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Seventy-ninth year

Provisional

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New York

<i>President:</i>	Ms. Fajon	(Slovenia)
<i>Members:</i>	Algeria	Mr. Koudri
	China	Mr. Fu Cong
	Ecuador	Mr. De La Gasca
	France	Mr. Dharmadhikari
	Guyana	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
	Japan	Mr. Yamazaki
	Malta	Mr. De Bono Sant Cassia
	Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Hwang
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sierra Leone	Mr. Sowa
	Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Ms. Jambert-Gray
	United States of America	Ms. Shea

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2024/664)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 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/2024/664)

The President: On behalf of the Council, I would like to inform participants that, with regard to rule 37 and rule 39 of the provisional rules of procedure, the Council's approach will be to consider only those participation requests that were submitted before the start of the meeting.

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, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director of UN-Women and Ms. Mina, civil society breifer.

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/2024/664, 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: I am grateful for your personal presence, Madam Foreign Minister Fajon, at today's important debate on the question of Afghanistan during an increasingly complicated context.

Three years after the Taliban's seizure of power, millions of people across Afghanistan have cause for mixed feelings. On the one hand, the end of armed conflict has delivered a period of stability not seen in decades. It has put an end to the worst abuses associated with decades of war and created an opportunity for a

positive peace. A number of positive steps have been taken in the fields of the economy, infrastructure and foreign relations to seize this opportunity and begin to address the many negative legacies of war.

I have growing concerns, however, that this opportunity is being missed. The Afghan population faces a serious humanitarian and development crisis as international funding drops. The de facto authorities are exacerbating this crisis by policies that focus insufficiently on the real needs of their people and undermine their economic potential. And the ongoing mismatch of expectations and distrust between the de facto authorities and important parts of international community is depriving the diplomatic engagement effort of the momentum it needs if we are to implement the recommendations of the independent assessment (see S/2023/856).

I am greatly concerned that the 2024 Afghanistan humanitarian response plan is only 30 per cent funded, with around \$900 million received of the \$3 billion dollars required. There are no indications that significant additional resources will be provided as we approach the final quarter of the year. Unlike last year, there is no pipeline of residual funding to draw on. Real support on the ground has noticeably decreased.

For example, 260 static and mobile health facilities providing primary health-care services have been discontinued, impacting 2.9 million people. An additional 171 health facilities are expected to be closed in the coming months. Nearly 900,000 children requiring severe wasting treatment will not be reached, leaving those children 12 times more likely to die than healthy children. Food rations had to be reduced from 75 to 50 per cent in communities already experiencing emergency levels of hunger. That especially impacts women and children, who make up 80 per cent of the beneficiaries of general food assistance.

Six mine clearance projects had to be reduced to two. Only two donors support humanitarian mine action programmes in Afghanistan, while 4 million people live within one kilometre of unexploded ordnance contamination. Children make up 86 per cent of the casualties from explosive ordnance.

Over 160,000 people affected by last year's multiple earthquakes in the western region are left living in precarious conditions. Women, children, people with disabilities and the elderly live in damaged homes that

are structurally unsafe, leaving them exposed to further natural disasters.

Up to 74 per cent of rural communities experienced drought in the past 12 months, including almost 5 million women and children who live in areas without access to safe water.

The approach of winter and the possible return of an additional hundreds of thousands of undocumented Afghans from neighbouring countries and elsewhere will compound those immediate problems.

The humanitarian crisis will soon become a development crisis, given Afghanistan's quickly growing youth population, an economy that is unable to absorb them and international donors that are reluctant to provide development aid, owing in large part to restrictions on the movement and activities of half the population.

The *de facto* authorities would not need so much international charity if they unlocked the resourcefulness of their entire population. I recently visited several provinces in the south of Afghanistan. A woman I met who had just learned to read from literacy courses told me that one of the greatest benefits was that she now knew that she had mistakenly been giving her children expired medication. At the same time, the most basic human needs are not being met. People lack water for crops, especially following the ban on opium cultivation. I have witnessed these miseries with my own eyes and spoken to people, including farmers, in various places. We will continue to strenuously advocate for the rights of all Afghans, but just as strenuously call for the assistance required to ensure mere existence.

