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Seventy-eighth year

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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Hoxha	(Albania)
<i>Members:</i>	Brazil	Mr. França Danese
	China	Mr. Zhang Jun
	Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
	France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
	Gabon	Ms. Bongo
	Ghana	Mr. Osei-Mensah
	Japan	Mr. Ishikane
	Malta	Mrs. Frazier
	Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
	Russian Federation	Ms. Evstigneeva
	Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Nusseibeh
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Dame Barbara Woodward
	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/2023/678)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 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/2023/678)

The President: 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 and Pakistan 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; Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director of UN-Women; and Ms. Karima Bennouna, civil society representative.

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/2023/678, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

I now give the floor to Ms. Otunbayeva.

Ms. Otunbayeva: When former Secretary-General Kofi Annan was given the Nobel Peace Prize in December 2001, he began his address with the words "Today in Afghanistan, a girl will be born." Who is she now? Is she a university student forced into exile in order to continue her education? Is she a qualified professional who a few months ago had a career, but is now confined to her home? Or is she like the young woman that a United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) team met in south-western Afghanistan recently: the daughter of a widowed mother, a girl who had never gone to school because of the conflict and whose main concern every day is finding enough water for her family? Those brief examples describe the dilemmas and complexities in Afghanistan today. There are no easy answers.

Afghan communities, to take the latter example, are being ravaged by the effects of three years of drought. In a country where nearly 80 per cent of the population depends on agriculture, climate change and the lack of water are having devastating effects on people's lives. Afghans in water-scarce areas say that if they do not have water, everything else is secondary. A de facto provincial governor referred to what he has termed "upside-down migration", whereby families who have everything but water migrate to where they have nothing but water.

With regard to human rights, since my previous briefing (see S/PV.9354), UNAMA has issued three human rights reports: first, on the impact of improvised explosive devices on civilians; secondly, on violations of the de facto authorities' own declared amnesty regarding former government officials and former members of the armed forces; and thirdly, on the treatment of detainees. Those reports have documented human rights violations by the de facto authorities in contravention of international law. In many cases, they are violations of the Taliban leader's own instructions, for example, on the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment. Such violations create fear and distrust that undermine the claims to domestic legitimacy by the de facto authorities. I acknowledge the cooperative responses of the de facto authorities through the de facto Ministry for Foreign Affairs to our reports before they were published. Their written responses can be found annexed to each of the reports.

UNAMA's human rights efforts are focused on engaging with the de facto authorities and enabling them to establish an inclusive, responsive system of governance, including policing, that respects human rights norms and standards. It is time to support strengthened engagement with the relevant components of the de facto authorities through appropriate means to increase their knowledge and further compliance of law enforcement actions with international norms.

In that regard, we welcome the recent visit of a group of distinguished Islamic scholars from States members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The delegation of ulama focused on girls' education, women's rights and the need for inclusive governance, stressing that those are integral to Islamic governance around the world. We urge that such visits continue. They are part of a vital conversation between the de facto authorities and the international community, helpfully mediated by the Islamic world.

At the subnational level, UNAMA has documented many instances of consultations between the de facto authorities and local communities. Those consultations are both through institutions and ad hoc. Very recently, provincial ulama councils composed of religious clerics and tribal elders have been created in all 34 of Afghanistan's provinces. Those Councils are intended to provide accountability and listen to local grievances, but they also report directly to the Taliban leader. It is too early to judge those institutions — whether they are instruments of accountability and consultation or of control. We are concerned that the recently created Provincial Ulama Council for the predominantly Shia provinces of Bamyan and Daikundi has no Shia members.

At the end of this month there will be a Moscow format meeting in Kazan, Russia, which will focus on inclusive Government. The de facto authorities will send a delegation headed by the de facto Foreign Minister. Despite insistence by the de facto authorities that their institutions are inclusive, there appears to be a growing legitimacy gap with the people. The lack of certainty regarding rights, accountability, representation and recourse to justice remains a significant obstacle to internal legitimacy. And there cannot be international legitimacy without domestic legitimacy.

On a positive note, there is growing evidence that the de facto authorities have significantly reduced the cultivation of poppy in Afghanistan. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime will report on that in greater detail in October. The world can benefit from that decision, which has affected the livelihoods of thousands of Afghan farmers. UNAMA has established in Kabul a working group of countries that are coordinating their efforts to provide specific assistance to those farmers, as well as to the millions of Afghans who have become addicts as a result of the demand for those drugs in faraway countries. Today in Istanbul donors are meeting on Afghanistan. We will reiterate our requests to provide enhanced assistance to those communities.

In the meantime, we are greatly concerned by the humanitarian funding gap. As of one week ago, the Afghanistan humanitarian response plan had received \$872 million, approximately 28 per cent of the \$3.2 billion requested. Many programmes have already closed owing to insufficient funding just as winter is fast approaching and lives are most at risk. That means that 15.2 million Afghans now facing acute food insecurity

could be pushed towards famine in the coming months. I urge donors to heed our humanitarian appeal with as much generosity as possible before winter comes.

More sustainable and cost-effective means of providing assistance are also required. We urge donors to consider funding basic human needs assistance in line with the United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan with a view to sustaining essential services, strengthening livelihoods and promoting community resilience to benefit the most vulnerable, including women, displaced people and returnees.

Since 2022, the Council has mandated UNAMA to carry out an engagement strategy that seeks to moderate the policies of the de facto authorities and bring Afghanistan into convergence with international norms. On the ground, the de facto authorities with whom we are in constant contact demonstrate an openness to continue that engagement, even as we continue to disagree profoundly — and to express those disagreements in our meetings — on issues such as the rights of women and girls and the need for more inclusive governance. But I am increasingly concerned about what can be described only as a lack of positive direction in our engagement. If that drift continues, we will neither be able to address the concerns of the international community, nor the de facto Administration, nor above all the significant needs of the Afghan people.

It is well known that our engagement strategy has been significantly undermined by the more than 50 decrees the Taliban have issued aimed at eliminating women from public life and education. The two speakers after me, UN-Women Executive Director Sima Bahous and Ms. Karima Bennoune, will speak in far greater detail on the devastating effects that those edicts have on the lives of Afghanistan's women.

UNAMA, in conjunction with UN-Women and the International Organization for Migration, has just published its fourth quarterly report on the situation of Afghan women based on more than 500 interviews. Among other findings, 46 per cent of women stated that the Taliban should not be recognized under any circumstances. That further undermines the de facto authorities' claim to domestic legitimacy.

The policies that drive the exclusion of women are unacceptable to the international community. We all recognize that, especially myself, as a woman from the region, who has to deal each day with the ongoing

effects of the ban on Afghan women, including those banned from working from our premises. The question, however, is whether to continue engaging with the de facto authorities despite those policies or to cease engaging because of them. UNAMA's view is that we must continue to engage and to maintain a dialogue. Dialogue is not recognition. Engagement is not acceptance of those policies. On the contrary, dialogue and engagement are how we are attempting to change those policies.

The goal of our engagement continues to be to promote governance practices that reflect international norms, as well as Afghanistan's cultural and religious heritage. That engagement could benefit from being more structured and purposeful while remaining principled. A reframed engagement strategy must first acknowledge that the de facto authority bears responsibility for the well-being of the Afghan people in all dimensions but especially concerning women. A reframed engagement strategy must also have mechanisms to address the de facto authorities' long-standing concerns. And it should include an intra-Afghan dialogue of the sort that was interrupted when the Taliban took power in August 2021. Such an engagement would also require a more coordinated position of the international community. We look forward to the report of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Afghanistan and his observations on that and other issues.

The lack of trust on all sides is a serious impediment to building confidence but the doors to dialogue are still open. Afghanistan has been a country in conflict for nearly half a century. This moment, despite its problems, is an opportunity. We must ensure that the doors to dialogue are not shut. After all, today in Afghanistan hundreds of girls will be born. They should not be born into poverty, exclusion, discrimination or hopelessness. They should be able to contribute to the full potential of a peaceful Afghanistan that is not isolated from the world community.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Bahous.

Ms. Bahous: Since the Taliban took over Kabul more than two years ago, the Security Council adopted several resolutions condemning the many forms of repression directed at Afghan women and girls. It has also heard directly from 13 Afghan women, the majority

of whom spoke to the Chamber from exile, where too many are forced to be. Their message to the Council on what Afghan women want, wherever they are, is what women everywhere want — the right to live free and equal lives with dignity and respect.

Over the past year, UN-Women has collaborated with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the International Organization for Migration to regularly consult Afghan women inside the country and to try to put women at the centre of international decision-making, as required by our women and peace and security agenda. This past quarter, women told us, once again, that access to education remains their highest priority. More than four out of five young women and girls who should be studying are out of school. The lifetime impact of that cannot be underestimated, not only for the women and girls who are not in school, but also their families and communities.

While many of the demands of women living inside Afghanistan have remained unchanged, there are three marked shifts that demand our urgent attention.

First, women's influence on decision-making has shrunk dramatically, and not just at the national and provincial level. At the community, extended-family and household levels, women are seeing their decision-making spaces and authority severely curtailed, with space around household decision-making shrinking the most. That is driven by increased poverty, a decrease in women's financial contributions, the Taliban's imposition of hyperpatriarchal gender norms and women's growing isolation. In our consultations, only 22 per cent of women reported meeting with women outside of their immediate family at least once a week, and a majority reported worsened relations with other members of their families and communities. That jeopardizes women's mental health and increases the risk of gender-based violence.

Secondly, women tell us that, in addition to facing an ever-growing list of restrictions on their lives, those restrictions are being enforced more frequently and more severely, including by male family members, as the Taliban hold them accountable to enforce their decrees. With those continued restrictions we see, among other things, increases in child marriage and child labour.

Thirdly, while a year ago, improving safety and security, especially for working women, was the

second most pressing priority, it is replaced today by mental-health concerns. As the percentage of women employed continues to drop, 90 per cent of young women respondents report bad or very bad mental health, and suicide and suicidal ideation is everywhere. They tell us that they are prisoners living in darkness, confined to their homes, without hope or future. As Special Representative Otunbayeva has said, they tell us that their elimination from public life is like a continuous fear of violent death.

Women in Afghanistan continue to demand that the international community provide spaces for them to speak directly with the *de facto* authorities, that international actors do not meet with the Taliban without women in their own delegations and that international actors continue to use all means at their disposal to leverage and pressure for change, including the use of sanctions, without exceptions for travel, and the issue of non-recognition. Forty-six per cent of women consulted think that recognition should not happen under any circumstances, and 50 per cent think that it should be granted only after the Taliban end rights violations related to women's education, employment and participation in inclusive Government.

