visas and work permits for national or international NGO staff; fees for imports; landing fees to the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation — headed by a designated individual — for the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service; and licences for NGO registration, communications equipment and municipal charges, among others. Those are requirements we face in any and every humanitarian operation in the world. They are payments that have to be made if we are to even start the process of aid delivery. Furthermore, a failure to make any, or all, of those payments would have severe consequences for humanitarian actors, including the freezing of bank accounts, the shutting of offices and even deregistration.

A further key component of resolution 2615 (2021) was the clarification that the provision of funds or assets to designated persons or entities is permitted when it is necessary for humanitarian and basic human needs programming. However, let me reassure the Council that the existence of that exception in no way means that humanitarian organizations in Afghanistan approach the matter lightly. On the contrary, all necessary precautions are taken to avoid making payments to designated individuals or entities. For example, when using hawala providers — as two thirds of our partners inform us they have to do at some point in the banking chain because of ongoing issues in the Afghan banking sector — strict measures are taken to avoid those providers listed under the resolution 1988 (2011) sanctions regime. Indeed, there has been no reported use of those entities. Furthermore, our humanitarian partners ensure that payments strictly match the modalities for payments made during the years of the republic. Those payments include, for example, cash payments to officials at the immigration desk at the airport for international visas; payments via bank transfer to line ministries for withholding tax on behalf of national staff, landlords or contractors; or payments in cash deposited in Da Afghanistan Bank for licenses for very high frequency radios or armoured vehicles. All those payments are the cost of operating

in Afghanistan, just as they were prior to August 2021. None are aid diversion.

Let me now turn to aid diversion specifically. I want to be clear about what we are seeing in Afghanistan. Aid diversion, as frequently seen in other contexts, such as the looting of warehouses or the hijacking of aid convoys, has not occurred in Afghanistan. To the extent that aid diversion has occurred, or poses a threat, it tends to take place post-distribution, often in the form of confiscation of assistance by the authorities or community leaders. Aid that is confiscated tends to be taken to ensure that everyone in a community, rather than only the 70 or 80 per cent who are most in need, receives some form of assistance. It is not intended to benefit the authorities or leaders themselves. Redistribution of that kind is a common cultural practice in Afghanistan and something that is frequently undertaken by communities themselves. That in no way means that the practice is not problematic and that it does not constitute aid diversion. It may. But it does mean that the mitigation measures and response need to be tailored to the specific nature of the practice.

The other challenge we are seeing to aid distribution in Afghanistan relates to attempted interference in aid programming by the de facto authorities. Over the past year, there has been a noticeable increase in the desire of the de facto authorities to be more involved in humanitarian programming. The attempted interference has contributed to a 21 per cent increase in bureaucratic and administrative impediments between January and October 2023 compared to the same period in 2022. While the forms of interference such as intervening in beneficiary selection or recruitment, exerting pressure to change established service delivery models, requesting data and information with regard to budget and staffing contracts and requesting the payment of new fees, are the same as we see in other humanitarian operations globally and do not necessarily imply aid diversion, they do undermine our capacity to operate in a manner that is independent and impartial. And they do cause delays to assistance. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Afghanistan continues to work with our humanitarian partners to resolve those obstacles and to categorize the types of interference and nature of aid diversion more accurately. That will help to ensure that the tools we deploy to prevent and respond to those different issues are the most appropriate and effective.

Humanitarian organizations take very seriously their responsibility to minimize the risk of aid diversion, and we take strict measures to make sure that aid reaches its intended beneficiaries. When instances of aid diversion have occurred, such as in Ghor province — which was brought to the Council's attention during its meeting in June (see S/PV.9354) — immediate action is taken to cease distribution while issues are resolved. Donors are kept fully informed every step of the way.

OCHA has just launched the *Global Humanitarian Overview 2024*. Afghanistan remains one of the countries with the highest levels of humanitarian need and the country in which we are aiming to reach the greatest number of people with humanitarian assistance. The humanitarian community is committed to doing so. But we cannot be the solution. Ultimately, the Afghan people need sustainable solutions and a longer-term approach that moves them beyond mere survival. They need solutions that allow support for income generation, agriculture, climate resilience and the restoration of basic services. For that, the people of Afghanistan need and deserve peace and stability and an environment in which every Afghan can enjoy respect for their human rights. I urge the Council to continue its efforts to that end.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Rajasingham for his briefing.

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

I would like to express my thanks for the opportunity to address the Security Council and to provide an update on the activities of the 1988 Committee, in accordance with paragraph 56 of resolution 2255 (2015). I would like to extend my appreciation to Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for their invaluable support to the 1988 Sanctions Committee.

I would also like to thank the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team and the Secretariat for their dedicated support for the work of the Committee in implementing the sanctions regime under resolution 1988 (2011), especially over the past year in Afghanistan. As we move through this critical period for Afghanistan, the Committee looks forward to continued close engagement with UNAMA and the

States in the region under my chairmanship of the 1988 Committee in 2024.

Let me begin this briefing by recalling that the main objective of the sanctions regime is to deter threats to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan through the use of measures such as asset freezes, travel bans and arms embargoes. Resolution 2665 (2022) reiterated the need to ensure that the current sanctions regime contributes effectively to efforts to achieve a sustainable and inclusive peace in Afghanistan.

Now, two years after the Taliban seized power, the situation in Afghanistan remains complex and dynamic. On the security front, some terrorist groups have gained greater freedom of action, resulting in an increased terrorist threat in neighbouring contiguous States. The effectiveness and sincerity of some measures that the Taliban appear to be taking to curb certain groups remain unclear. Foreign terrorist fighters pose a threat on the other side of Afghanistan's borders. The Member States expressed their concern about the presence of foreign terrorist fighters sheltered by the Taliban.

Although the Taliban are fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP), the group retains the capability to carry out high-profile attacks in Afghanistan. The Member States believe that, in view of its nature and its well-known objectives of building a caliphate, ISIL-KP was the most serious current domestic terrorist threat inside Afghanistan, projecting also into neighbouring countries, Central Asia and beyond. Ties between the Taliban and Al-Qaida, as well as with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), remain strong. The TTP has launched attacks against Pakistan, and some Member States have reported indications that Al-Qaida is attempting to rebuild its operational capacity.

According to the Monitoring Team, while opium poppy production has been significantly reduced this year, opium prices have risen, as has the production of methamphetamine, a more profitable enterprise. Several senior Taliban figures remain deeply involved in drug production and trafficking. Monitoring the upcoming planting season is crucial for a credible long-term assessment.

In the light of that complex situation, it is important for the current sanctions regime to remain an appropriate and effective tool to counter threats to peace and stability in Afghanistan. According to some reports, the Taliban constantly raise the issue of lifting sanctions, but there

is little evidence that this significantly influences their decision-making. The Monitoring Team's reports reveal that significant difficulties are being encountered in the implementation of the 1988 (2011) sanctions.

Some Member States are expressing concern about the increasing availability of substantial quantities of weaponry and military equipment, gifted by a number of Member States to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces before August 2021, as well as about the continued existence of an internal market for small arms and light weapons. Member States in the region have reported the deployment of advanced weaponry, including of NATO calibre, against Government forces of neighbouring States, as well as the transfer of such weaponry to entities on the sanctions list.

Afghanistan continues to face an unprecedented humanitarian crisis — in 2023, more than two thirds of its population is in need of assistance. The humanitarian exemption mechanism established under resolution 2615 (2021) has created the conditions necessary to address that issue without violating United Nations sanctions. While the Council has encouraged those providing humanitarian assistance to minimize the diversion of assistance to individuals or entities on the 1988 sanctions list, some Member States have expressed concern about attempts by the Taliban to redirect humanitarian assistance intended for needy families to the Taliban, especially in provinces with significant ethnic minorities.

Resolution 2665 (2022) highlighted the dire economic and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan and recalled that women, children and minorities were disproportionately affected. The resolution also expressed concern about the erosion of respect for the rights of women, girls and minorities. In addition, restrictions on Afghan women working for the United Nations and non-governmental organizations are still in place.

With regard to the travel ban, several exemptions have been requested since the previously approved exemption mechanism for the Taliban was not extended in August 2022. The Committee supports exemptions to the travel ban for members of the Taliban on the sanctions list when those individuals are promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan or humanitarian objectives. In 2023, the Committee approved 16 exemptions to the travel ban for members of the Taliban on the sanctions list for travel to eight Member States.

However, concerns remain about unauthorized travel and late requests, highlighting the importance of Member States adhering to the travel ban measures.

The Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team's fourteenth annual report (see S/2023/370) recommended that the Committee update certain provisions of its guidelines for the conduct of its work, including exemption procedures, short-notice or emergency authorizations and standard forms. The Committee did not agree to take action to implement that recommendation. It is my understanding that the Security Council is aware of that and will take it into consideration.

As talks aimed at promoting peace and stability continue, there is a growing need to continue to report on the activities of the Taliban, as well as those of individuals and entities subject to the sanctions regime under resolution 1988 (2011), in order to ensure compliance with the sanctions. To facilitate that, resolution 2716 (2023) extended the mandate of the Taliban Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team until December 2024.

I emphasize the importance of Member States cooperating and sharing information with the Monitoring Team, particularly given the Team's reliance on external sources of information in view of the situation in Afghanistan. I urge all Member States, including their intelligence and security services, to respect the annexes to resolutions 2255 (2015) and 2611 (2021), to consult confidentially with the Monitoring Team and to strengthen the enforcement of the sanctions measures.