We are, at the same time, trying to address the political legacy of Afghanistan's long conflict. In the current situation, Afghanistan is cut off from the international community. Individual Taliban officials, many of whom are *de facto* ministers, are under sanctions and cannot travel without permission from the Council. Afghanistan's Central Bank assets are frozen, limiting the development potential of the private sector, and the *de facto* authorities have no representation in multilateral institutions.

The United Nations invited representatives of the *de facto* authorities to the third Doha format meeting last July. That meeting provided an opportunity for Member States and international organizations to engage directly with the *de facto* authorities on a range

of concerns. During the meeting, all major issues, including human rights, were raised. The delegation from Kabul heard loud and clear the concerns of the international community and was given a chance to respond. Like many of the Special Envoys in Doha, I was encouraged by the constructive participation of all parties. The Doha format also provided an opportunity for Special Envoys to engage with members of civil society from Afghanistan, including women. We hoped that that would signal a good start to a new chapter in a more meaningful dialogue, in accordance with the recommendations of the independent assessment.

However, the adoption of the moral oversight law shortly after the Doha meeting has undermined that process, whether intentionally or not, by entrenching some of the most onerous restrictions on the Afghan population that the international community has previously condemned. That law sends a negative political signal regarding genuine engagement — a signal that we cannot ignore. I have conveyed that clearly to my interlocutors in Afghanistan. That law was drafted by a small group of religious scholars and with no consultation with the population that the law regulates. Its provisions codify existing restrictions on women and add new ones on women and other segments of the population. It gives extensive and discretionary powers of enforcement to the *de facto* Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. With its implementation, the law has already begun to generate significant anxiety among the Afghan population.

My colleague Ms. Sima Bahous, Executive Director of UN-Women, will provide more details on the effects of that law. Let me just say that it is likely to have a disproportionate impact on women. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has already received reports of women being prevented from going to work at radio stations, of drivers refusing to provide transport to women not accompanied by a male family member and of stricter enforcement of segregation and dress codes in the workplace. UNAMA will continue to follow closely its implementation and enforcement.

The fact that those provisions have been placed outside the scope of discussion is particularly problematic. It means that one of the major obstacles to Afghanistan's full reintegration into the international community cannot be part of the necessary dialogue. I am grateful to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for its ongoing engagement with the

de facto authorities. I note the declaration from its recent Summit of Foreign Ministers in Yaounde. The declaration underlines the need to ensure full respect for the human rights of all Afghans, including women, children and people belonging to ethnic, religious and other cultural minorities.

I am often criticized in my discussions with the de facto authorities for providing what are said to be misleading and negative reports on the situation in Afghanistan. Every country has problems, and no Government solves them by ignoring them. I have urged the de facto authorities to receive our observations in the good faith in which they are offered, and for the sake of the Afghan people and their concerns about their future.

Similarly, the international community has valid concerns about terrorism emanating from Afghanistan, despite denials by the de facto authorities. The most recent report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team (see S/2024/556) underscores concerns about the presence of terrorist groups on Afghan soil, including those that pose a direct threat to Afghanistan's neighbours. The recent attack outside the de facto Directorate for the Implementation of Decrees, killing at least seven individuals and wounding more than 20 others, is a reminder that the terrorist threat inside Afghanistan has not been removed. Last Thursday in central Afghanistan, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant–Khorasan Province carried out an attack that killed at least 14 members of the Hazara Shia community. We must find an appropriate mechanism to address those common concerns.

In many ways, the de facto authorities are correct that their achievements have been underappreciated and that ongoing international restrictions on Afghanistan have made governance more difficult. But unnecessarily harsh policies and an allocation of resources that appears heavily skewed towards security concerns, rather than the needs of the people, undermine those achievements and the well-being of the Afghan people. We are no less committed to moving forward on the agenda agreed upon at the third Doha meeting and to implementing UNAMA's mandate, which includes deepening the international consensus on Afghanistan, establishing agreed-upon working groups, maintaining all channels of engagement, advocating that Afghanistan fulfil its international obligations and providing all possible support to the Afghan people.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Bahous.

Ms. Bahous: I am grateful for the opportunity to brief the Council today. My thanks also go to Slovenia for focusing this debate on women and girls.