The last time the Security Council met on Afghanistan (see S/PV.9354), it was reported that there were more than 50 edicts and decrees restricting women's rights. More have been added since. The number of families living in poverty has nearly doubled in two years. More than two-thirds of people in Afghanistan require humanitarian assistance to survive. Twenty million face acute hunger, the majority of whom are women and girls, and the cost of the food basket has gone up. Household debt has increased sixfold.

The Taliban's attacks on women's rights exacerbate the situation, pushing women out of jobs and opportunities to generate income and out of the education they need to be part of Afghanistan's future. It is estimated that women's employment has dropped by 25 per cent since the Taliban's takeover, compared to 7 per cent for men — and those estimates predate the many bans enacted since the end of 2022, which have barred tens of thousands of women from working in non-governmental organizations and the United Nations, and the forthcoming loss of more than 60,000 jobs that will come with the shutdown of beauty salons. Those decrees are costing Afghanistan approximately \$1 billion per year, a sum that will only increase.

We must chart a way forward together, guided by women's voices and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. We have ignored those voices too often in the past. Afghan women were excluded from 80 per cent of peace negotiations from 2005 to 2020. The negotiations for the Doha agreement, in 2020, excluded Afghan women and did not contain a single reference to, or safeguard for, women's rights. Those failures were part of what brought us to where we are today. The past is full of examples of neglecting or ignoring women; the present is filled with the consequences. The future must therefore be focused on listening to, investing in, and supporting women, as well as including them.

Women in Afghanistan will lead the change they need. They will find ways of speaking out, educating themselves, generating income and helping others. They have done that before, and they will do it again. Our job is to hear and support them, including by finding spaces for them to meet with the *de facto* authorities, including women in our delegations when we meet with the *de facto* authorities, and using all of the tools in our toolbox to bring them out of the dark.

It also means putting money behind organizations led by and assisting Afghan women and women-run businesses. Seventy-seven per cent of women's organizations did not receive funding in 2022. That is something we cannot accept. Just as Afghan women act with courage and creativity, opening clandestine schools and having girls wearing boys' clothes to access education, donors too can find innovative ways to reach women and girls, including through online platforms, radio, cash assistance and scholarships and safe migration alternatives.

I leave the Council with three final recommendations.

First, we recommend that the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) convene a dedicated meeting on the role the Committee can play in responding to violations of women's rights in Afghanistan, including hearing from Afghan women and women's rights experts directly, updating the listing criteria and using all the tools at the Committee's disposal.

Secondly, we must consider the messages we send when we frame the situation in Afghanistan purely or exclusively as a humanitarian crisis, which it is not. It is an economic crisis, a mental-health crisis a development crisis and much more. And the thread that connects those different facets is the underlying women's-rights

crisis. That must be the primary lens through which we understand what is going on and what we must do.

Thirdly, we ask the Council to lend its full support to an intergovernmental process to explicitly codify gender apartheid in international law. The tools that the international community has at its disposal were not created to respond to mass, State-sponsored gender oppression. This systematic and planned assault on women's rights is foundational to the Taliban's vision of State and society, and it must be named, defined and proscribed in our global norms so that we can respond appropriately.

On International Women's Day this year, members invited a brave Afghan activist, Zubaida Akbar, to their deliberations (see S/PV.9277). She told the Council what Afghan women told me when I was on mission to Afghanistan in January, and what the Afghan women I met here at the General Assembly across all my engagements this past week have echoed — that if members do not defend women's rights here, they have no credibility to do so anywhere else. Zubaida Akbar was right. The world is watching. In some places it is watching to condemn, but in others it is watching to emulate, as other countries and parties to conflict seek to mimic the violations that the Taliban have inflicted on women. The multilateral system is being tested. We must not be found wanting.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Bennoune.

Ms. Bennoune: I thank members for the opportunity to brief the Security Council.

My name is Karima Bennoune. I am an international legal expert and have worked with Afghan women human rights defenders for nearly three decades. The Council has heard from many of them about the catastrophic harm women are suffering from under the Taliban. Today I will focus on what the Security Council and the international community should do in response.

As members are aware, since August 2021 the Taliban have stripped Afghan women of most of their human rights through at least 65 decrees. They have arbitrarily detained and tortured women defenders who bravely resist the apartheid restrictions. Their rule represents the antithesis of the Charter of the United Nations and is a threat to peace and security. A recently reported increase in suicides among women

is a horrible but predictable consequence. Day after day, women from across Afghanistan tell me about the devastating impact of Taliban rule. One Uzbek woman from Takhar, who previously worked in civil society, said she recently tried to commit suicide. "I am afraid that they will ban women from breathing without a man's permission", she explained. A Hazara woman described living under constant threat of widespread targeted anti-Hazara atrocities by the Taliban. A woman protester in Kabul said, "What we are experiencing every day is gradual death. This is what it feels like to live under gender apartheid".

Many Afghan women also tell me how concerned they are about increasing attempts by some international actors to normalize the Taliban despite their repressive policies. As a result, some Afghan women defenders recently went on a hunger strike, demanding international recognition that gender apartheid is being practised in their country. Too often, the international community claims to be combating extremism but fails to support the people peacefully resisting it on the front lines. The Council has repeatedly called on the Taliban to end their grave abuses. But there is more that it must do to hold them accountable for their decimation of women's rights.

I am here today to ask the Council to make it clear through action that the international community will not tolerate the system of gender apartheid that the Taliban have imposed. In June, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and the Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls called on the international community to galvanize international legal condemnation and action to end gender apartheid, which they described as an institutionalized system of discrimination, segregation, humiliation and exclusion of women and girls. The Secretary-General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Executive Director of UN-Women and the representatives of countries from many regions, including members of the Council, have also correctly labelled the situation as gender apartheid. In the Human Rights Council, South Africa not only recognized that Taliban rule constitutes gender apartheid but called for an international response to it, similar to that which helped to end racial apartheid.

I am here today to call on the international community to heed those words, go beyond the condemnation of this worst example of systematic oppression of women in the world and take urgent

action to end it. What has been tried since the Taliban returned to power is not working. Along with many Afghan women defenders, I believe that the gender apartheid approach is one of the most promising options for a more effective way forward. It can be pursued both through gender-inclusive interpretation of existing apartheid law today and by codifying gender apartheid in international law going forward.

In December 2022, after consultation with diverse Afghan women defenders, I published a study entitled “The International Obligation to Counter Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan”. So what are the consequences of that framing? Adapted from the international law on racial apartheid, gender apartheid emphasizes that discrimination has been made the system of governance itself, such that the aim of public policy is to discriminate. It can be accurately captured by adapting the definition of apartheid in the Rome Statute by simply adding “gender” — in other words, inhumane acts committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one gender group over any other gender group and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime.

The Taliban are not simply failing to uphold women’s rights — the oppression of women is central to their system of governance and a core part of their philosophy. The apartheid framework recognizes that the ordinary human rights approach, centring the State as the actor to implement human rights, cannot work here. Positive change will be possible only with a consistent, principled international response led by the Council, mandated by its 10 resolutions on women and peace and security and supported by States from all regions.

The vital concepts of gender apartheid and gender persecution are distinct and complementary. Both are needed to hold the Taliban accountable. Gender apartheid is the institutionalized framework within which gender persecution takes place in Afghanistan. The Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court is investigating the situation and may bring charges against some alleged perpetrators of international crimes, and that would be an important development. However, individual accountability, while essential, is not in itself sufficient to address the scale of the crisis. A powerful aspect of the gender apartheid approach is that it not only implicates the perpetrators of apartheid, but as was the case with racial apartheid in South

Africa, it means that no Member State can be complicit in or normalize the Taliban’s illegal actions, and that States must take effective action to end the situation. It therefore makes it clear that there can be no recognition of the Taliban and certainly no place for them at the United Nations, at least as long as their system of gender apartheid persists.

The goal is not to isolate Afghanistan or cut off desperately needed humanitarian assistance. Principled and non-discriminatory aid delivery is a matter of life and death. However, humanitarian action and the protection of human rights are and must be mutually reinforcing. This year we are marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which reaffirms the Charter’s faith in the equal rights of men and women. Afghan women are among the most courageous defenders of that foundational principle and deserve the Council’s strongest support. I therefore recommend, first, that the Security Council and other relevant United Nations bodies should consider adopting resolutions labelling the treatment of Afghan women by the Taliban as both gender persecution and an institutionalized framework of gender apartheid. Such resolutions should require States and the United Nations to take effective steps to end those grave violations of international law.

Secondly, there is an important opportunity to strengthen the relevant international law through the proposed treaty on crimes against humanity currently under consideration. Council members and other States should ensure that the treaty is gender-competent and includes a reference to gender apartheid.

Thirdly, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, whose role is vital, should fully implement all aspects of its mandate on women’s rights. In addition, the forthcoming independent assessment and its implementation should prioritize the protection of women’s rights and the meaningful participation of Afghan women.

As an Afghan woman defender once said to me, optimism is key to survival. The stalwart women of Afghanistan who have continued to protest will not give up and are risking their lives for the Charter’s promise of equality. The Security Council must show as much courage and commitment as they do.

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

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

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I would like to start by thanking Special Representative Otunbayeva and UN-Women Executive Director Sima Sami Bahous for providing an update on the situation. I also thank Ms. Karima Bennouna for her remarks.

More than two years have passed since the Taliban takeover in August 2021. It is truly regrettable that I have to say once again in this Chamber that we have seen little progress on the issues of concern, despite the repeated calls by the Security Council and the international community. The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is becoming increasingly dire, and the economy is stagnant. The restrictions on human rights, especially on those of women and girls, have not been lifted. We acknowledge that the Taliban have claimed achievements, such as improvements in the security situation and progress in the area of counter-narcotics. However, those achievements will be fragile unless the Taliban addresses the Afghan people's suffering.

The Security Council must continue to urge the Taliban to reverse their repressive human rights policies and prioritize their people. In particular, the restrictions on women and girls must be reversed, and their full, equal, meaningful and safe participation must be realized, as called for in resolution 2681 (2023). At the same time, the international community should not isolate the Taliban, as it did in the 1990s, when the country became a hotbed of terrorism, but rather should engage with them. We should be united in our approach to the Taliban.