Once again, I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Council and to update it on the work of the 1988 Committee and the challenges we face in the current context.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to Ms. Akbar.

Ms. Akbar: I am grateful for this opportunity to brief the Security Council. My name is Shaharzar Akbar. I am a human rights defender and Executive Director of Rawadari, an Afghan civil society organization that has reported on the situation of human rights, including of women, girls and marginalized groups, since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021.

Today I want to share with the Council the trends we have observed on the ground in Afghanistan, what they tell us about the Taliban's vision for the country and, most importantly, what it means for international engagement, including by the Security Council, going forward.

Since the Taliban's return to power, we have documented an alarming pattern of human rights violations across the board. We have witnessed repression of women's rights in every conceivable sphere of life, from education and work to movement and participation in public life — repression so widespread and systematic that international experts have deemed it gender apartheid. Daily, we witness more cohesive enforcement of those restrictions with a rise in public corporal punishments and an increasing number of decrees limiting women's rights and freedoms, now numbering 90. The Taliban's promises of an inclusive Government, of respect for women's rights and of the temporary nature of any of those restrictions have proved to be lies.

We have witnessed a brutal crackdown on civic space, on the freedom of expression and the media and on human rights defenders. The Afghanistan Journalists' Centre has reported 99 incidents of violations of press freedom in 2023, including 41 arrests and criminal charges being brought against journalists. At least two women human rights defenders, Manizha Sediqi and Parisa Azada, who were targeted for their activism, remain in custody.

Despite the declared general amnesty, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and civil society organizations like ours have documented the ongoing killings of former security forces and Government employees, which to date have not been investigated. We have witnessed targeted attacks, forced displacement and marginalization of Afghanistan's various religious and ethnic groups, such as Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmens and Tajiks, who have no meaningful representation in the de facto Administration. The Taliban have further excluded Shia religious scholars from provincial Ulema councils.

Furthermore, we have witnessed the dismantling of an independent judiciary and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission; the undermining of the independence of other legal institutions, such as the Afghanistan Independent Bar Association; and the replacement of women, Shia and

other non-Taliban judges and legal professionals, which has resulted in widespread impunity and undermined the rule of law.

What do those trends tell us? The pattern of violations that I just described illustrate the Taliban's destructive vision for my country's future. In that vision, there is no rule of law. In that vision, there are no dissenters, no human rights defenders and no independent media. In that world, there is no quality and comprehensive education, and as a result, no economic prosperity. There are no ballot boxes or respect for the people's right to choose.

In that future, Afghanistan's Government is almost entirely composed of madrasa-educated Taliban members with an unquestioning loyalty to their leader. Women and marginalized ethnic, linguistic and religious groups have no share in power and decision-making. In that vision, women are less human than men. Women's education does not matter. Their rightful place is in the home. They have no role in decision-making or governance. They are constantly surveilled and held in place by their own male children and relatives, taxi drivers, the religious police and the entire machinery of the de facto authorities. When women face violence and abuse, their only options are to bear it or to die. I ask the Council: is this a future the international community is willing to support?

Let me now share a different vision. We — the majority of Afghans — want an equal, peaceful and prosperous country. We want a country that is not at war with its women and girls. We want a country that embraces its rich ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity. And we want a country that respects the human rights of all Afghans. The Taliban have shown the international community who they are. And we, Afghan women, have told the international community what we want. The choice before the Council is whether it will support our vision of a peaceful, equal, diverse, democratic Afghanistan or the Taliban's vision, one that violates the Charter of the United Nations and the fundamental values that the Council claims to uphold.

Right now, it is the Taliban who are defining the rules of the game, and humanitarian organizations, the United Nations and the international community are forced to play by their rules in order to negotiate modest concessions. It is ironic that, while we have insisted that humanitarian aid can never be conditional, it is the Taliban who have imposed conditions on the work of

the United Nations and humanitarian organizations by banning Afghan women from working in most sectors. And regrettably, the United Nations and humanitarian actors have complied.

Let me be clear: Afghanistan needs continued and increased international assistance. We should also continue to explore ways to relieve the economic pressure on ordinary Afghans without benefiting the Taliban. However, the situation in Afghanistan is not merely a humanitarian crisis. It is a political, a security and — most fundamentally — a human rights crisis, and we need the Security Council to be clear that human rights, especially women's rights, will be central to the international community's next steps in Afghanistan. I therefore leave the Council with the following recommendations.

First, as the Council deliberates on how to take forward the recommendations made in the independent assessment on Afghanistan mandated by resolution 2679 (2023) (S/2023/856, annex), it is critical to note that no steps should contradict the repeated recommendations of many Afghan women that there be no unprincipled engagement with or recognition of the Taliban or a seat for them at the United Nations as long as their systematic discrimination against women and girls continues. Setting out a road map for engagement as the Taliban's abuses deepen sends a message that women's rights are dispensable. For that reason, I urge the Council not to provide a blanket endorsement of the report's recommendations without establishing clear and explicit safeguards to protect the human rights of Afghan women, including their full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in any decision-making or new mechanisms, such as the creation of a United Nations Special Envoy or broader United Nations-convened meetings of Special Envoys, going forward.

I urge the Council to be clear that the normalization of relations with the Taliban is not possible without swiftly reversing all restrictions on women's rights, as called for by the Council in resolution 2681 (2023), and Afghanistan meeting its obligations under international law, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). That must be a collective red line for Member States, United Nations agencies and all humanitarian actors, and it must be central to discussions of any other areas regarding Afghanistan, including security, the economy, development, counter-terrorism, narcotics and migration. It is also critical that any next steps do

not fall short of what the Security Council has already called for.

Secondly, I urge the Council to support all avenues to ensure justice and accountability for human rights violations by the Taliban, including by bringing a case against Afghanistan before the International Court of Justice for violations of CEDAW and through the establishment of an independent international accountability mechanism on Afghanistan.

Thirdly, I urge Member States and other relevant United Nations bodies to label and investigate the Taliban's treatment of Afghan women as both gender persecution and gender apartheid. Furthermore, gender apartheid must be included in the treaty on crimes against humanity that is currently under consideration.

Fourthly, it is critical that UNAMA, as the primary United Nations presence in the country, retain and implement its current mandate in full, especially the tasks of monitoring and advocating for respect for human rights and providing protection for those at risk.

Finally, the international community must prioritize extending support to Afghan human rights defenders and civil society, both those who have been forced into exile and the brave activists who remain in the country, by expediting resettlement for those at risk, funding civic work in Afghanistan and continuing to meaningfully consult with the diverse human rights community of Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Akbar for the information she has provided.

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

Mr. Yamazaki (Japan): I would like to start by thanking Special Representative Otunbayeva and Director Rajasingham of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for providing an update on the situation. I also thank Ms. Shaharзад Akbar for her remarks on the dire status of Afghan women. My appreciation also goes to Ambassador De La Gasca of Ecuador.

More than two years have passed since the Taliban takeover in 2021, and the international community's interest in Afghanistan appears to be gradually waning. However, the humanitarian and human rights situation, as well as the political situation, remain severe. The economy is somewhat stable but at a very low

equilibrium. While the survey conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime found that opium cultivation decreased substantially — in what should be a welcome development — more assistance is now required for rural communities that had relied on the opium economy. While security has improved overall, sporadic terror attacks are alarming.

The strong earthquakes that hit Afghanistan in early October caused tremendous damage and casualties in Herat province. I would like to express condolences to those who lost families and loved ones. The recent mass influx of Afghans from Pakistan is also of humanitarian concern.

It goes without saying that we remain highly concerned about the human rights situation of women and girls. Japan urges the Taliban to reverse its restrictions on the freedom of women and girls so they can realize their full, equal, meaningful and safe participation, as called for in resolution 2681 (2023).

The international community should maintain and increase its commitment to Afghanistan. The people of the country need to be empowered through greater engagement and more international support. For Japan's part, its Embassy in Kabul has continuously and directly urged the Taliban to remove its repressive policies, listen to the people's voices and build a constructive relationship with the international community. At the same time, we have coordinated with the Taliban to make social and economic progress, and we have provided assistance for the Afghan people. As part of our efforts, Japan recently announced approximately \$58.4 million in assistance which will be provided mainly through United Nations agencies to support Afghan people who are facing a multifaceted humanitarian crisis.

On this occasion, I would like to touch upon the independent assessment, which was provided to the Council by Special Coordinator Sinirlioğlu in accordance with resolution 2679 (2023). Japan welcomes that comprehensive assessment, in particular its emphasis on engagement and the need to promote confidence-building with the Taliban. I am confident the assessment will serve as a good basis for discussions on our way forward. Now, the international community should recognize the need to increase international engagement in a more coherent, coordinated and structured manner and make sure the assessment's recommendations are implemented properly.

In that context, I welcome the expression of intention by the Secretary-General, in his latest report (S/2023/941), to convene the next special envoys meeting. Japan will actively participate in that important conference to form an internationally coordinated approach to Afghanistan. We also believe that a United Nations special envoy should be appointed to facilitate engagement among relevant stakeholders, as recommended in the independent assessment. I would like to emphasize that the role and expertise of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) remains critically important, and I am sure that the United Nations special envoy and UNAMA will work closely and complement each other's roles.

The Taliban's posture on the independent assessment is also important. I encourage the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNAMA to continue to communicate with the Taliban on this matter. The Japanese Embassy in Kabul will also actively engage in communicating the spirit of the independent assessment.

In conclusion, I stress that Japan, a co-penholder on this file, will continue to address this issue in order to see peace, stability and prosperity for the people of Afghanistan.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): I thank Special Representative Otunbayeva for her invaluable briefing; and since this is our last meeting as co-penholders on this file, allow me to also recognize her tireless commitment to Afghanistan and to its people and her steady leadership of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I assure her that the United Arab Emirates will continue its strong support of her vital role and efforts in Afghanistan. I also thank the briefers for their insightful remarks.

In carrying out our responsibility for this file over the past year, alongside our partner, Japan, we have worked to build and maintain Security Council unity. From our perspective, it is vital that this unity continue and that it coalesce around an international approach towards Afghanistan that works.

It has been two and a half years since the fall of Kabul.

Afghan women and girls continue to face severe curtailment of their rights. For just one example, the recent UNAMA report on the response to sexual and gender-based violence documents how women

who are victims of this violence are sent to prison, because authorities say there are no other ways of protecting them.

The security situation remains precarious, with profoundly alarming cross-border incidents. A week ago, a terrorist attack, claimed by Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, targeted a Pakistani police station close to the border, killing 23 officers and wounding 32.

Additionally, Afghanistan's fragile and contracting economy is threatened by the decrease in aid funding. The October earthquake in Herat compounded humanitarian needs in a country where two thirds of the population continues to require assistance.

None of that is sustainable, and all of it must move on a different trajectory of hope and development. Afghanistan deserves better.

This year, we voted unanimously to renew the mandate of UNAMA, to commission the independent assessment and to stand up for the human rights of Afghan women and girls (see S/PV.9283). Despite the divisions that sometimes preclude this body from taking necessary action, there was resounding unity on this file. All 15 members reaffirmed the international community's commitment to the present and the future of Afghanistan and its people, especially its women and girls. We did not let them down, and we will continue to support the way forward.

With the submission of the independent assessment mandated by resolution 2679 (2023), we now have a blueprint for an approach that would offer hope for ordinary Afghans. While the assessment is no panacea, it does provide a constructive alternative to a failed status quo. The measures outlined as immediately implementable include provisions such as support for agricultural livelihoods, improvements in the health sector and assistance with water management. Looking at the staggering scale of the needs in the country and the limited amount of aid available, it is very hard to argue against those types of activities.

While we fundamentally abhor and reject the restrictions imposed on women and girls, we are at the same time convinced that withholding assistance that is aimed at basic human needs runs counter to our commitment to Afghanistan and its people and to our humanitarian imperative. Of course, even if the Council endorses that approach, and we hope that it does, we should not be naive about the road ahead. That process

will be neither easy nor quick. But the essence of the pathway outlined by the Special Coordinator is that it demonstrates what can be gained by both sides from mutual and principled engagement.

We have just wrapped up the twenty-eighth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in the United Arab Emirates, and the Conference highlighted, as never before, the interplay between climate and stability. The changing climate in Afghanistan does not only imperil its people, but also has significant implications beyond its borders. The ongoing drought is diminishing agricultural yields, leading to disputes over access to water, keeping children away from school and driving people away from their homes. In a country with the world's highest humanitarian needs and where 80 per cent of livelihoods depend on agriculture, the destabilizing effects of climate change can be devastating.

The United Arab Emirates is therefore today pleased to announce that it will sponsor the position of a climate security adviser within UNAMA. The adviser will be responsible for mapping out climate risks and devising appropriate strategies for addressing those, in order to reduce climate-related vulnerabilities. However, effectively responding to climate security risks in Afghanistan will require tailored engagement and technical assistance to the de facto authorities — exactly as the independent assessment proposes.

Despite UNAMA's crucial work and the various efforts by Member States, there remains an enormous gap between the reality of Afghanistan and the aspirations of its people. That gap will not be narrowed if we double down on a failed approach. The Security Council and the international community must lend its support to a principled and pragmatic process that serves the lives and livelihoods of all Afghans. Nobody is served if Afghanistan is isolated, if its economy implodes, if border tensions escalate, if farmers are made destitute or if terrorism is allowed a foothold — not least of whom Afghan women and girls, who must be included in charting their own destiny and that of their country.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would also like to begin by thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva, our colleague from the Office for the Coordination of

Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Rajasingham, and Ms. Akbar for their briefings.

The New Agenda for Peace highlights education as one of the proven development paths that strengthen the social contract and human security. In Afghanistan, 84,234 secondary school graduates took the university entrance exam this year. Not one of them was a woman. I repeat: not a single woman was among the 84,234 high school students with the prospect of going to university. At the same time, we note that the most likely economic scenario for the country in the medium term is that of a recession, along with an increase in poverty. Afghanistan's economic development is inconceivable without the contribution of women; whether as company directors, entrepreneurs or employees, Afghan women are indispensable to the country's prosperity. The Arria Formula meeting at our Mission on 11 December confirmed this once again: Afghanistan can achieve lasting stability, security and prosperity only with the full participation of women.

The international community must adopt a common strategy and act with unity. We just heard that the Council was united and must remain so. The independent assessment that the Secretary-General submitted to us (S/2023/856,annex) provides an opportunity to develop such a strategic approach. We support the co-penholders, Japan and United Arab Emirates, in their efforts to find a way forward. For Switzerland, in addition to the inclusion of women in all processes and activities, two other aspects will be essential on that path.

First, as we heard, there is the massive forced return of Afghans from Pakistan, 60 per cent of whom are children. That represents an enormous challenge for an economic and humanitarian system that is already severely strained. Switzerland recognizes the immense efforts made by neighbouring countries to take in those refugees. At the same time, we recall the obligations under international law, including international refugee law, and the need for durable political solutions. On this last point, we are grateful to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for its commitment and fully support it. Those migratory events also serve to underline the importance of the broader regional context of Afghanistan. States in the region need to be closely involved in all efforts.

Secondly, there are climate issues. A week ago, the Council's Informal Expert Group on Climate and

Security met to discuss the situation in Afghanistan. On that occasion, UNAMA highlighted the scale of the impact of climate change on the country, both in humanitarian and livelihood terms. It is therefore essential that we step up our efforts on this issue, particularly in view of its regional and global impacts. Switzerland is also in favour of reviewing the international commitment on the matter, as part of the follow-up to the independent assessment.

On the occasion of the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk reminded us that we must rebuild a foundation of hope. For Afghanistan, we could find hope in the prospect of a country where the human rights and fundamental freedoms of every individual are respected and where living in security, free from fear, is guaranteed. Educational opportunities for all, but especially for women and girls, are a key ingredient in this foundation of hope for a stable, secure and prosperous Afghanistan. Switzerland remains determined to continue, along with Council members, its active support for Afghanistan. We also continue to support UNAMA and its vital work on the ground.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva, Ambassador De La Gasca, Mr. Rajasingham and Ms. Akbar for their very informative briefings. I also thank the entire team of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for the work and commitment they have to a stable, prosperous, inclusive and secure Afghanistan.

I want to highlight three pressing topics in my remarks today: the situation of women and girls, humanitarian access and the United Nations independent assessment on Afghanistan (S/2023/856, annex).

First, the United Nations December 2023 report (S/2023/941) on the situation of Afghan women offers a concrete look at the bleak reality for women in Afghanistan. The report clearly states that Afghan women urge the United Nations to stress to the Taliban that it must include women in all sectors of society. The United States hears their requests and will not consider any significant steps towards the normalization of relations with the Taliban until women and girls have meaningful access to education, the workforce and other aspects of social and political life. Indeed, the international community as a whole has spoken out

against those indefensible restrictions. We were also disheartened by the snapshot in UNAMA's December 2023 report on the handling of complaints of gender-based violence against women and girls. The report notes the difficulty that Afghan women and girls face when trying to report gender-based violence. The report also highlights that the lack of female police officers in some units further impedes access to justice for women and girls.

Secondly, the difficult operating environment created by the Taliban is hindering humanitarian access, notably through restrictions on female humanitarian staff. The United States is committed to providing assistance to those most in need. Since 2021, we have provided over \$2 billion in assistance. It is imperative to recognize that humanitarian assistance alone is not enough. That is why the Taliban must reverse their policies that keep women from contributing to Afghanistan's economy. For our part, we will work with donors, multilateral development banks and other partners to support sustainable interventions that create livelihood opportunities, including for Afghan women.

Thirdly, we welcome the United Nations independent assessment on Afghanistan. We agree with the report's recommendations on appointing a United Nations Special Envoy and establishing an international contact group. The United Nations Special Envoy and the contact group will be important for the development of a road map that ensures Afghanistan meets its international obligations. They will also complement UNAMA's work to accomplish its mission of promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The Security Council must continue to work together to press the Taliban to reverse their destructive course. The Taliban must engage in serious dialogue with the Afghan people to support their aspirations, to put an end to human rights abuses and to allow assistance to reach those in need. We look forward to continuing to work with Council members to advance our shared objectives in Afghanistan.

Mr. Spasse (Albania): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva, Director Rajasingham, Executive Director Akbar and Ambassador De La Gasca, Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), for their insightful presentations.