There has been no change in the fact that the continued presence of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is critically important for the future of Afghanistan. We deeply appreciate that UNAMA has addressed a wide range of matters by seriously engaging with the relevant Afghan political actors and stakeholders. UNAMA also functions as a gateway to the outside world for the Taliban. Japan, as one of the co-penholders, remains supportive of UNAMA's activities. For our part, Japan continues to pursue patient, pragmatic and principled engagement with the Taliban in order to encourage them to change the course of their policies in the direction desired by the Afghan people. Since we resumed operations at our Embassy in Kabul in September 2022, we have continuously urged the

Taliban directly to abolish their repressive policies and build a constructive relationship with the international community. We believe that building trust with the Taliban is important in that process.

We are also using our presence on the ground to try to assist the population. In late August, Japan and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations signed a cooperation document for a project to enhance agricultural production through community-led irrigation. The project expands on the efforts made by the Japanese physician Tetsu Nakamura and his aid group, Peace Japan Medical Services, to bring back agriculture to farmlands abandoned over the past 20 years. Through that project, we hope to not only alleviate serious food shortages in the country, which we have all discussed as an acute problem, as described by the Special Representative, but also help the Afghan people rebuild their livelihoods and once again stand on their own feet. By November, an independent assessment will be provided in accordance with resolution 2679 (2023). We hope to receive forward-looking recommendations on how relevant political, humanitarian and development actors can address the multifaceted challenges faced by the Afghan people in an integrated and coherent way.

In conclusion, I stress that Japan will continue to support the building of a peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan, and we are committed to the work of the Security Council to bring about a better future for the Afghan people.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): I also thank our briefers, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Roza Otunbayeva, Executive Director Sima Sami Bahous and Ms. Karima Bennouna, for their valuable remarks today.

We have now passed the two-year mark of the Taliban being in power in Afghanistan. The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/678) provides us with a clearer idea of the current landscape. Conflict has subsided, and some gains have been made in counter-terrorism in Afghanistan. The opiate trade has been reduced. At the same time, millions are facing serious food insecurity. Humanitarian needs are among the highest in the world, and women and girls are being erased from society. This is therefore not a moment for complacency in the Security Council. When we adopted resolution 2679 (2023) last March, mandating an independent assessment, our primary aim was to

address the existing gap for a coherent international strategy on the part of the de facto authorities. While the assessment may not provide a silver bullet, it should aim to provide a list of tangible options on which we can build an integrated response. Today I will focus on the United Arab Emirates expectations of the assessment due in November.

First, we need a clear way forward on a political process and a coherent policy of engagement with the de facto authorities. That should include a reckoning with their de facto control over the territory of Afghanistan that does not simply lead to the legitimization of their power by default. It is a complex balancing act, but many millions of lives depend on our ability to walk that tightrope. Our unity as the international community remains our strongest lever. The Afghan people are not responsible for the behaviour of the Taliban. It is our responsibility to ensure that they do not become victims twice over — first victims of extremist policies and then victims of our own inaction or disunity. That does not mean legitimizing or ignoring the Taliban's blatant disregard for human rights, especially the rights of women and girls. But it does mean engaging with them on key areas that require international involvement in order to reverse their persecution of women.

The Secretary-General's efforts to convene Afghanistan envoys almost six months ago was a step in the right direction, but we must see something that is consistent, meets regularly and has a clear timeline and deliverables. The next meeting of envoys should be scheduled without delay. We also need an approach that involves clear benchmarks for increasing the cooperation to emerge from such meetings, one that will lead to the de facto authorities upholding Afghanistan's obligations under international law and their respect for human rights and the reversal of the restrictions on women and girls. We need to understand the leverage that we have to incentivize the de facto authorities to reach those benchmarks, as well as the consequences for them if they do not. In the context of the assessment, we must therefore re-examine how we envision the process, that is, whether we build a United Nations-convened pathway, pursue a new one or unify the many important regional initiatives and meetings that are currently under way, including those led by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, in order to work holistically in reinforcing — and not at odds with — one another. Regardless of what approach we take, women must be full participants in that process,

and confidence-building measures and ties to timelines and benchmarks should be part and parcel of all future frameworks.

Secondly, we need to kick-start the Afghan economy. The economic crisis is compounding what is already the world's worst women's rights crisis. Rampant poverty may have forced up to 80,000 girls into marriage. Humanitarian aid on such a scale is not a viable long-term strategy. We have already seen that less than one third of this year's humanitarian appeal has not been funded. The latest report of the Secretary-General offers promising indications that revenue is being generated internally. Nevertheless, reviving the Afghan economy necessitates finding ways to reintegrate Afghanistan into the international banking system and providing capital to revitalize its private sector, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, while placing a priority on those run and owned by Afghan women. Ideally, we should be able to consider definitive options in the context of the assessment, and those should tie in with the benchmarks and timelines of the civil political process. As I heard from women civil society leaders this morning, that aid should be monitored so that it actually reaches women and minorities and is not used as a lever of patronage by the de facto authorities. And we would genuinely welcome further data from United Nations agencies on that point.

Thirdly, the independent assessment must have a clear recommendation for how we mitigate security challenges in a holistic way in Afghanistan, including in counter-terrorism, as well as in countering organized crime and narcotics. The significant decrease in conflict-related violence and the counter-terrorism gains need to be acknowledged and built upon. The decline in the opiate trade has also been a positive development for the region following the de facto authorities' ban on narcotics cultivation. These security challenges are intertwined and must also remain a centre of our focus to ensure that Afghanistan does not serve as a safe harbour for threats against other nations.

Finally, Afghanistan is among the top 10 climate-vulnerable countries globally. It is also among those that are the least equipped to adapt to climate change and to mitigate its impacts. Now in its third consecutive year of drought, 25 out of 34 Afghan provinces experience either severe or catastrophic drought conditions. Water scarcity has been manifesting increasingly in border tensions as well. Protection from the impacts of climate change needs to be among our

priorities for the Afghan population. We have had too many recent reminders of what happens when we do not boost resilience and adaptation measures, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

The question we face today is therefore clear: are we willing to invest in climate-proofing economies and societies, massively scaling up early warning systems and providing for diversified livelihoods, or are we willing to live with the consequences of what we know will be more frequent and more severe disasters in a potentially failed State? That is a debate that we need to be having now if we are to avoid devastation like the tragedy we saw in Derna most recently. It is up to us to make space for those discussions in this Chamber and within the United Nations system. The opportunity and the responsibility that we have today is to chart a corrected course for Afghanistan and for the people of Afghanistan. That responsibility cannot be understated.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, the Executive Director of UN-Women, Ms. Sima Sami Bahous and Ms. Karima Bennoune, civil society representative, for their briefings. I welcome the presence of the representatives of Afghanistan, India, Iran and Pakistan.

The content of the Special Representative's briefing, specifically with regard to the lack of results in restoring the rights and freedoms of women and girls, the difficulties in getting humanitarian assistance to the population most in need and persistent security risks, is a cause for concern and vigilance for the Council.

The crisis in Afghanistan involves a number of facets: a lack of institutions; the violation of human rights, the deterioration of socioeconomic indicators; the increase in the number of people who require humanitarian assistance to survive; the recruitment and use of children; and the obstacles that the Taliban impose on the deployment of humanitarian aid. The persistence with which the Taliban regimes continues its violations against human rights and fundamental freedoms is the most worrisome, specifically regarding the situation of women and girls, given the deepening of its policies on the refusal to allow work and education, as well as their resistance to repealing the edicts that institutionalize gender discrimination and that practically constitute apartheid. We would sound the alert with respect to the abuse and violations that have occurred against political representatives from various

sectors, human rights defenders, former government officials and armed forces. Possible constitutional and legal reforms should be geared towards strengthening institutions and the participation of all actors.

The most recent report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team (see S/2023/549) notes that there is evidence that various terrorist groups, including Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province, could have greater margin for manoeuvre to finance and organize their operations. Ecuador reaffirms that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security and weakens the rule of law and democracy. We reiterate the importance of implementing coordinated actions among the competent bodies of the United Nations system, regional organizations and neighbouring countries to step up the fight against terrorism, illicit arms trafficking, violent extremism and drug trafficking.

The current funding crisis is unprecedented. We encourage donors not to falter when it comes to fulfilling their commitments. In the case of Afghanistan, less than 30 per cent has been raised up to the month of September, which jeopardizes the continuity of the programmes that have been easing the situation of 29 million of people in need.

My delegation takes note of the bilateral and regional efforts and mechanisms for cooperation and dialogue that exist with the Taliban regime; however, we call for those efforts to have as their fundamental objective the promotion of the effective implementation of human rights policies and the reconstruction of an inclusive, participatory society that is consistent with international law. Faced with the lack of flexibility of the Taliban regime, we call for global solidarity and for concerted political action in the region and the international community. The situation in Afghanistan must continue to be a priority for the Council. For that reason, we reaffirm our support for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and our intention to support any initiative aimed at giving the Afghan population the opportunity to live in a State capable of protecting their human rights and guaranteeing their well-being and security.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I join others in thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva, Executive

Director Sima Bahous and Ms. Karima Bennouna for their briefings.

Twenty-two years since Kofi Annan's Nobel Peace Prize speech, which the Special Representative referenced, and over two years since the Taliban seizure of power, our dominant concern remains the Taliban's systematic assault on the rights of women and girls. There have been over 50 decrees curtailing women's ability to participate in public, political, economic and social life and barring girls from secondary schools and higher education. Those decrees have also affected the ability of the United Nations to get aid to those who need it most — this is at a time of dire need. Two thirds of the population of Afghanistan require humanitarian assistance. A total of 40 per cent are facing acute food insecurity — a number that would be far higher without families and communities in Afghanistan supporting each other in whatever ways they can. Afghanistan remains one of the poorest and most climate-vulnerable countries in the world, its prospects further dimmed by a significant brain drain as a result of migration, persecution and uncertainty.

We note the progress the Taliban has made in tackling the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant–Khorasan Province, and we underscore the importance of continued action against terrorist groups within Afghanistan and their affiliates. The people of Afghanistan remain our priority. What can we do for them?

First and foremost, we need to take urgent action to avert a humanitarian catastrophe as winter approaches. The United Kingdom has contributed more than half a billion dollars to address the humanitarian crisis since April 2021, and we call on fellow Member States to step up support where they can. But as we heard from Special Representative Otunbayeva, the United Nations revised humanitarian appeal for Afghanistan for 2023 is only 28 per cent funded. The United Kingdom is unwavering in its commitment to providing aid to the people of Afghanistan and supporting United Nations efforts. But we are clear that male-only delivery chains do not and cannot achieve that, and we support calls for the closer monitoring of the delivery of aid.