The overall situation in Afghanistan continues to be a matter of grave concern that needs increased

attention and action from the international community. For years, the people of Afghanistan have endured violence, discrimination and deprivation of their most basic rights. Women and girls continue to be excluded and erased from public life. The Taliban have already institutionalized large-scale and systematic gender-based discrimination and violence against women and girls. As a result, women and girls in Afghanistan are living in an apartheid regime. Ongoing extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, detentions, torture and the ill-treatment of former Government officials and members of the former Afghan National Defence and Security Forces remain deeply concerning. Cases of torture and inhumane treatment in detention centres, as well as human rights violations, remain largely unpunished. This culture of impunity is once again showing us the real face of the Taliban. They promised a more inclusive and less repressive leadership but ended up doing the exact opposite. We cannot turn a blind eye to the plight of the Afghan people, who are enduring unimaginable hardships and uncertainty on a daily basis. It is essential to prioritize the protection of civilians, uphold human rights and work towards addressing the root causes of the conflict by promoting inclusive and sustainable development in Afghanistan.

The instability in Afghanistan has the potential to spill over into neighbouring countries, further exacerbating regional tensions and insecurity. It is evident that the situation in Afghanistan is not a mere domestic issue, but one that has reverberating consequences for international peace and security. We expect the de facto authorities to manage, mitigate and prevent threats to regional and global stability by taking all the necessary measures to prevent the use of Afghan soil for threats or attacks against any other countries; for planning and financing terrorist attacks; or for producing, selling and trafficking illegal narcotics.

Albania welcomed the independent assessment (S/2023/856, annex) published several days ago. We must use that momentum to prioritize our efforts to achieve a secure, stable, prosperous and inclusive Afghanistan and to discuss the strategic focus areas for addressing those priorities. Any progress or increased engagement with the de facto authorities must be linked to benchmarks grounded in human rights obligations, particularly in women's rights. All our efforts to address the overall humanitarian, human rights and socioeconomic situation in Afghanistan will fall short

if we fail to urgently address the dire situation of women and girls in the country.

We must also support those on the ground who are working tirelessly to defend human rights and provide assistance to those in need, including by providing funding for humanitarian aid, supporting grass-roots organizations and offering refuge to those who are in immediate danger.

In the light of those sobering realities, it is incumbent upon us to rally together and respond to the call for action. We cannot afford to stand idly by while the people of Afghanistan continue to suffer. We must mobilize our resources, political will and diplomacy to support Afghanistan in its quest for lasting peace, stability and prosperity.

In conclusion, we urge all members to redouble efforts to find viable and sustainable solutions and to stand with the people of Afghanistan in their pursuit of a better future.

Mr. Afonso (Mozambique): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Council, namely, Gabon, Ghana and my own country, Mozambique (A3).

We wish to thank Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, for her important work. We also thank Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and Ms. Shaharзад Akbar for their important briefings. We express our sincere appreciation for the dedicated work carried out by the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011).

The report under consideration (S/2023/941) presents several actions carried out by the Taliban Administration. The response plan implemented by the Taliban authorities to manage the large-scale repatriation of Afghan citizens returning from Pakistan is a positive step forward. The establishment of subcommittees dedicated to providing assistance in various aspects, such as safeguarding the rights of Afghan refugees, demonstrates a proactive approach to addressing the situation.

We see the efforts to promote unity and engagement between the authorities and the population through awareness-raising meetings as a promising initiative.

We urge the Taliban to ensure that those meetings are inclusive and representative of all segments of Afghan society, including women and girls. The creation of ulema shuras in all 34 provinces is a positive development that allows for greater popular participation in the discussions on development priorities and the prevention and resolution of conflicts. That process is crucial for rebuilding the Afghan social fabric and fostering trust between the population and the authorities.

We take note of the efforts by Taliban officials to seek investments and enhance cooperation with neighbouring countries. We encourage the Taliban authorities to continue those efforts and explore further opportunities for economic growth and development.

We take note of the improvement in the security situation in the country, as evidenced by the significant reduction in security incidents, the softening of armed opposition and the decrease in terrorist attacks. While there has been an improvement in the security situation in the country, we remain concerned about the protection of vulnerable groups, including United Nations personnel on the ground. It is crucial for the authorities to continue their efforts to combat terrorism and ensure the safety and security of all Afghan citizens.

While recognizing the ongoing efforts to combat drugs and opium production, we urge the Taliban authorities to prioritize supporting farmers in transitioning to alternative crops for sustainable livelihoods. That transition will contribute to long-term stability and prosperity for Afghan communities.

Despite some constructive developments, we reiterate our deep concern regarding the restrictions imposed on women's participation in the country's political life. We therefore call for a system of governance that mirrors the diversity of Afghan society and ensures the effective and equal participation of all citizens, including women and other minority groups. In that regard, we strongly condemn all policies or actions that discriminate against women and girls. We urge the Taliban to reverse the decrees that prevent women from accessing work and education. It is essential to empower women and girls and to ensure their full participation in all spheres of Afghan society. We further urge the Afghan authorities to prioritize the well-being and safety of the Afghan people and allow Afghan women to contribute to humanitarian efforts.

We welcome the engagement of neighbouring countries and regional organizations such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in raising awareness among the Taliban Government about the need to promote a more inclusive society. Those collaborative efforts have the potential to contribute positively to the development and progress of Afghan society.

The critical humanitarian situation, aggravated by climate events, demands an urgent response in order to save the millions of lives at risk. In that regard, we reiterate our call on the international community to renew its support and increase response activities. Supporting Afghanistan's economic development and providing technical assistance are crucial to meeting the basic needs of Afghans and enhancing their resilience. Accordingly, the A3 endorses the release of Afghanistan's international financial assets for the purpose of developing its economy for the benefit of the Afghan people.

To conclude, we reiterate our appreciation for the work carried out by all United Nations staff in Afghanistan, under the leadership of Special Representative Roza Otunbayeva, and by non-governmental organizations. We value UNAMA's engagement with the authorities and all relevant stakeholders to improve the general situation in the country. It is essential to raise awareness on issues related to governance, including human rights, and to work towards a more inclusive and prosperous Afghanistan.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I thank Special Representative Otunbayeva and our briefers for their contributions today.

We welcome the focus today on women in Afghanistan, as the Taliban continues to enact more restrictive decrees to control every aspect of their lives. It has been 830 days since the Taliban banned Afghan girls from accessing and receiving secondary education. Out of the 84,000 high school graduates participating in Afghanistan's recent annual university entrance exam, none were female. Without access to education, the future of girls and young women is bleak, and they will continue to be more vulnerable to exploitation, forced marriage, domestic violence and even suicide. Moreover, the Taliban's dissolution of various institutions and independent oversight mechanisms has further constrained the monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children.

We reiterate our call on the Taliban to immediately and unconditionally reverse all policies and practices that restrict the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Afghan population, especially of women and girls. We call for the immediate release of human rights defenders who have been arbitrarily arrested and detained. We deeply regret that there has been no commission of inquiry or fact-finding mission to assess violations against women's rights. Sanctions continue to be flouted. We support efforts by the international community to ensure accountability for all crimes committed. Moving forward, we welcome the performance-based road map proposed by the independent assessment (S/2023/856, annex). We reaffirm the need for clear, measurable and time-bound benchmarks based on Afghanistan's universal treaty commitments, including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. We concur fully with the need to ensure Afghan women's full, equal, meaningful and safe participation and leadership in all political forums.

On the security dimension, we reiterate our concerns regarding the significant threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province and the continuing terrorist activity along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan terrorist group, emboldened by the Taliban's seizure of power, is exploiting its presence in Afghanistan to increase cross-border attacks on nearby Pakistani provinces, heightening tensions and threatening regional stability. Malta remains steadfast in its support to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and its personnel as they perform their duties and deliver on their mandate under difficult circumstances. The Taliban must engage with the Mission in good faith, respect and adhere to resolution 2681 (2023) and be accountable to the international community. Malta also commends UNAMA's continued cooperation with the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia.

Over the past three months, the extremely dire humanitarian situation has been exacerbated by the forced return of 428,000 Afghans from Pakistan, 80 per cent of whom are women and children. The severe restrictions imposed on Afghan women working for civil society organizations and the United Nations has curtailed Afghan girls' and women's access to life-saving humanitarian assistance. We encourage international donors to step up their contributions

and United Nations and humanitarian partners to continue delivering aid committed to principled humanitarianism. The European Union contributed this month an additional €25 million to the World Food Programme (WFP) operations in Afghanistan. That will help the WFP to deliver food assistance across the country.

I would like to conclude by quoting Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai, who, just last week, called for international solidarity with Afghan women by saying: “it took a bullet to my head for the world to stand with me. What will it take for the world to stand with girls in Afghanistan?”

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Representative Roza Otunbayeva, Ramesh Rajasingham and Shaharзад Akbar for their briefings.

France remains concerned about the situation in Afghanistan. France is following with the greatest concern the deterioration of the humanitarian situation and the increase in human rights violations in Afghanistan, which are the result of the Taliban’s policy. France supported the creation by the Human Rights Council, in 2021, of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Afghanistan. The Taliban regime has placed segregation and violence against women at the heart of its political identity. Women and girls have been deprived of their right to education, eliminated from public, economic and political life and deprived of the freedom of movement. France will never accept that policy of segregation. The consequences of those decisions on the physical and mental health of women in Afghanistan are unacceptable. Their protection from sexual and gender-based violence is not guaranteed. The security situation also continues to be worrisome and calls for increased vigilance. Terrorist groups, whether Da’esh or Al-Qaida, are active in the country and pose a threat to regional and international security. Furthermore, drug cultivation and trafficking remain alarming, with a rise in methamphetamine trafficking in the region.

France and the European Union (EU) remain committed to meeting the needs of the Afghan people. France has contributed more than €140 million since 2021, while the EU mobilized more than €1 billion in the same period. My country will continue its humanitarian aid in the areas of health, education and food security in particular. At the Global Refugee Forum held from 13 to

15 December in Geneva, my country also committed to resettling Afghan women in France through the Women in Danger scheme. It is essential that we continue to support the civilian population as a large-scale food crisis unfolds in Afghanistan. Humanitarian assistance must be delivered in an unhindered manner to all those in need, in accordance with humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law.

France remains committed to contributing to a unified strategy in Afghanistan. Compliance with the requirements set by the Security Council must remain our compass. Resolution 2681 (2023), adopted unanimously, and resolution 2593 (2021) set clear expectations for the Taliban. We welcome the independent assessment report on the situation in Afghanistan led by Feridun Sinirlioglu (S/2023/856, annex), and we believe that its conclusions should inform discussions among all stakeholders and contribute to the emergence of a unified strategy. Such a strategy must, of course, be aimed primarily at the well-being of the Afghan population, without endorsing any discrimination. It must be the driving force behind an inclusive political process that allows Afghan women to participate in decision-making affecting Afghanistan.

Lastly, France will be attentive to safeguarding the capacity of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the robustness of its mandate. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our full support for UNAMA, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and all United Nations agencies and their partners on the ground, which carry out indispensable and outstanding work.

Mr. França Danese (Brazil): I thank Special Representative Roza Otunbayeva, Director Ramesh Rajasingham, Executive Director Shaharзад Akbar and the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), Ambassador José de La Gasca for their insightful remarks and their commitment to a stable, peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan.

As this is Brazil’s last quarterly briefing on the situation in Afghanistan during our current mandate, I wish to reflect on some of the core pillars of our work on this file — first, promoting dialogue and engagement over isolation; secondly, addressing the socioeconomic roots of Afghanistan’s challenges; and, thirdly, upholding the human rights of all, especially women and children.

The first of these pillars highlights the importance of maintaining open and active communication channels with Afghanistan. To that effect, the international community must continue to engage constructively, while recognizing the complexities and nuances on the ground, with the objective of fostering a State that is politically and ethnically inclusive, free of terrorism and narcotics, respectful of all human rights and economically stable. The role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) remains crucial in supporting those endeavours. International support in those areas is not just necessary but vital.

Secondly, it is essential to address Afghanistan's challenges at their roots. We welcome the *de facto* authorities' efforts to stabilize the economy, curb corruption, fight terrorism and drug production and trafficking, increase tax revenue and engage in regional economic cooperation. Progress made in those areas deserves encouragement. At the same time, it is equally important to address the issue of frozen Afghan assets in an effective manner. We urge relevant stakeholders to find agreeable mechanisms to inject those funds into Afghanistan's economy, offering much-needed relief.

Thirdly, and perhaps most crucial, is respecting human rights, particularly those of women and children. It is deeply regrettable that Afghan girls are denied proper education and women have no opportunities to work. Discrimination in all its forms must cease. Brazil calls on the *de facto* authorities to reverse restrictive policies and foster an inclusive political and social system that incorporates women and minority groups.

Brazil once again welcomes the independent assessment (S/2023/856, annex) issued under resolution 2679 (2023). This comprehensive document represents a beacon of hope, acknowledging the need for a new model of engagement that is reflective of Afghanistan's current political realities. We also hope for a positive outcome in the ongoing negotiations to launch the process outlined in the independent assessment. We also look forward to the follow-up meeting of Special Envoys for Afghanistan, soon to be convened by the Secretary-General, as part of a broader international push for a unified approach to engaging with the *de facto* authorities.

I extend our gratitude to Japan and the United Arab Emirates for their active role as the Council's co-penholders on the Afghan file throughout the year. I commend the Secretariat, the Special Representative,

the UNAMA team, United Nations agencies and the various humanitarian and civil society organizations for their tireless efforts, which remain instrumental in addressing the challenges faced by the Afghan people.

Brazil will continue to follow these developments closely, including from the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission next year, recognizing that a stable, peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan can yield far-reaching benefits to peace and stability in its region.

Finally, we reaffirm our solidarity with the Afghan people, especially Afghan women and children, and stand ready to support efforts to ensure their safety, security and well-being.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative Otunbayeva and all the other briefers for their briefings.

As the year draws to a close, a year-end review of the Afghan issue will help us to summarize the experiences and lessons learned and start next year off right. Over the past year, the Afghan *de facto* authorities have governed actively. The economy has seen some recovery and, overall, the domestic situation has been stable. Yet Afghanistan continues to face severe humanitarian and livelihood crises. Issues related to the protection of the rights and interests of women and girls and the threat of terrorist forces, among other things, remain pronounced.

The United Nations, regional organizations and Afghanistan's neighbours have maintained their attention on the situation in the country. The Council has had frequent meetings on the Afghan issue, and the Secretary-General has appointed a Special Coordinator for the Independent Assessment of Afghanistan. However, the efforts of the international community have yet to produce notable results. To address the multiple challenges facing Afghanistan and effectively help the Afghan people escape their plight, we need to increase reflection and input and adopt a more flexible and practical approach to seeking integrated and systematic solutions.

I would like to make four points.

First, we must help Afghanistan respond to the humanitarian crisis. At present, more than 3 million Afghan children are malnourished, and more than 10 million people do not know where their next meal is coming from. Winter is upon us, and the Afghan humanitarian disaster will worsen. We again call

upon the international community to take immediate action by stepping up humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, bringing warmth and hope to the Afghan people and not letting ordinary Afghans become victims of political considerations.

We also hope that all parties will take a long-term view, increase development aid to Afghanistan and help the country restore the functionality of its banking system, establish basic economic order and better integrate into regional economic and trade cooperation and connectivity. Meanwhile, Afghanistan's frozen overseas assets and interests should be returned to the Afghan people as soon as possible.

Secondly, we must help Afghanistan strengthen the protection of women's rights and interests. Afghan women and girls have the right to education and employment. The Afghan Taliban authorities should take concrete action to implement the requests made in Security Council resolutions and respond to the concerns of the international community. Meanwhile, we must see that the rights and interests of women and girls will not be realized in a vacuum.

The international community should support Afghanistan in its peaceful reconstruction and economic recovery efforts so as to create more enabling conditions for guaranteeing the rights and interests of women and girls. We should refuse to oversimplify the issue into absolutes, or worse still, instrumentalize or weaponize it.

Thirdly, we must enhance engagement with the Afghan authorities. As pointed out in the independent assessment on Afghanistan (S/2023/856, annex), the international community should have a clear picture of the political reality in the country, prioritize the interests of the Afghan people and maintain engagement with the country. Undoubtedly, the current political reality in Afghanistan is that the Afghan Taliban are governing the country.

When engaging with the Afghan authorities, the international community must demonstrate good faith, set no preconditions, communicate with the Afghan Taliban in ways that are acceptable to them and strive for their understanding and cooperation. With regard to the follow-up to the independent assessment, the Security Council should consider the needs of the Afghan people and the expectations of the international community in an integrated manner and make its decision based on full consultations. The Council should adjust the sanctions

measures in a timely manner and, in particular, reinstate the travel ban exemption on some Taliban officials to facilitate engagement with Afghanistan.

Fourthly, we must bolster support for the Afghan authorities in their counter-terrorism efforts. Currently, terrorist forces in Afghanistan remain active and pose a threat to the security of Afghanistan and countries in the region. The international community should urge and help Afghanistan to effectively combat terrorism and be determined to prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming a hub for terrorist organizations. As requested by Security Council resolutions, the Afghan authorities should take robust measures to prevent terrorists from using its territory to engage in terrorist activities that pose a threat to other countries.

According to reports of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, poppy cultivation in the country declined by 95 per cent, following the drug ban, which deserves full recognition. The international community should provide Afghanistan with targeted support, such as alternatives to poppy cultivation and drug rehabilitation, among other things.

As Afghanistan's neighbour, China has always actively supported its peaceful development and taken concrete actions to help the Afghan people and ease their suffering. We stand ready to continue our active participation in coordination and cooperation with Afghanistan within such frameworks as the coordination and cooperation mechanisms among Afghanistan's neighbours, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Afghanistan Contact Group and the China-Central Asia cooperation mechanism, support the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the United Nations positive role and work with countries of the region and the international community in general to help Afghanistan overcome its plight and achieve lasting peace and stability, as soon as possible.

Mr. Phipps (United Kingdom): Let me join others in thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva and the other briefers for their important remarks today.

The United Kingdom remains gravely concerned about the continued curtailment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Afghanistan, particularly for women and girls. That, together with ongoing reports of arbitrary arrests and detentions, is in clear violation of the international commitments that all States must

adhere to. We echo the recommendation of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) that the international community should maintain its multilateral advocacy for women's rights and gender equality. The United Kingdom is of course a firm supporter of those values, and we will continue to raise them at every opportunity.

Since UNAMA's previous briefing to the Security Council (see S/PV.9423), Herat was struck by successive devastating earthquakes. In response, the United Kingdom has provided approximately \$4 million in emergency support to those affected, including an additional \$13 million to support Afghans across the country during the winter months. We have also committed \$23.5 million to the International Organization for Migration to support vulnerable undocumented Afghans returning to the country.