Secondly, the international community should remain united in its message to the Taliban. We have set out our expectations in successive Security Council resolutions on humanitarian access, cutting ties with terrorists, respect for human rights and inclusive

governance. The Taliban should understand clearly the costs of their policies. International recognition should not be on the table. Sanctions relief should not come. Afghanistan cannot be self-reliant when 50 per cent of its people are excluded from society. Without inclusive governance and society, peace and stability will remain elusive.

Finally, we look forward to Ambassador Sinirlioğlu's independent assessment, which will provide a valuable basis for a more coherent, strategic international approach as we look to build on the Secretary-General's conference with special envoys in Doha and other regional initiatives, in which the United Kingdom will continue to play its part.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for her assessments of the situation in the country. The Russian Federation supports the activities of UNAMA under her leadership within the framework of the tasks mandated to the Mission. We also note Kabul's interest in developing contacts with her. We are heartened by the fact that the United Nations remains committed to maintaining a presence in Afghanistan and delivering the necessary assistance to its people. We listened attentively to the statements by Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director of UN-Women, and the civil society representative, Ms. Karima Bennouna. We are pleased that actors from the region have also been included today's discussion. We have taken note of the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2023/678), and we would like to make the following points.

The Security Council has now been discussing the situation in Afghanistan for many years. During that time, the country endured the Taliban rule in the 1990s, followed by a 20-year war that led to its effective collapse, culminating in the shameful flight of United States and NATO troops and then, paradoxical as it may be, the return to power of the Taliban movement in August 2021. Against the backdrop of those changes, what remain unchanged are the empty Western promises to build a long-anticipated peace, in addition to the magnitude of the problems and challenges that the people of Afghanistan are once again facing alone.

In analysing the situation in the country over the past 20 years or so, we cannot avoid the conclusion that

the main result of that inglorious military campaign has been the return to power of those whom Washington and its allies so fiercely fought all those years — and with whom an agreement was signed in Doha behind the backs of the Afghan people, whose interests they claimed to be protecting. What were the real reasons for such a long-standing presence of our Western colleagues in Afghanistan? It appears that the country was a training ground for trying out America's regional strategy, testing various types of weapons, laundering billions of dollars and fine-tuning corrupt schemes that various Western partners of the Afghan republican authorities set up over the years. As a result of the so-called war on terror, Afghanistan became yet another safe haven for extremists of all stripes and the homeland of yet another wing of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). On top of that, it has witnessed numerous war crimes perpetrated by the United States and its NATO allies. Of course, we can hardly expect our United States colleagues or their satellites to summon the courage to admit that openly. On the contrary, they are trying hard, including through threats of sanction, to erase the evidence of their atrocities from the pages of history as if they had never been.

Against that backdrop, we can see the hypocrisy of our our colleagues' loud proclamations about their alleged continuing concern about the plight of ordinary Afghans, including women and children, whom they themselves betrayed and abandoned to their fate without ceremony, not to mention their false concerns about the lack of preconditions for a genuine settlement and the rebuilding of Afghanistan. If we look at actions rather than words, the Western countries do not care about the Afghan people, including their women and girls, or about the unprecedented humanitarian and economic crisis. All their efforts are focused on the war on Russia in Ukraine and on pumping huge amounts of weapons and money into Ukraine.

We share the Secretary-General's assessment of the complex internal political situation in Afghanistan. We continue to be particularly concerned about the security risks caused by the activity of the ISIL-Khorasan terrorist group, which established itself firmly during the years of Western intervention. We see that those terrorists have continued to deliberately exacerbate the situation by perpetrating terrorist attacks, instilling an atmosphere of fear and despair and calling for bringing the knives out against those Muslims whom the Taliban view as heretical. All of that contributes to

the radicalization of young people. The aim is clearly to present themselves as a real alternative force and to destabilize Afghanistan's neighbouring States. In that case, it is no secret — and this has been confirmed by the militants themselves — that ISIL receives support from abroad, including from foreign intelligence services. That is hardly surprising, however. During the years of republican governance, we heard a number of stories of ISIL militants receiving NATO helicopters. In that regard, we are concerned about the security conditions for UNAMA staff and the humanitarian workers on the ground. While we note the efforts of the de facto authorities, it is clear that they will not be enough to fully eradicate the hornet's nest. Meanwhile, the prospect of terrorist activity spilling over into neighbouring countries in Central Asia remains very real.

The narcotics problem is also closely linked to terrorism. We believe there is no alternative to comprehensive international and regional assistance in eradicating that threat, including through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). It is clear that in the context of widespread hunger and poverty, it will be difficult for Afghanistan to tackle those challenges alone. In that connection, we note UNODC's efforts in supporting Afghan farmers. We see a need to continue to scale up those efforts and ensure that they remain consistent.

We are paying close attention to the humanitarian and socioeconomic situation in Afghanistan. We note the efforts undertaken by the United Nations and regional organizations to deliver humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, and the selfless work of humanitarian agencies and their personnel, who are willing to remain on the ground to help Afghans regardless of the circumstances, all of which is highly commendable. At the same time, any efforts of the United Nations to expand assistance beyond basic needs continue to be blocked by Western donors, who categorically reject any opportunity to provide the country with any development assistance, including for rebuilding schools and hospitals and constructing roads.

Against that backdrop, the Western representatives' deliberate reduction of financing for the United Nations humanitarian response plan for Afghanistan under various politicized pretexts does not stand up to criticism. We only have to look at the case of humanitarian aid to Ukraine. The United Nations has received \$1.83 billion for Ukraine this year alone. It is not just the humanitarian response plans for

Afghanistan that are chronically underfunded, but so are those for most other countries around the world. There is no justification for such discrimination.

In some areas, humanitarian and development issues are also related to water shortages, which have forced people to flee their homes and migrate to other provinces. We take note of the efforts of UNAMA to assist Afghans, including with the support of the United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other entities. We also continue to monitor developments with respect to the situation of the rights of all Afghans, including the basic rights of women and girls and the rights to education and employment. We take note of the statements by the de facto authorities, but hope for a prompt resolution of those problems. The priority for us is still the establishment of a genuinely inclusive Government, with the participation of all ethno-political groups in the country. We anticipate progress on that track as well.

More than any other people, the Afghan people deserve the right to live in peace and stability. However, it will be impossible to build a long-term, sustainable peace without painstaking, pragmatic cooperation with the de facto authorities on a broad range of pressing issues — there is no alternative to that. UNAMA's effectiveness hinges on its adoption of a comprehensive approach.

Russia has consistently advocated greater cooperation with Afghanistan on a comprehensive settlement. Together with our regional partners, we are working to forge a common approach to the situation in the country. That goal is also being advanced by the Moscow format, a meeting of which is to be held on 29 Sept in Kazan, Russian Federation. The United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Indonesia have also been invited to that meeting, as has a Taliban delegation. We note the potential of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Afghanistan Contact Group. There are regular liaisons conducted within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Commonwealth of Independent States. We also participate in the format of Afghanistan's neighbouring countries and the quartet made up of China, Russia, Pakistan and Iran. Moreover, we are leveraging bilateral contacts with the de facto authorities to discuss expedited solutions to all the objectives that have been set out. We will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people

and step up cooperation at the socioeconomic level. We are keen to develop relations with Kabul, including for the purposes of rebuilding the infrastructure Russian enterprises built in the country.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I thank Special Representative Otunbayeva, Executive Director Bahous and Ms. Bennoune for their briefings.

More than two years have passed since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. Regrettably, the initial reassurances they provided to the international community have not been adhered to. Instead, we are witnessing a situation in which human rights abuses are flagrant, particularly those directed against the human rights of women and girls. Hundreds of former Government officials and former members of the armed forces continue to be victims of a crackdown, despite the Taliban's announcement of a general amnesty in August 2021.

As outlined by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the trafficking in methamphetamine in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries is surging, despite the introduction of a drug ban by the Taliban last year. We also continue to witness incidents of armed confrontation at border crossings with neighbouring countries. That is a serious security concern, with implications for regional security and stability.

The Taliban's egregious violations, as well as its systematic discrimination against and segregation and exclusion of women and girls in Afghanistan, continue to escalate and may amount to gender persecution and a crime against humanity. Since August 2021, more than 50 decrees have directly curtailed women's rights to education, employment and the freedom of movement and expression. The recent closures of beauty salons and the dismissal of women working in kindergartens deprived women of some of their last sources of employment and spaces for finding community support outside their homes.

Girls are not only denied education in Afghanistan but are also banned from accepting educational opportunities abroad. The summary report of country-wide women's consultations is clear: gender equality and women's rights are the top priority for Afghan women. As mental health continues to deteriorate, with suicides taking place daily, we must strive to ensure their safety and security. The Taliban's exclusion of women from Afghan society and their restrictions of civic spaces have prevented civil society organizations,

human rights defenders and the media from operating freely. We must renew our efforts in support of Afghan women and girls as they face unprecedented gender-based segregation. We reiterate our demand on the Taliban to immediately and unconditionally reverse all policies and practices that restrict the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan's economy has further deteriorated, plunging the country deep into a humanitarian crisis. Two thirds of the population are in constant need of humanitarian assistance. We commend and support all United Nations and humanitarian staff who continue to assist the people of Afghanistan. The multidimensional humanitarian emergency throughout the country still endures. Yet the provision of international aid has shown signs of weakness, including due to budget shortages and declines in assistance. That occurs at a time when almost 40 per cent of Afghan children under 5 years of age are facing acute malnutrition. The combination of the societal marginalization of Afghan women and the decrease of international humanitarian aid has significantly diminished their options for making a living and feeding their children.

Malta remains steadfast in its support for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and its personnel as they perform their duties under difficult circumstances. We appreciate UNAMA's continued close cooperation with the European Union on the ground. We reiterate our demand that the Taliban engage with the Mission in good faith, respect the context of the unanimously adopted resolution 2681 (2023) and be accountable to the international community. We also look forward to the United Nations Special Coordinator's recommendations, to be included in the independent assessment, on how the United Nations can more effectively strengthen its actions in the country.

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

The A3 wishes to thank Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, and Ms. Karima Bennouna for their excellent briefings on the situation in

Afghanistan. We welcome the participation in this meeting of the representatives of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, India and Pakistan.

We take note of the recent progress achieved in Afghanistan in improving macroeconomic performance, promoting trade, and working to improve infrastructure and regional cooperation. While acknowledging those steps, we wish to express our deep concern about the ongoing attacks on civilians, the violence against children, the extrajudicial killings and the arbitrary arrests in the country. We are also profoundly concerned about the prevailing discrimination against women and girls and the curtailment of the freedom of expression. It is against that backdrop that the A3 would like to highlight the following points.