It has been more than two years since the Taliban took power in Afghanistan. As the independent assessment (S/2023/856, annex) concludes, our shared goal should be an Afghanistan that is at peace with its people, its neighbours and the international community. It is our view that the independent assessment outlines the architecture and mechanisms that are needed to achieve that. For its part, the United Kingdom is fully committed to finding a constructive way forward. In the absence of a coherent international strategy to date, it is the responsibility of the Security Council to seize the momentum provided by that report. We look forward to continuing to work constructively with international partners and the full range of Afghan stakeholders in our shared endeavour towards improving the lives of all Afghans.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Ms. Otunbayeva, and the Director for Coordination of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, for their briefings on the situation in Afghanistan. The Russian Federation supports the activities of UNAMA under the leadership of Ms. Otunbayeva, within the framework of the tasks conferred upon the Mission. We note Kabul's interest in developing contacts with her. We welcome the United Nations commitment to maintaining its presence and providing the assistance needed to the people of Afghanistan. We listened closely to the briefings by the

Permanent Representative of Ecuador, Mr. José Javier De La Gasca, in his capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), and the civil society representative, Ms. Shaharзад Akbar. We are also pleased to see that representatives of the region will also be part of the discussion today. We have taken note of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/941) on the situation in Afghanistan.

We would like to make the following points.

During the more than two years that the Taliban have been in power, despite the strident claims of Western colleagues about a possible collapse, Afghanistan has stood firm. In the face of unprecedented unilateral sanctions and a humanitarian crisis, the country has not slid into another civil war or devolved into a black hole. More than 1.3 million internally displaced persons have returned to their homes, which is an unprecedented statistic. However, given the full range of the challenges and threats, as well as the myriad problems left in the wake of the foreign troops' hasty retreat, Afghanistan's people are in need of our sustained assistance and support more than ever. We have repeatedly spoken of the need for a realistic and comprehensive approach to Afghanistan that would enable setting aside all narrow interests and concentrate in earnest on the needs of the Afghans themselves, while relying on realistic assessments of the situation on the ground and the willingness of the de facto authorities themselves to respond adequately to the expectations of the international community.

We can see that they remain interested in developing broad, pragmatic cooperation. At the same time, it is clear that progress will hardly be possible if certain Western donors continue to place all responsibility on the Taliban alone, while demanding that they fulfil their obligations. How many more years will it take before they admit to themselves that attempts to use threats, pressure and blackmail are ineffective and inefficient? In the current circumstances, without constructive steps on their part towards Afghanistan, we are on the road to nowhere.

We share some of the Secretary-General's assessments on the situation in the country. Despite the efforts made by the de facto authorities, we continue to be particularly concerned about security risks, including those caused by the terrorist activities of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province terrorist group, which has grown in influence, and allied foreign

terrorist fighters. We note that the terrorists purposely continue to influence the situation in an attempt to present themselves as a viable alternative force and undermine stability in Afghanistan's neighbouring countries. Obviously, the actions being taken by the Taliban are not enough to completely eradicate terrorism. Meanwhile, the spillover risk of terrorism outside the country into Central Asia remains quite real. The drug problem is also closely linked to terrorism. We are convinced that comprehensive international and regional assistance in eradicating that threat, including through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, is imperative. To that end, such efforts must be ramped up and be undertaken consistently. The production of synthetic drugs is also a matter of concern.

We are also closely following the humanitarian and socioeconomic situation in the country. We note the efforts being made by the United Nations and regional organizations to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. We highly appreciate the contribution of humanitarian agencies and their personnel, who are willing to remain on the ground and help Afghans under any circumstances. It is clear, though, that those measures are not enough. We must reject the politicization of humanitarian aid, unfreeze assets and expand assistance, with a view to ensuring Afghanistan's subsequent economic recovery. We also continue to monitor developments concerning the rights of all Afghans in general, including the universal rights of women and girls to education and work. We take note of the statements by the de facto authorities and expect a speedy resolution of those issues. Other pressing issues include the formation of a truly inclusive Government with the participation of representatives of all ethnic and political groups in the country. We expect to see progress in that area as well.

The Russian Federation fully supports the right and desire of the Afghan people to live in peace and stability. Stability in the region also depends on that. However, building that kind of long-term and sustainable peace is impossible without patient and pragmatic engagement with the de facto authorities on a wide range of issues. There is no alternative path. We believe that the effective implementation by UNAMA of the tasks conferred upon it also depends on compliance with an integrated approach. In that regard, we welcome the efforts of Special Coordinator Feridun Sinirlioğlu in preparing the independent assessment report (S/2023/856, annex) on Afghanistan, including his emphasis on the

imperative of building a comprehensive dialogue with the de facto authorities on the basis of an integrated approach to resolving all the pressing issues mentioned.

The rapid resolution of the current impasse and the subsequent international reintegration of Afghanistan will depend on the coordinated and coherent actions of all players. It is encouraging that, on the whole, many of the ideas set out in the report echo the general approaches of stakeholders in the region to a settlement in the country, including those voiced by the members of the Moscow format.

In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude to the United Arab Emirates and Japan for their tireless efforts as the informal co-penholders on the Afghanistan dossier in the Security Council.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Ecuador.

I am grateful for the information provided by Special Representative Roza Otunbayeva, the Director for Coordination of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Rajasingham, and civil society representative Ms. Shaharзад Akbar, Executive Director of Rawadari.

My delegation would like to reaffirm its support for the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and its mandate contained in resolution 2678 (2022), which we consider to be robust and comprehensive, and whose renewal next March we will support.

We take note of the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2023/941), the contents of which correspond to that of the independent assessment report (S/2023/856, annex) prepared by the Special Coordinator in November (see S/PV.9488).

On the basis of those reports, my delegation wishes to express its concern about the following issues: the fragility of the Afghan economic system, which has exacerbated poverty, unemployment and underemployment; the continuation of practices that violate human rights, such as extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, public floggings, persecution and censorship of the media; the continued security risks for the civilian population due to the illegal circulation of arms, ammunition and explosives, and the terrorist attacks attributed to the Islamic State in Iraq and the

Levant-Khorasan Province; and the deteriorating humanitarian situation, including the increase in the number of malnourished children and people who depend on humanitarian assistance to survive. We are also concerned about the situation of vulnerability of displaced persons and refugees, mostly children and adolescents, and the measures that are being implemented in neighbouring countries to force their return. In that regard, we reiterate the need to respect the principle of non-refoulement and to ensure that the return process is safe, dignified and voluntary.

The Security Council has closely followed the situation in Afghanistan in 2023, in particular the restrictive measures imposed by the Taliban regime against women and girls, which have created an institutionalized system of gender-based discrimination, violating their rights and freedoms. An example of the effects of those measures is that, among the 84,000 high school students who applied for university admission in 2023, there was not a single woman. The system put in place by the regime must be dismantled, and women and girls' enjoyment of their fundamental rights and freedoms must be reinstated immediately.

In that context, and considering the recommendations of the independent assessment report, we believe it is the Council's responsibility to review the mechanisms for encouraging inclusive and participatory intra-Afghan dialogue, promote cooperation aimed at improving the living conditions of the population and to ensure that the Special Envoy's mandate enables him to support UNAMA's efforts in an effective and complementary manner. However, any action taken must be done with a view to the restoring the civic space, the rule of law and the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women in all discussions about Afghanistan's future.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Faiq (Afghanistan): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting, and I commend you for your excellent leadership of the Security Council this month.

I thank Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General; Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Director of Coordination of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; Ambassador José De La Gasca, in his capacity as

Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011); and Ms. Shaharзад Akbar for their comprehensive and insightful briefings today. I thank the previous speakers for reaffirming their commitments to continue supporting the fundamental human rights of the people of Afghanistan, particularly women and girls, and for their ongoing efforts to help bring about real peace based on the will of the people, in a stable, secure and united Afghanistan.

I also extend our appreciation to all donors, the United Nations system and national and international non-governmental organizations for remaining engaged and continuing to provide vital humanitarian and life-saving support to the people of Afghanistan. Moreover, I would like to commend the United Arab Emirates for its role as co-penholder on the Afghanistan file, as well as all other outgoing members of the Council, for their support to the people of Afghanistan. Their commitment to peace and security, support for stability in Afghanistan and advocacy for human rights, especially for women and girls, deserves our utmost appreciation.

As Afghanistan enters its third year under the Taliban's repressive and unilateral rule, the country remains confronted with myriad complex challenges and uncertainty. A staggering 29 million people are in need of humanitarian aid, and the fundamental rights of women and girls, such as the right to work and access to education, are systematically denied. Female employees of non-governmental organizations and the United Nations face restrictions on their ability to work, while female protesters are subjected to daily detention and torture. In addition, targeted killings of Shia scholars and our fellow Hazara compatriots persist, along with extrajudicial killings of former security and defence forces. The growing presence and activities of terrorist groups in Afghanistan pose escalating and wide-ranging security threats to the country, the region and the wider world. Furthermore, the decline in humanitarian aid, in addition to natural disasters, forced migrant returns, unemployment and poverty contribute to the prevailing uncertainty about the future.

It is crucial to recognize that the Taliban have not only failed to address those challenges but have also exacerbated them. Since their forced takeover, there has been a systematic erosion of human rights, particularly the rights of women and girls, leading to gender apartheid. That not only violates human rights but also directly contradicts Afghanistan's obligations

under international law, including to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Unfortunately, it is due to the Taliban's policies and the humanitarian crisis that the human capital of Afghanistan, including youth, educated and professional individuals, former civil servants and military personnel, are either unemployed or forced to leave the country.