First, at the political level, we note with dismay that the current Government is composed entirely of men and that some of them feature on the United Nations sanctions list. Moreover, the lack of representation of the diversity of the Afghan people — both ethnic and social — in the political landscape is self-evident and deplorable. The A3 cannot condone policies or actions that are based on doctrines of discrimination against women and girls. We call on the Afghan authorities to take steps aimed at reversing those measures, and for a full reversal of the ban on women aid workers, as well as for equal access to education for boys and girls.

Secondly, we believe that addressing the humanitarian challenges faced by the Afghan people is a matter of urgency. The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is dire and deteriorating rapidly, with millions of people in need of assistance. The available data shows that one in three people are already facing crisis levels of food insecurity across the country and that more than 40 per cent of children under the age of five are facing acute malnutrition. It is therefore essential to provide life-saving aid, including food, water, health care and shelter, particularly in remote and hard-to-reach areas. In order to achieve that humanitarian relief, we call on donors to renew their support and increase their response activities, especially before the approaching harsh winter season.

Thirdly, despite the reduction in incident levels resulting from armed clashes and detonations of improvised explosive devices, the security situation in Afghanistan remains worrisome. In that context, we condemn any acts of violence. We encourage the Afghan authorities to continue their efforts to combat

terrorism and ensure the safety of Afghan citizens. We also encourage the countries of the region to increase their joint efforts to stabilize the security situation in Afghanistan so as to ensure peace dividends for the entire region.

Fourthly, to achieve lasting political stability, the A3 stresses the need for an inclusive political process in Afghanistan that upholds human rights and democratic values. It will be crucial to ensure that all the country's voices are heard and represented in the political process. We call on the Afghan authorities to fully embrace inclusivity and democratic principles, fostering a stable and open political environment that can contribute to long-term peace and development. The international community must provide support to ensure the success of that process.

The A3 would like to express its sincere appreciation for the dedicated and selfless work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), as it works tirelessly to engage with the Afghan authorities and all relevant actors to improve the overall situation in the country. We encourage the continuation of awareness-raising activities on issues related to governance, including human rights. We commend its involvement in helping to control the proliferation of arms. UNAMA's commitment and efforts in those areas are essential to fostering positive and sustainable change in the country.

To conclude, the A3 reiterates its call on Afghanistan's authorities to prioritize the fundamental rights and welfare of all Afghan citizens, especially women and girls. We urge the international community at large and the countries in the region in particular to provide their support and contribute to the lasting peace, stability and development of the people of Afghanistan.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Otunbayeva, Executive Director Bahous and Ms. Bennoune for their very informative briefings. I also thank the entire United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) team for their work and commitment to a stable, prosperous, inclusive and secure Afghanistan. I want to highlight three pressing topics in my remarks today — the current situation of women and girls, access for humanitarian assistance and ongoing human rights abuses.

First, as we know, the Taliban have chosen to impose numerous edicts to prevent women from contributing fully to Afghan society. They have banned

women from universities, closed secondary schools to girls and prevented Afghan women from working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the United Nations. Those restrictions are absolutely indefensible. Muslim-majority countries have spoken out against those decisions and the United States joins them in doing so here today. We urge the Taliban to roll back those restrictions and allow women and girls to have access to education, which would enable their full, equal and meaningful participation in society. Women are also essential actors in the distribution of aid. It is imperative that they be allowed to continue their critical work with NGOs and the United Nations. We are committed to providing assistance that prioritizes non-discrimination and the meaningful inclusion of women, with careful attention to ensuring the safety and security of female staff and the inclusion of women and girls as recipients of aid.

Secondly and more broadly, the Taliban have created an increasingly difficult operating environment for partners who are staying and delivering life-saving aid to the Afghan people. Any interference in or diversion of humanitarian aid is totally unacceptable. We continue to expect the Taliban to allow unhindered humanitarian access and a flow of aid consistent with humanitarian principles. Now more than ever, the international community must rally together and increase pledges and support to the humanitarian response. The United States is committed to providing assistance to those most in need. Since August 2021 the United States has provided nearly \$2 billion in humanitarian assistance, including nearly \$969 million to the World Food Programme. Reports of macroeconomic stability notwithstanding, more than half of all Afghans live in poverty and about two thirds are in need of assistance. 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, UNAMA's report this month highlighted at least 800 instances of killing, unjust detention, physical abuse and ill treatment and disappearances carried out against former Government officials and members of Afghanistan's national defence and security forces between August 2021 and June 2023. Those reported human rights abuses are unacceptable. UNAMA's comprehensive mandate is vital to reporting on and monitoring human rights abuses, as well as to promoting women's rights and empowerment.

The members of the Security Council must continue to work together to press the Taliban to reverse its destructive course. Indeed, we must press the Taliban to 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 together to advance our shared objectives in Afghanistan, including at the next United Nations-convened meeting of special envoys.

Mr. França Danese (Brazil): I thank Special Representative Roza Otunbayeva and Executive Director Sima Sami Bahous for their briefings. I also commend civil society representative Ms. Karima Bennouna for shedding light on the challenges and hardships faced by millions of Afghans, and especially women and girls, in their daily lives.

As we have reached the two-year mark of the Taliban's return to power, we can assess the global response to Afghanistan's challenges and also chart a course to contribute to the well-being of the Afghan people.

Brazil welcomes the efforts by the United Nations to engage with the Taliban de facto authorities and to align Afghanistan's policies with international standards, as detailed in the most recent report by the Secretary-General (S/2023/678).

Brazil remains troubled by the extremely serious humanitarian crisis in the country. It requires the focused attention of the international community. A staggering 29.2 million Afghans, making up over 70 per cent of the population, desperately need assistance. Shrinking resources, economic constraints and the lack of employment opportunities exacerbate the distressing situation.

The human rights situation is also appalling, in particular for Afghan women and girls. Many of their essential rights and freedoms continue to be systematically and deliberately violated. Such acts run against everything we cherish and believe as far as human dignity is concerned. Despite evidence to the contrary, we must hope and continue to urge the de facto authorities to steer the nation towards inclusivity and full and indivisible respect for human rights and especially with regard to women and girls. Discriminatory measures and systematic violations of the human rights of women and girls, including access to education and work, will undermine any prospects of

building a stable and prosperous society in Afghanistan. That can never be achieved without the proper inclusion and meaningful participation of women in public life and girls getting their appropriate education.

Addressing the root causes of Afghanistan's multiple challenges is key to translating the country's enormous potential into reality. Recent economic indicators offer a glimmer of hope for Afghanistan's macroeconomic landscape. The exchange rate has been stable, inflation is under control, revenue is being collected and legal exports are increasing. Therefore, Afghanistan has somewhat robust macroeconomic fundamentals on which to build. But one must not compromise such fundamentals by following a political path that further alienates significant segments of the Afghan society and continues to isolate the country.

The international community should do its part and engage in a principled manner. Carefully channelling frozen assets back to Afghanistan's Central Bank should be a key component of any strategy aimed at a constructive engagement with the de facto authorities. Helping Afghans to address the intricate political, economic and humanitarian challenges they face is no simple task, but the international community, and especially States that have had or still have a stronger involvement in the country's more recent history, have the political and moral obligation to do so.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): We welcome the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2023/678) and thank the speakers for their comments, recommendations and efforts. I also refer to the stakeout with the States that signed what we call the statement of shared commitments on women and peace and security. Indeed, we must explore all avenues and legal instruments — from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to the International Criminal Court — in order to hold responsible those who systematically violate international law.

While the report shows some macroeconomic progress, it also highlights the unprecedented humanitarian and social crises, accompanied by serious human rights violations, as well as the lack of response to the environmental disaster represented by climate change. Today, as Council members have heard many times, more than two thirds of the Afghan population are in need of assistance. Women remain systematically excluded from education and paid work, as well as

from political, economic and social life in general. That only exacerbates the situation of entire families. The violation of women's rights, in addition to being a crime and affecting their mental and psychological state, weighs heavily on the economic and humanitarian prospects of the entire country.

The fact that humanitarian work carried out by women is largely suspended, first and foremost, costs human lives, but the exclusion of women also jeopardizes humanitarian action as a whole, discourages the necessary funding and encourages economic diversion. There can be no doubt: for Afghanistan to recover, it needs women who can determine their own future and actively participate in shaping public and political life.

That starts at school, where girls acquire the necessary skills. As Ms. Basij-Rasikh so aptly put it at our meeting in June,

“The secret to a stable Afghanistan, a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan, is no secret at all; it is educated girls.” (*S/PV.9354, p. 5*).

We recall resolution 2681 (2023), which calls upon the Taliban to swiftly reverse its policies and practices.

Allow me also to make a more general comment. As High Commissioner Volker Türk said, human rights in Afghanistan are on the verge of collapse. Switzerland supports the important work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in that area — and I would like to thank the Special Representative — in particular the collection of data across the country and the production of relevant reports, so that one day justice will be served. It is also important to develop long-term solutions. That requires close collaboration with civil society organizations.

When it comes to long-term approaches, we cannot forget the environmental crisis of climate change in Afghanistan. Its cumulative effects are having a devastating impact on people's livelihoods, security and the economy in Afghanistan and the region. Food insecurity is exacerbated by rising temperatures, changes in precipitation and the increased frequency of extreme weather events. More people are forced to move within and outside the country, which is a potential source of tension. It is therefore important to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change now and to strengthen people's resilience and adaptive capacity, while adopting a gender-sensitive approach. In Switzerland's view, the Council should give further

consideration to that issue and support UNAMA's important efforts in that regard.

As the Secretary-General stated in his report, the Taliban will achieve economic self-reliance only if they succeed in establishing a relationship of trust with the international community. For Switzerland, that trust requires inclusive governance and, above all, respect for the human rights of the Afghan people in all their diversity.

We therefore will endeavour in the Council to ensure the implementation of the adopted resolutions and a more coherent and holistic strategy based on an evaluation that we look forward to. However, it is also important to be engaged on the ground and in the region to provide tangible support to the Afghan population.

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Special Representative Roza Otunbayeva, UN-Women Executive Director Ms. Bahous and Ms. Karima Bennouna for their statements.

The situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate. The Taliban continue their policy of systematic oppression of Afghan women, who continue to be deprived of their right to education, their freedom of movement and their right to engage in the activity of their choice. We will never accept that policy of segregation. France is and will remain in support of Afghan women and girls.

France is committed to ensuring that Afghan women make their voices heard. That is why, with several of its partners, France organized a ministerial meeting during the General Assembly's high-level week in order to denounce the policy of systematic discrimination imposed on Afghan women by the Taliban. We will ensure that this campaign continues.

The security situation also remains very worrisome. Terrorist groups such as Da'esh and Al-Qaida have found refuge in Afghanistan. We are also closely monitoring developments in drug cultivation and trafficking.

Those challenges cannot be considered in isolation. Respect for the rights of Afghan women, in particular their education and full participation in economic life, is a prerequisite for the country's economic development, which would serve as the best bulwark against the spread of radicalization and terrorism.

France remains committed to helping the Afghan people meet all their humanitarian needs. France continues to provide aid directly to the Afghan people, based on the principle of “for women, by women”. France has contributed more than €140 million since 2021 and will continue its humanitarian aid in the areas of health, education and food security. This year, France will make an additional contribution of €1.5 million to the World Food Programme to prevent the risk of famine for women and girls. I repeat that this aid must be channelled to all those who need it, in accordance with humanitarian principles and international law.

France remains committed to ensuring that the demands of the international community and the resolutions of the Council are respected. Resolution 2593 (2021) set five expectations in terms of the fight against terrorism, humanitarian aid and respect for human rights. The Taliban continue to trample on those expectations and to violate the resolutions of the Council, including resolution 2681 (2023), unanimously adopted less than six months ago.

France will also continue to support the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, who is doing a remarkable job. We also support the process of independent review of the situation in Afghanistan by the United Nations, led by Special Coordinator Feridun Sinirlioğlu.

Finally, we will continue to support the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and all the United Nations agencies and their partners working tirelessly on the ground for the benefit of the Afghan people. We thank them all.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to first thank Special Representative Otunbayeva and Executive Director Bahous for their briefings. I also listened carefully to the statement delivered by the civil society representative.

Afghanistan is at a critical phase of peaceful reconstruction. Over the past two years, its interim Government has actively implemented measures to stabilize the situation, developed the country’s economy and improved people’s livelihoods. As a result, the country’s security situation has been stable on the whole, with a significantly lower incidence of violence and a steady increase of tax revenues and imports

and exports. Those positive developments should be acknowledged and encouraged.

In the meantime, Afghanistan is still facing severe challenges in areas such as its humanitarian situation, terrorist threats, livelihoods and the protection of the rights and interests of women and children. We expect the country’s authorities to build political inclusivity and govern with moderation, develop good-neighbourly cooperation, protect the rights and interests of ethnic minorities and women and children and make positive efforts in the interests of its people.

At the same time, the international community should sustain its attention and support to Afghanistan, provide its people humanitarian assistance and help with its economic development.

In that context, four issues warrant close attention.

First, there has been a significant reduction in donor countries’ humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan. The United Nations Development Programme estimated that Afghanistan’s gross domestic product shrank by 3.6 per cent last year, largely due to a sharp drop in the humanitarian funding it received. According to the Secretary-General’s report (S/2023/678), as many as two thirds of its population will need humanitarian assistance next year, while the United Nations Afghanistan humanitarian response plan, as it stands now, is only 27 per cent funded. The latest data from the World Food Programme indicates that about 41 million Afghans are food insecure, with more and more women and children living in hunger. Those figures clearly demonstrate that cutting back — by a big margin — humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan for political or ideological reasons and linking humanitarian assistance with other issues will only stand in the way of Afghanistan’s stability and development. Winter is coming. We call on traditional developed country donors to prioritize the need for survival of the Afghans, refrain from instrumentalizing humanitarian assistance to exert pressure and not to let the Afghans fall victim to political considerations.

Secondly, I would like to touch upon Afghanistan’s frozen assets overseas. In August 2021, the United States illegally froze \$7 billion of the Afghan Central Bank’s assets. A year ago, the United States announced the transfer of \$3.5 billion out of the frozen assets to the so-called “Afghan Fund”, set up in a foreign bank, claiming that the Fund would be used to improve livelihoods and stabilize the economy. However, two

years have passed and not one penny of the Fund has been returned to the people of Afghanistan. According to the Secretary-General's latest report, the Fund has accrued \$128 million in interest. The Fund's board held three meetings to discuss — unbelievably — how to pay for the Fund's operations with the interest. This is a new form of plundering. It is absurd beyond words.

The money belongs to the people of Afghanistan. No matter what money laundering techniques are used, it will not become the lawful earnings of others. We once again urge the United States side to return the assets immediately, in full and unconditionally, and not to find more excuses to further delay the process.

Thirdly, I would like to speak about unilateral coercive measures. Compared with the freezing of assets, which is only the tip of the iceberg, unilateral coercive measures are the real, massive iceberg below the surface. Under the unilateral coercive measures, the banking system of Afghanistan has collapsed. Cash flow is nearly depleted, and the process of economic recovery is stalled. There is a serious shortage of medicine and medical devices, imported water-purification equipment, construction materials, machine parts, among other supplies. The day-to-day life of the Afghan people has been severely impacted. At the same time, the obstacles that unilateral coercive measures pose to humanitarian assistance are still prominent. Although resolution 2615 (2021), clearly states that the provision of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan does not constitute a violation of the Council's sanctions, many humanitarian institutions still feel constrained when delivering aid to Afghanistan out of fear of long-arm jurisdiction. We once again call on the relevant country to lift its unilateral sanctions against Afghanistan as soon as possible.

Fourthly, we must address engagement with the authority in Afghanistan. That the Afghan interim Government is in power is a *fait accompli*. The international community should adopt a long-term view and engage with it in a practical manner. In the past, in order to facilitate dialogue on peace and stability in the country, the Security Council decided to grant exemptions to the travel ban for some Taliban personnel, which has yielded positive results. However, some countries view dialogue and engagement with Afghanistan as a reward and insist on ending the exemption and using that as a tool to penalize the Afghan authorities and exert pressure on them, imposing restrictions on their dialogue and engagement

with the international community. Evidence shows that closing the door of dialogue will only exacerbate antagonism and division. The Security Council should resume the package of exemption arrangements as soon as possible and make it easier for Afghanistan to engage with the international community. At the same time, the sanctions mechanism established under resolution 1988 (2011) is no longer relevant in the light of the current developments and should therefore be adjusted or lifted expeditiously.

Since its establishment, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has carried out considerable work to maintain stability, promote economic and social development, facilitate the engagement of the Afghan authorities with the international community and improve the country's humanitarian situation. China commends those efforts.

Resolution 2626 (2022) granted a broad mandate to UNAMA and clearly defined its priorities. We hope that UNAMA will act in line with that resolution and prioritize the use of its resources to help alleviate the humanitarian situation, while promoting economic and social development, advocating a prompt unfreezing of the country's overseas assets and reporting to the Security Council in a timely manner. Meanwhile, UNAMA should continue to facilitate the international community's engagement and dialogue with the Afghan authorities and play a constructive role in the peaceful reconstruction of Afghanistan. With security in place, UNAMA staff should conduct more fieldwork. It should make timely adjustments concerning staff vacancies, use its resources more efficiently, improve its staffing structure and recruit more professional staff from countries in the region.

We are pleased to note that Afghanistan's neighbours and the countries of the region have been at the forefront of economic and trade cooperation and improving connectivity with Afghanistan; connectivity projects and economic and trade cooperation are moving ahead swiftly. We hope that the international community will support the efforts of countries in the region; continue to leverage platforms such as the coordination and cooperation mechanisms among Afghanistan's neighbours — the Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Afghanistan Contact Group — and help the country to unleash its development potential and maintain security and stability.

Since 2021, China has provided 4 trillion renminbi worth of food, medicine and vaccine supplies, among other emergency supplies, as well as 1 billion renminbi worth of humanitarian assistance. As a next step, China will further deliver on its pledges and support Afghanistan by providing humanitarian assistance and development aid. China will make more tangible contributions, within its capacity, in order to support the Afghan people in overcoming their difficulties and building a better future.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Albania.

Two years after the Taliban takeover, the overall situation remains dire in every aspect and respect, with the Taliban's draconian restrictions on freedom and liberties becoming worse, particularly for Afghan women and girls. Under such circumstances, the international community continues to struggle to find a balance between providing desperately needed aid to millions and engaging with the de facto authorities but not rewarding them and their hard-line, retrograde policies.

Despite the best efforts, as we heard, the humanitarian response in Afghanistan simply cannot keep pace with the country's worsening conditions. There is no better example to illustrate the destructive and abusive approach of the Taliban towards humanitarian assistance than the absurd restrictions they have imposed on United Nations Afghan female personnel, which constrains the work of the Organization. Unfortunately and regrettably, the Taliban have made a choice. Instead of engaging to find long-term sustainable solutions, increase humanitarian assistance, ensure and strengthen economic stability and resume development aid, they prefer to impose their medieval, retrograde, draconian rules, knowing what it means for the country, even if it means leaving people without food, plunging them into hunger and starvation.

We remain alarmed by reports of ongoing extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detention, and torture and ill-treatment of former Government officials and members of the former Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. Once again, the Taliban are showing that they are unwilling to honour and uphold the commitment made in their general amnesty and their obligations under international human rights law. Continuous accusations and detentions of journalists, writers and critics of Taliban rule have further reduced

the freedom of expression, shutting down those few courageous voices of truth and reason still left in the country. That is simply unacceptable.

The Taliban are trying to present themselves as promoters of economic health and guarantors of security. It would be wonderful were it not only a façade. To date, there is no indication that the general population is profiting from economic gains. We are still witnessing massive poverty, suffering and destitution, with close to two thirds of the population relying on life-saving aid to survive. The continued presence and activities of terrorist elements remain a serious concern. Once a haven for terrorists, Afghanistan is turning into fertile ground for radicalization, especially among the betrayed youth.

I will conclude with a core issue that everyone mentioned — the unacceptable situation of women and girls in Afghanistan. The de facto authorities in Afghanistan continue to violate every rule and principle that form the foundation of the international human rights system, as all our briefers and many colleagues highlighted. The Taliban continue to betray the Afghan people, who seek and deserve respect, dignity and justice. They continue to slide backwards, while the country and its people need the opposite. That is as regrettable as it is intolerable.