It is evident that the current circumstances are primarily a result of the Taliban's persistent repressive policies related to their disregard for the demands of the Afghan people, the political impasse and the absence of a legitimate national Government. That is coupled with a lack of a coherent and coordinated strategy by the international community to address the current tragic situation in Afghanistan.

The key question is, what should we do and what can the international community do? In that context, let me thank the members of the Council for adopting resolution 2679 (2023) and the Secretary-General and his Special Coordinator for presenting the independent assessment report (S/2023/856, annex) to the Council. The findings of the independent assessment report are commendable in their objectivity and depth, shed light on some of the challenges our nation faces and serve as a critical reminder of the responsibilities shouldered by the international community, including the Council, towards Afghanistan.

While the report falls short of adequately recognizing the Taliban as the primary actor in the current crisis, their repressive policies, human rights violations and certain aspects of the current situation in Afghanistan, we in general appreciate this timely and much-needed report. It can serve as a solid foundation and a guiding document for initiating discussions to address existing problems and fundamental challenges. Furthermore, the report's key recommendations offer a path for progress and ensuring a positive trajectory for the way forward.

We welcome the very core message of the assessment report on the fact that the status quo is neither acceptable nor sustainable, and that the current international approach to Afghanistan is not working. We further welcome the report's specific emphasis on restoring the fundamental rights of all citizens, particularly women and girls, and their active participation across all fields, as well as on the necessity of establishing inclusive and broad-based

governance through a national dialogue grounded in a constitutional order and comprehensive structure.

It is crucial to underscore the need for the Council and all relevant partners to agree on an action plan with a defined timetable and specific conditions for implementing the report's recommendations and subsequent steps, including by appointing a special coordinator, as recommended in the report. That ensures that all parties, including the people of Afghanistan, are well-informed about the results of a structured, coherent and principled international engagement. A clear understanding of the outcome and commitments from all sides is essential for fostering transparency and accountability.

It is crucial to ensure the active and meaningful participation and contribution of Afghan women and girls in all discussions related to the implementation of the assessment report. No compromises should be made concerning their fundamental rights, freedoms and involvement in relevant mechanisms and processes.

I also wish to emphasize the importance of maintaining the conditionality of recommendations and a clear and benchmarked implementation process. Otherwise, serious and existing concerns about the prospects of further relaxation and normalization efforts with the Taliban, without observable changes or reversals in their policies and actions, will not only remain, but grow stronger. Those concerns have been expressed in open letters by representatives of diverse Afghans, including women activists and civil society groups. We recommend that their comments be attentively heard and thoughtfully considered in the subsequent steps of implementing the report, in recognition of the valuable perspectives of women and society representatives.

I would like to remind the Council and the international community about increasing calls by the Afghan people to reject any form of normalization with a Taliban regime that fails to respect human rights and international norms and to remain focused on finding a solution that results in the formation of a truly inclusive, broad-based and legitimate Administration that is able to reflect the will and national aspirations of the people of Afghanistan. The path forward should be shaped by the voices of all Afghans, reflecting the country's rich diversity and the shared desire for peace and prosperity.

The Taliban's refusal to engage in dialogue and their warped interpretation of inclusivity are both unfounded

and false. True inclusivity requires the Afghan people to shape their future through negotiations involving credible representatives from all segments of society, including marginalized women, youth, democratic forces, people in the military sector, career diplomats, civil society and human rights activists, as well as people free from corruption, reputable public figures and professionals. It is crucial to establish a responsible, representative and legitimate system of Government based on the rule of law, justice and accountability. The onus is now on the Taliban to prioritize Afghanistan's national interests by resolving the political impasse and respecting the legitimate concerns and demands of the Afghan people and the international community.

Let me echo the Secretary-General's appeal to reconsider and halt the forced return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan. I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Government and the people of the countries of the region, particularly Pakistan and Iran, for graciously hosting Afghan refugees, and ask for a compassionate and sustainable solution, with the support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and international community, that prioritizes the safety, well-being and dignity of Afghan refugees.

Before concluding, I express my gratitude to the Security Council for unanimously renewing the mandate of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team of the 1988 Committee for another year. We anticipate that this renewal will contribute to reinforcing the effective implementation of sanctions regime, enhancing monitoring and reporting on the presence and activities of terrorist groups in Afghanistan and the region.

In conclusion, let us reaffirm our resolve to not merely witness the unfolding tragedy in Afghanistan, but to actively participate in the creation of a just, inclusive and representative future where every Afghan child can aspire to education, where women participate as equals in society and where the basic tenets of freedom and human dignity are upheld. The Afghan people deserve no less, and we, as a community of nations, must deliver no less. Our goal must be to support the establishment of an Afghan-led and -owned political process that upholds human rights, fosters inclusive and representative governance and ensures Afghanistan's integration into the international community in a manner that is consistent with international norms and values. The Afghan people have suffered enough. It is time for the international community to stand in

solidarity with them and work towards a future that offers hope, dignity and prosperity.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Lapasov (Uzbekistan): I want to echo others in extending my gratitude to Special Representative Roza Otunbayeva for her comprehensive briefing on the situation in Afghanistan. We would also like to thank Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and Ms. Shaharзад Akbar for the provided information.

Indeed, the current situation in Afghanistan is of serious concern to the countries of the region, as well as to the global community. Uzbekistan hopes to ensure that Afghanistan does not become a terrorist haven once again. In other words, Afghanistan should not pose a threat to the States of the region or to third parties. Besides, it would be a huge mistake to leave Afghans to their own devices with no means to tackle an array of challenge and problems. Ignoring, isolating and imposing sanctions are making the situation even worse for ordinary Afghans.

At the same time, the formation of an inclusive Government that accurately reflects all segments of Afghan society and ensures basic rights and human freedoms, especially of women and girls and national minorities, still constitutes the fundamental condition for establishing long-term peace in Afghanistan.

One more point I want to make is that Afghanistan is on the brink of a grave humanitarian catastrophe. To our knowledge, over the next six months, the World Food Programme needs at least \$1 billion to deliver vital food and material assistance to 21 million people. Uzbekistan dispatches humanitarian aid to the Afghan people on a regular basis and, as a close neighbour of Afghanistan, advocates providing immediate humanitarian aid to this country.

We also see the significant progress that the new authorities of Afghanistan are making in combating corruption, drug addiction, drug production, drug trafficking and organized crime. The security situation in the country has improved significantly. According to the Afghan Ministry of Interior, last year almost 13,000 hectares of arable land were cleared of poppy. Nonetheless, the volume of trade in synthetic drugs such as methamphetamine increased sharply after the Taliban imposed a ban on opium poppy cultivation.

We cooperate with the Afghans within the framework of joint commissions on border and agricultural issues. We believe that in order to establish long-term peace in Afghanistan, due attention should be given to rebuilding the national economy and implementing large-scale energy and transport projects. Among them are the construction of the Termez-Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway line and the restoration of Afghanistan's internal transport arteries. We also see the potential in cooperation within the framework of the free trade zone that is being created in Termez. Its activities could be launched next year.

In conclusion, we would like once again to thank the leadership and team of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and other relevant United Nations agencies for their tireless work in Afghanistan. I would like to note that Uzbekistan views Afghanistan as a key factor in strengthen regional connectivity and uniting the large macroregion of Central and South Asia, the Middle East and Eurasia, as a whole.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank you for convening this meeting. I also thank Ms. Otunbayeva, the Special Representative, and the other briefers for their briefings.

We take note of the Secretary-General's report on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2023/941). The report highlights the unprecedented humanitarian challenges in Afghanistan, with over two thirds of its population requiring assistance. The October earthquakes in Herat province directly affected more than 150,000 people, exacerbating the situation. The revised humanitarian response, having received only 35 per cent of the \$3.23 billion required as of 11 November, aims to assist 21.3 million people. Iran emphasizes the need for impartial humanitarian aid and the importance of lifting sanctions to support Afghanistan's economic recovery.

Despite the de facto authorities' anti-terrorism efforts, the persistent presence of Da'esh and Al-Qaida affiliates continues to pose a severe threat to Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. The United Nations documented eight attacks by Da'esh affiliates between 1 August and 7 November, specifically targeting civilians, with a notable focus on the Shia community.

As a directly affected neighbour that is dealing with the repercussions of the situation in Afghanistan and hosting millions of Afghan people, Iran maintains its active engagement with the de facto authorities. That engagement has been conducted both bilaterally and through neighbouring and regional mechanisms such as the Moscow format, with the aim of enhancing and improving the humanitarian situation and facilitating Afghanistan's economic recovery. From 4 to 10 November, Iran hosted a delegation of Taliban economic officials. Discussions focused on strengthening economic and trade ties, covering such aspects as trade, transit, transportation, infrastructure and railways.

The de facto authorities have not taken significant steps to achieve genuine ethnic and political inclusion in Afghanistan. Instead, they impose severe restrictions on women and girls, particularly affecting their access to education. In the Moscow format meeting on 29 September in Kazan, Russian Federation, concerns were raised about restrictions imposed on women and girls, urging the establishment of a broad-based, inclusive Government. At that meeting, Iran proposed establishing a regional contact group for enhanced and coherent engagement with the Taliban and encouraging them to honour their obligations.