We must continue to speak out firmly and strongly, just as 11 members of the Council, signatories of the Statement of Shared Commitments for the principles of Women, Peace and Security, did in a joint statement issued before today's meeting. We cannot contemplate unparalleled, despicable and unacceptable gender discrimination policies. We need to call them by their name: yes, it is gender apartheid. The word is strong, but it is the right word. It reflects the horrible reality. And we concur with Ms. Bennoune — we cannot only repeat our statements and condemnation here and elsewhere; we must do more.

It is our collective responsibility to explore avenues for accountability and hold those responsible for gender persecution to account. We must not let those violations go unpunished. We must use all the tools at our disposal to ensure that the perpetrators of gender-based discrimination face the full weight of justice for violations of international conventions such as the Convention on the Political Rights of Women and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms

of Discrimination against Women — conventions to which Afghanistan is a party.

We must not look away just because it is difficult. And we must not be discouraged just because the Taliban remain deaf and defiant. The Taliban want recognition. They repeat it all the time. They must earn it by changing their policies. While we wait for the independent evaluation that is soon due, we will continue to stand with the Afghan people and their aspirations for equal rights and a future in prosperity.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Faiq (Afghanistan): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's important discussion on Afghanistan's dire situation, and I commend your leadership of the Security Council this month.

I am also thankful to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, the Executive Director of UN-Women, Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, and Ms. Karima Bennouna for their briefings. They underscored the grim, dire and deeply concerning situation in Afghanistan, which warrants urgent attention and action to overcome the current crisis.

We appreciate the remarks of Security Council members and the joint statement issued ahead of the meeting by members of the Council, reaffirming their commitments to continue supporting the fundamental human rights of the people of Afghanistan, particularly women and girls, as well as efforts to bring about real peace in a stable, secure and united Afghanistan. We also want to thank all Member States, donors, United Nations entities, non-governmental organizations and all other actors that provide vital humanitarian support in perhaps what is the most difficult period in the history of our nation.

Tragically, two years after the Taliban seized control, the situation in Afghanistan has not improved. It has only deteriorated across the humanitarian, human rights, social, security and political spheres. Economic and humanitarian crises have deepened, 97 per cent of the population are now living in poverty and two thirds of them are struggling for basic survival. Hunger has affected 15 million people, unemployment has increased and migration continues despite the grave risks. Under Taliban rule, social conditions in Afghanistan continue to regress significantly. The

rights and freedoms of women and marginalized communities have been severely curtailed. Women and girls face strict limitations on their mobility, access to education and participation in public life. Cultural and artistic expression are being suppressed, stifling Afghanistan's rich cultural heritage. The people live in constant fear of retribution for any perceived violations of the Taliban's strict interpretation of Islamic law.

Our hard-won rights and freedoms, particularly for women and girls, are gravely threatened, with reports of gender-based violence, forced marriages and sexual abuse, all perpetrated with impunity. Afghan women and girls are enduring gender apartheid and being stripped of their fundamental rights and economic opportunities, rendering them vulnerable. The closures of girls' schools and the restrictions on women's employment are not only obstacles to gender equality but pose a serious challenge to Afghanistan's development and the future of the nation.

Since the onset of the crisis, and increasingly over the past year, the people of Afghanistan have looked to the international community to form the consensus we need to help overcome the crisis in our country. The holding of the United Nations meeting in Doha in May, the appointment of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Afghanistan and the recent high-level meeting in support of women and girls last week during the general debate of the General Assembly are welcome developments that the people of Afghanistan recognize and value. That said, the focus and measures involved need to be sustained and strengthened as we advance in order to overcome the crisis in Afghanistan.

The people of Afghanistan welcome the statement endorsed by 13 Foreign Ministers that strongly condemned the Taliban's gender-based persecution and called for an immediate halt to human rights violations. It also emphasized the importance of an inclusive political process involving all Afghans, including women and ethnic and religious minorities. As we have stressed time and again, that issue remains vital to achieving a comprehensive settlement that leads to the legitimate and inclusive governance that can ensure national unity and political stability. And that should be a priority for the international community in its efforts concerning Afghanistan. We echo the call for convening a special session of the General Assembly to address gender apartheid in Afghanistan, which was reiterated by the Afghan women representatives during last week's discussions. We also applaud the

statements and commitments in support of the people of Afghanistan, including women and girls, and the calls on the Taliban to respect the fundamental human rights of the Afghan people and to espouse inclusivity made by several speakers during the general debate, statements that reflect a new degree of concern within the region and beyond about the current state of affairs.

We must remember that a nation's strength lies in empowering all its citizens, regardless of gender. However, the Taliban's rigid ideology refuses to embrace the benefits of modern science and technology. Its focus has been rather on intensifying the establishment of madrasas and religious schools, deliberately radicalizing young Afghans and compromising their future and that of our nation. Since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, 15,000 madrasas have been established and 100,000 madrasa teachers recruited just recently. It is our duty to liberate Afghanistan from the shackles of gender apartheid, radicalization and extremism to enable our women, girls and young people to contribute to our society's growth and prosperity.

The Taliban's grave human rights abuses, brutal punishment and suppression of the media and civil society have made crimes against humanity and violations of international law commonplace. The reports from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Amnesty International and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan paint a grim picture. The UNAMA report issued on 22 August documents more than 800 cases of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, detentions, torture and enforced disappearances involving individuals associated in one form or another with the former Afghan Government and its security forces. In a report released on 20 September, UNAMA records more than 1,600 incidents of human rights violations by the Taliban during arrests and detentions, including acts of torture and other inhumane treatment by the Taliban's Ministry of the Interior and General Directorate of Intelligence.

The ban on political parties has solidified the Taliban's autocratic power, extinguishing political diversity and inclusive decision-making. That isolation is fuelling turmoil and undermining the prospects for peace. Despite two years of global engagement, the Taliban have continued to obstinately reject demands, justifying their actions with distorted religious and cultural interpretations. Their exclusionary policies rejecting democracy, human rights and the rule of law

are exacerbating the crisis. Despite the claims that the return of former officials through the Commission for Return and Communication with Former Afghan Officers and Political Figures is being encouraged, credible reports suggest that members of the former security forces who trusted the call and returned from neighbouring countries have been killed. Even the former leaders who chose to stay are now subject to strict restrictions and house arrest.

The security situation in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan is deeply concerning. The Taliban's connections to terrorist groups and their sheltering of more than 20 such groups, including Al-Qaida and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, have transformed Afghanistan into a hub of terrorism, endangering Afghan lives. Their extremist ideology and history of violence have created a pervasive atmosphere of fear and insecurity, eroding trust in regional and international security efforts. Afghan civilians have endured the scourge of terrorism for too long. The Taliban, who have been the primary source of instability and insecurity in Afghanistan for the past two decades through their targeting of innocent civilians and destruction of public institutions and infrastructure, are now claiming credit for ensuring security and stability in the country. However, their promises of increased revenue collection have not resulted in tangible improvements for ordinary Afghans. Furthermore, transparency and accountability in the allocation of budgets are still lacking. Similarly, the Taliban's assertions of counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics efforts ring hollow, as their leaders are deeply involved in narcotics production and smuggling. While dissent within the Taliban focuses on the distribution of power and resources, the Afghan people continue to suffer under their despotic rule.

Despite those challenges, the people of Afghanistan remain resolute, with diverse groups working tirelessly to defend their rights and national values. Civil society, women, young people and political movements have mobilized to form a united national agenda. On 16 September, our Mission hosted a Zoom meeting with 85 representatives of the Afghan diaspora, independent Afghan political figures, human rights and women's rights activists and leaders of progressive and democratic parties and associations, both inside and outside Afghanistan. I would like to convey their essential messages and demands.

First, they urge international partners and the Council to maintain pressure on the Taliban, demanding

the reversal of anti-women policies, including education and work bans. They also call on the United Nations to recognize and classify the plight of Afghan women and girls as gender apartheid.

Second, they emphasize the importance of ongoing humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan, subject to the rigorous monitoring and supervision of aid delivery. That may involve strengthening targeted humanitarian aid and supporting small-scale projects aimed at saving livelihoods and developing entrepreneurship, particularly for women, which remain crucial. That includes serious consideration for merit-based inclusivity and diversity in the employment opportunities for locally hired staff of the United Nations and other international organizations.

Third, they have called for robust support to ensure the full, equal, and meaningful participation of Afghan women and girls in social, economic and political domains, including decision-making roles.

Fourth, they urgently seek the priority attention of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees with respect to the protection and resettlement of Afghan refugees who fled Taliban persecution to neighbouring regions, especially women and children facing detention and inhumane treatment. Those refugees, including women's rights defenders, former officials and security personnel, are in jeopardy, necessitating the swift provision of resettlement support.

Fifth, they support the imposition of sanctions on Taliban leaders for violating women's rights, and they oppose normalizing engagement with them until they respect the rights and will of the people of Afghanistan.

Sixth, dialogue with the Taliban alone has proven futile. The international community must play a more prominent role in helping Afghanistan achieve a legitimate Government based on the people's will.

Seventh and lastly, the need for a coherent and united international approach is essential. It requires inclusive dialogue and principled engagement, backed by the international community and facilitated by the United Nations, in order to establish a political road map towards an inclusive and representative governance system that is aligned with the will of the people of Afghanistan.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that the situation in Afghanistan calls for urgent and concerted efforts by the international community. By prioritizing security,

human rights, legitimate and democratic governance and regional cooperation, it is possible to forge a path towards a more stable, inclusive and prosperous Afghanistan. Through principled engagement and a legitimate political structure that is aligned with the people's aspirations, we can help shape a better future for the Afghan people and prevent the country from once again becoming a breeding ground for extremism and terrorism. It is crucial for the international community to act swiftly and decisively in order to prevent further suffering and to lay the foundations for real and sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank Albania for convening this meeting. I also thank Ms. Otunbayeva and Ms. Bahous for their briefings, and Ms. Bennoune for her viewpoints.

We also take note of the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2023/678), which highlights the ongoing and escalating humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan in 2023. It reveals that an alarming two thirds of the population, approximately 29.2 million people, require urgent assistance, marking a concerning increase from 28.3 million earlier in the year. Adding to the severity of the situation, inadequate humanitarian funding has exacerbated those unprecedented levels of need. The humanitarian response plan, requiring a total of \$3.23 billion, remains severely underfunded, with only 27 per cent of the necessary funds secured as of 12 September.

We firmly believe in the importance of impartial and unconditional humanitarian aid. It is also crucial to lift unilateral sanctions in order to support and facilitate Afghanistan's economic recovery. The international community has a moral obligation to fulfil its humanitarian commitments and pledges by demonstrating solidarity and compassion for the Afghan people. We emphasize the need for collective cooperation to assist Afghanistan in rebuilding its economy and creating conditions that are conducive to the well-being of its citizens, while also facilitating the safe return of Afghan refugees.