We commend the efforts of Mr. Feridun Sinirlioğlu during his mandate as Special Coordinator and take note of his independent assessment (S/2023/856, annex). The assessment underscores the imperative of increased and coherent international engagement with the de facto authorities and highlights positive elements, such as advocating for national political dialogue to foster inclusivity and reconciliation among Afghan political actors. That approach is crucial to uniting Afghanistan towards a secure, stable and prosperous future. The report also calls for swift international action to address the frozen assets issue and suggests a review of the sanctions regime.

Regarding the mechanisms proposed in the recommendations — namely, the international contact group and the appointment of a special envoy — Iran takes note of the recommendations, but deems the establishment of such mechanisms premature. We advocate for thorough discussions and comprehensive examination, considering existing regional mechanisms and the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). Moreover, addressing the challenges and concerns

faced by neighbouring countries, which may differ from the priorities emphasized by donors and other stakeholders, could pose significant obstacles to the success of establishing such a contact group. Importantly, granting equal standing to specific NATO countries, especially those accountable for the current situation in Afghanistan, without them fulfilling their responsibilities towards the Afghan people, is both unfair and counterproductive. Meanwhile, we emphasize that international engagement should not only seek normalization or recognition of the de facto authorities. Instead, it should contribute to improving the situation of the people, ensuring that they are the primary beneficiaries of any normalization process.

In conclusion, we reaffirm once more our full support for UNAMA and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and emphasize the importance of maintaining their field presence. Iran remains steadfast in its commitment to collaborating closely with neighbouring countries, the relevant partners and the United Nations to promote lasting peace, security and stability in Afghanistan. We hope that the de facto authorities will fulfil their international obligations, in particular by upholding their obligations to their neighbours.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mrs. Kamboj (India): I thank you for convening the meeting, and I thank the briefers, in particular Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva, whom we heard this morning.

As a contiguous neighbour to Afghanistan and a friend to its people, and as a country with direct stakes in ensuring peace and stability in Afghanistan, allow me to place the following observations before the Council.

First, the situation in Afghanistan is still one of concern. The deteriorating humanitarian situation, compounded by natural disasters, such as the earthquake of October 2023, has had a devastating impact on the lives of the people. It is therefore important for the international community not to lose its focus on Afghanistan.

In that regard, we note the report submitted by Special Coordinator Feridun Sinirlioğlu (S/2023/856, annex), providing his assessment, as mandated by Security Council resolution 2679 (2023). We have indeed read the recommendations contained in the report. As a

long-standing partner to the Afghan people, India will continue to engage actively with other partners, with the ultimate objective of securing peace and stability in the country. India already partners with several United Nations agencies on the ground and will continue to do so for the welfare of the people of Afghanistan.

Secondly, the benchmarks set by the Security Council through its resolution 2593 (2021) continue to guide the international community's approach to Afghanistan. Our common and immediate priorities include providing humanitarian assistance for the Afghan people, forming an inclusive and representative government structure, combating terrorism and drug trafficking, and preserving the rights of women, children and minorities.

Thirdly, humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan needs to be prioritized, given the distressing humanitarian situation in the country. India has delivered material humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and has also continued its educational scholarships for Afghan students. We have also partnered with various United Nations agencies, including the World Food Programme and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, in their humanitarian efforts. Our assistance will continue, for the benefit of the people of Afghanistan.

As I conclude, let me state that India reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the people of Afghanistan. We will continue to be closely and actively involved in support of the Afghan people. Since this may be the last open meeting of the Council before the mandate renewal of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in March 2024, I would also like to state here that we look forward to working closely with the penholders, to share our views as a neighbour of Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, and the Ecuadorian delegation on your successful presidency of the Security Council this month. Pakistan welcomes this debate on Afghanistan. I would like to thank Special Representative Rosa Otunbayeva for her cogent briefing to the Council. We note the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/941) on the latest developments in Afghanistan. Pakistan conveys its appreciation to the United Nations Special Coordinator, Ambassador Feridun Sinirlioğlu, for his work on the

independent assessment report (S/2023/856, annex). We also commend the leadership role of Ambassador Nusseibeh and the United Arab Emirates delegation as the co-penholder on Afghanistan this year.

Peace in Afghanistan is a strategic imperative for Pakistan. As noted in the Secretary General's report, the Afghan interim authorities have further consolidated their control of Afghanistan across all spheres of governance and brought some modicum of stability to the country. Yet, Afghanistan presents a complex and enduring challenge. On the positive side, law and order has improved, opium cultivation has been reduced by 95 per cent, action against Da'esh is being taken, corruption has declined, notably and efforts are being made to operate the economy through domestic revenue collection and local budgets. Afghanistan's trade with its neighbours, including transit trade, has also increased significantly.

However, there are serious challenges.

First, Pakistan has been the main artery for the provision of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. Yet the humanitarian response plan, which aims to help 21.3 million Afghans, remains severely underfunded at 35 per cent. We hope that the donor States will respond generously to the Secretary-General's appeal to help the destitute people in Afghanistan.

Secondly, the Afghan economy remains fragile largely owing to liquidity challenges, a dysfunctional banking system and irregular cash flows with no safeguards against terrorist financing. Smuggling into Pakistan through transit trade has also been a major problem, which we have stopped now. Pakistan supports early implementation of reconstruction and the regional connectivity projects in Afghanistan.

Thirdly, while opium cultivation has been reduced by 95 per cent, there is an urgent need to provide support for alternative crop production to sustain farmers' livelihoods and prevent a reversal of the gains that have been made.

However, the two issues with regard to which the Afghan interim Government must implement its obligations are, first, the restrictions that have been placed on women's and girls' right to education and work. Those edicts must be reversed. Some pragmatic solutions are possible. Pakistan will continue to work to develop such possible solutions. Secondly, it must implement its obligations with regard to the continued

presence of terrorist groups in Afghanistan, which constitutes the most significant threat to Afghanistan and to the entire region and perhaps the world.

While the interim authorities have reported some success in the fight against Da'esh, the fact is that a number of terrorist groups are living in Afghanistan evidently under the protection of the Afghan interim Government. Pakistan in particular faces a major threat from Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The TTP and its affiliates have been responsible for carrying out a series of organized cross-border terrorist attacks on our soil, causing considerable loss for our civilians and soldiers and causing considerable damage to our military and other installations. We have lost hundreds of our brave soldiers and civilians in those attacks just this year alone. And last week, a TTP-affiliated group carried out a heinous attack on our security personnel in Dera Ismail Khan, resulting in the loss of more than 23 precious lives.

Those attacks have become more lethal and sophisticated since the TTP terrorists acquired and began using advanced military equipment. Those weapons obviously originate from the considerable stocks left behind by foreign forces. Yet the question is, how did the TTP, a listed terrorist organization, secure those weapons? Pakistan demands that the United Nations, either the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan or another agency, conduct a thorough investigation to elicit how those weapons got in the hands of the TTP and to identify ways of retrieving them. It is clear that the TTP has been given free rein to conduct cross-border attacks against Pakistan's border outposts and other installations. We also have clear evidence that the TTP receives support from our main adversary.

The Council should invigorate the work of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) to secure action by the Afghan interim Government against all those terrorist groups in Afghanistan and empower the monitoring team to analyse and inform the Committee and the Council about progress made in the context of counter-terrorism in Afghanistan. Any process of engagement with the Afghan interim Government should be conducted on the basis of the action that it takes against those terrorist organizations or else we will see the recurrence and proliferation of terrorism from Afghanistan, as happened prior to 9/11, threatening not only the region but also the entire world.

Pakistan has indeed paid an enormous price for its 40 years of generosity towards Afghanistan. After 40 years, we continue to host 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees with little or no support from the international community. Since the Afghan interim Government claims that peace has been restored in Afghanistan, it should work with the High Commissioner for Refugees to make preparations for the early repatriation of those Afghan refugees.

There are another 2.2 million Afghans who are undocumented and illegally present in Pakistan. Those include 700,000 who crossed into Pakistan after the Taliban takeover. Besides the security threat posed by terrorist sleeper cells, many of those illegals are involved in drug trafficking, operate property mafias and commit other crimes, and the inflow of such large numbers has had a negative impact on Pakistan's economy and job market.

The current plan to repatriate the illegal foreigners is an unavoidable compulsion on Pakistan arising from its legitimate security, economic and social concerns. However, the plan is being implemented in as humane a way as possible. There is no forcible return except for a number of Afghan criminals in our jails. More than 98 per cent of the more than 244,000 Afghans who departed through Torkham last month were voluntary returns. The Chaman crossing has a similar pattern.

We have made exceptions for those who have proof of registration, for those who have the Afghan citizenship card and, now, also for those who are considered vulnerable. That is in addition to the 60,000 or more who have been waiting for two years to be relocated to third countries, and we urge those third countries to accelerate their process in order to receive those people, who they have agreed to receive, and lighten the burden on Pakistan.

We hope that the assessment of Ambassador Feridun Sinirlioğlu will enable the Security Council and all relevant stakeholders in the international community to adopt a comprehensive, long-term and realistic road map for Afghanistan's normalization. Any process of engagement with the Afghan interim Government must be constituted on the basis of its response to the core concerns of the international community: respect for human rights, particularly the rights of women and girls; political inclusivity; and action to neutralize the terrorist organizations in Afghanistan — not only Da'esh but also the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan and other entities — that threaten the security of Afghanistan's neighbours. Pakistan will participate in the Secretary-General's revived Doha format, and we hope that consensus will be reached on the recommendations of the report submitted by the Special Coordinator.

The meeting rose at 12.10. p.m.