As a neighbouring country that is deeply impacted by the influx of millions of Afghan refugees, we are alarmed by the potential consequences of the current situation for regional security and stability. The

persistent presence of Da'esh and Al-Qaida affiliates, coupled with the scourge of drug trafficking, poses a substantial threat to Afghanistan, its neighbouring countries and the broader international community. Tragically, on 13 August we witnessed yet another devastating terrorist attack, targeting innocent civilians and pilgrims visiting the Shah-e-Cheragh shrine in Shiraz. That cowardly act resulted in the martyrdom of two innocent Iranians and the injury of several others. Da'esh claimed responsibility for the second such attack in 10 months.

While preliminary indications suggest a reduction in opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan following a de facto ban on narcotics cultivation imposed by the authorities in April 2022, our concerns with regard to drug trafficking persist.

Regrettably, there has been no progress by the de facto authorities in achieving genuine ethnic and political inclusion. Instead, they continue to impose increasingly stringent restrictions on Afghan women and girls, severely curtailing their access to education. We reiterate our call for the establishment of an inclusive Government, recognizing it as a crucial step towards the safety and dignified return of millions of Afghan refugees to their homeland.

We are also deeply concerned about the measures taken by the de facto authorities that seek to undermine the cultural, linguistic and historical ties of Afghans to the Farsi language. Those measures not only threaten Afghanistan's stability and security but also violate the basic human rights of all Afghan citizens. They should be promptly reversed to protect the rights of the Afghan people.

Iran remains steadfast in its commitment to close collaboration with neighbouring countries, relevant partners and the United Nations in order to promote enduring peace, security and stability in Afghanistan. Iran played a crucial role in the delivery of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan by establishing a novel distribution route that utilized the Chabahar port in Iran. For example, a substantial shipment of 10,000 metric tons of wheat successfully reached Herat on 4 July for further distribution to people in need across Afghanistan. Despite the Taliban's failure to meet their commitments, we must maintain our constructive engagement with the de facto authorities. That approach is instrumental in seeking the best possible outcomes for the people of Afghanistan and the broader international community.

Iran believes that collaboration among Afghanistan and the countries of the region will resolve the challenges the country faces. To that end, Iran actively supports regional initiatives aimed at fostering dialogue with Afghanistan, such as neighbouring ministerial meetings and the Moscow format, the next round of which is scheduled to be held in Kazan, Russia, on 29 September. We look forward to the outcome of that meeting, which will focus on the key subject of inclusive Government. We hope that the de facto authorities will fulfil their international obligations, particularly in upholding Afghanistan's commitments under its border treaties with its neighbours.

Finally, we reaffirm our support for ongoing United Nations efforts, particularly those of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, which play a pivotal role in the pursuit of peace and stability in Afghanistan and represent a matter of paramount importance given the current circumstances.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mrs. Kamboj (India): I express my gratitude for the convening of this meeting and extend my thanks to Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director of UN-Women, and the civil society briefer for their insightful remarks regarding the Afghanistan situation.

As Afghanistan's contiguous neighbour and a friend to its people, India has direct stakes in ensuring the return of peace and stability to the country. In the interests of using the time as efficiently as possible, I would like to highlight just three key observations regarding the situation in the country, drawing on our historical and civilizational connections with the Afghan people.

First, our collective approach has been articulated in resolution 2593 (2021). In that regard, our common and immediate priorities include providing humanitarian assistance for the Afghan people, ensuring the formation of an inclusive and representative Government structure, combating terrorism and drug trafficking and preserving the rights of women, children and minorities.

Secondly, given the distressing humanitarian situation in the country, we need to prioritize humanitarian assistance for the people. India has delivered assistance to Afghanistan in the form of food

grains, medicines, vaccines, disaster-relief aid, winter clothing and education materials. We have continued to award scholarships to Afghan students. India has also partnered with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in its humanitarian efforts, and our assistance will continue for the benefit of the people of Afghanistan.

Thirdly, we have collaborated with several United Nations agencies on the ground and will continue to do so for the people's welfare. Meanwhile, we note that as requested by resolution 2679 (2023), the Secretary-General will soon be providing his integrated and independent assessment and forward-looking recommendations to address the challenges facing Afghanistan. We look forward to that report.

I would like to conclude by stating that we reaffirm our unwavering commitment to keeping Afghanistan close to our hearts. Going forward, India will continue to raise its voice in support of the Afghan people. We believe that the pursuit of peace and stability in Afghanistan is an urgent and shared imperative that demands our collective dedication.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, and the Albanian delegation on your successful presidency of the Security Council this month, and I am grateful to you for convening this important debate on the situation in Afghanistan. I would like to thank Special Representative Otunbayeva for her valuable insights, Ms. Karima Bennouna for her briefing and the Secretary-General for his report (S/2023/678) apprising the Council of the latest developments in Afghanistan. We also listened to an Afghan citizen who represents no one but himself.

As the Prime Minister of Pakistan stated in his address to the General Assembly, peace in Afghanistan is a strategic imperative for Pakistan (see A/78/PV.10). Two years after the power transition in Kabul, Pakistan is encouraged by some positive developments in Afghanistan, while we remain concerned about some other issues. On the positive side, the interim Afghan Government has remained stable with no major internal threats to its authority. The law-and-order situation in Afghanistan has improved significantly. The interim Government has taken action against Da'esh. Corruption has declined drastically. The interim Government has also been able to organize and manage

the economy, particularly trade and revenue collection, despite external and internal constraints. Trade between Afghanistan and its neighbours has increased, as has transit trade through Afghanistan. However, serious problems remain.

First, the humanitarian situation remains dire, as the Secretary-General notes in his report. More than two thirds of Afghanistan's people are destitute and require immediate humanitarian assistance. We hope that the Secretary-General's humanitarian appeal for \$4.2 billion will be fully funded.

Secondly, the restrictions on women and girls remain in force, although some space has been created through pragmatic avenues. Pakistan will continue to make every effort to find a durable solution through consultations on that important issue.

Thirdly, the Afghan economy remains hobbled, largely because its banking system is not operational. The massive smuggling of dollars from Pakistan to Afghanistan has had a devastating impact on Pakistan's economy and currency. As a result of our recent crackdown on the illegal money smuggling, the Pakistani rupee has stabilized and strengthened in the market. The Afghan banking system must be revived. To that end, Afghanistan's national assets held abroad should be released and returned and financial support for development projects restored. We also look forward to the early implementation of the shovel-ready regional connectivity projects between Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia, as well as Pakistan, China and Afghanistan.

Fourthly, while opium cultivation has been reduced by 80 per cent, it will be essential to provide replacement crops and subsidies to sustain farmers' livelihoods. The growing prevalence of more profitable methamphetamine must also end.

The presence of terrorist groups remains the major security threat both within and from Afghanistan. There has been some success in the interim Government's fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Da'esh. Pakistan will continue to offer its support and cooperation to neutralize that terrorist group. The immediate and major threat to Pakistan is posed by the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which is responsible for a series of cross-border terrorist attacks on our military posts and on civilian targets within Pakistan. We have lost hundreds of our brave soldiers and civilians in those attacks over the past year alone. The

border attacks have become more lethal owing to the TTP terrorists' acquisition and use of advanced military equipment, apparently from the stocks left behind by foreign forces. And the majority of the suicide bombers in attacks claimed by the TTP within Pakistan have turned out to be Afghans.

Pakistan's Special Envoy has held further talks in Kabul following the recent attack in Chitral. We have been assured that action has been taken against the TTP elements involved and that further steps will be taken to prevent TTP terrorism against Pakistan. We will welcome those steps once they are credibly implemented. Until the TTP and other terrorist groups are contained and neutralized, they will continue to pose an ever-present threat to Afghanistan's neighbours and possibly the international community as well. If the TTP is not actively contained, it could emerge as an umbrella organization for the various terrorist groups and factions in Afghanistan once Da'esh is eliminated. That concern is heightened by the support and sponsorship the TTP has received from some well-known spoilers in our region.

There are more than 4 million Afghans in Pakistan. Nearly 1.4 million Afghan refugees are registered, while more than 2.2 million remain undocumented. Another 600,000 have made their way into Pakistan over the past two years. In the wake of the terrorist attacks, Pakistan has an obligation to ensure that none of the illegal Afghans belong to terrorist groups. The international community and the Afghan interim Government should cooperate with Pakistan in securing the repatriation of all illegal Afghans and, eventually, all Afghan refugees, to their homes in Afghanistan.

Despite the challenges, Pakistan continues to believe that engagement and cooperation constitute the only feasible path towards promoting a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan. We are glad that the Afghan interim Government is engaged with all of Afghanistan's neighbours and others with legitimate stakes in Afghanistan. Pakistan looks forward to the independent assessment on Afghanistan to be provided by Ambassador Sinirlioglu. We hope that the assessment will enable the Security Council and the international community to have a comprehensive, long-term and realistic perspective on the situation in Afghanistan. That would enable the Security Council to adopt a

specific road map for normalization within and with Afghanistan. It should respond to the concerns of the international community — namely, respect for human rights, particularly the rights of women and girls; inclusive governance; and an end to terrorism. At the same time, the international community should respond to the priorities of the Afghan interim Government and the priorities of the Afghan people. Those encompass adequate financial support, an end to travel restrictions, the termination of sanctions, political recognition and United Nations representation. Pakistan will work in all relevant formats to promote and implement such a pathway to peace and prosperity for Afghanistan and our entire region.

The President: The representative of Afghanistan has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I trust that it will be short and concise. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Faiq (Afghanistan): I just wanted to respond to the remarks made by the citizen and representative of Pakistan, that I am representing Afghanistan in the Council and voicing the anguish and the misery of the people of Afghanistan, who have suffered as a result of the interference of countries that today practice a double standard. On the one hand, they present themselves as victims of terrorism, and on the other hand, they lobby, normalize and support another terrorist group in Afghanistan.

The President: The representative of Pakistan has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I trust that, in this case as well, it will be short and concise. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): I do not wish to dignify the statement just made by this gentleman, who claims to represent Afghanistan. I think that his credentials are questionable — he has no Government, he has no representative, he has no credentials, and it is, I think, an anomaly that the Security Council is obliged to invite him to speak to the Council and to breed the kind of hatred and disinformation that he presents before the Council. As such, I believe that the General Assembly should take notice of this situation; it is a huge political anomaly that must be addressed.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.