We have heard, and will continue to hear today, about the Taliban's new morality law, which was made public on 21 August by the de facto Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. While much of that law was already in place in prior decrees or edicts by the de facto authorities, the law marks a new low, when we thought there was nowhere lower to go. It requires women and girls to cover their entire bodies and faces everywhere outside their homes. It forbids them from speaking in public, using public transportation alone and even looking at men to whom they are not related by blood or marriage. As the Council knows, that comes on top of edicts issued over the past three years segregating women and men in daily life, prohibiting women from using gyms, parks or public baths and more. What makes that even worse is that, because many of the provisions are ambiguously worded, we already see that they are, in practice, subject to arbitrary interpretation, thereby granting extensive powers of enforcement to the morality police. Thus, Afghanistan's women do not only fear those oppressive laws; they also fear the capricious application thereof. A life lived in such circumstances is truly incomprehensible.

The new morality law does not only segregate women from men; it isolates them from other women too. In our surveys, only 22 per cent of Afghan women report meeting with women outside their immediate family on a daily or weekly basis, while 18 per cent never do so. Not surprisingly, 90 per cent of Afghan women and girls report that their mental health is bad or very bad, with the majority of women reporting that their mental health is getting worse every quarter and 8 per cent knowing at least one woman or girl who has attempted suicide. In our surveys, 64 per cent of women felt completely unsafe leaving their house by themselves — a percentage that has increased in recent months and will likely increase with the new law. When asked why they felt unsafe, 70 per cent attributed it to harassment by the de facto authorities. All of this is to be placed in a context of honour killings,

corporal punishment, domestic violence and rising maternal mortality.

We cannot forget that it is not only women who are suffering in that environment. Our data shows that men feel less safe when they have to accompany women. Many men are also becoming *de facto* enforcers, which is souring relationships with their neighbours and destroying social trust and cohesion. And while millions of Afghan women and girls are prevented from attending school, millions of Afghan boys are in school, receiving only the education that is sanctioned by the *de facto* authorities; we do not know what the curriculum entails.

Before the promulgation of the new morality law and in spite of enormous risks, at least women continued to run businesses, work in organizations for the improvement of their communities or protest against injustice. In 2021, 88 per cent of those protests were held outdoors and by 2022, fewer than half were. Currently, 94 per cent of protests are held online, with locations and identities hidden. And the new morality law has also triggered a new wave of protests online in which Afghan women are seen singing with their faces uncovered and their hair loose, in a show of defiance against the law.

Those bans continue to destroy Afghanistan's overall economic prospects too. It is projected that the Afghan economy will lose 5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) annually by excluding women from the workforce and the equivalent of two thirds of today's GDP by 2066 if the suspension of women's access to higher education remains in place. Our projections estimate that maternal mortality may increase by 50 per cent by 2026 because of the ban, translating into thousands of additional deaths of Afghan women during childbirth every year from preventable causes and policy choices.

I do not need to point out to the Council the potential implications beyond Afghanistan's borders. We are seeing developments in Afghanistan inspiring other oppressive actors elsewhere. We are in the midst of a global backlash against gender equality gains and witnessing the weaponization of misogyny. How the international community rises to the unacceptable extremes of Afghanistan is not just a test of who we are; it is being watched carefully by political actors and armed groups in other countries and regions.

I assure Council members that, if we give up on Afghan women, succumb to fatalism, let go of our principles, look away and remove our resources, the impact on our broader struggle for gender equality may be felt for decades. Women's absence from key decisions, discussions and agreements — be it in Bonn, Doha, Sochi and other forums — contributes to the ongoing cycle of exclusion. As UN-Women, we implore the Security Council and key international actors to learn from past experience and the failures that excluding women brings. We must not trade away women's rights or women's representation in the pursuit of some possible, incremental progress, whether on counter-narcotics or terrorism prevention. That approach failed us in the 1990s; it will fail us again this time. So instead of turning away, we all must step forward in three ways.

First, we must invest in and strengthen women-led civil society organizations, including through long-term, flexible funding. In Afghanistan, that requires changes to the usual mechanisms and to risk management. But as realities and needs change, so must our ability to support.

Secondly, we must commit at least 30 per cent of all funding for Afghanistan to initiatives that directly target gender equality and women's rights — no more gender-blind interventions, no more weak or superficial mainstreaming of gender into other initiatives. That does not work in Afghanistan. Afghan women continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience and leadership by establishing new civil society organizations to serve their needs and the needs of others. They are also creating and running businesses that not only provide for their families but also serve, and sometimes uplift, their communities. We must support those efforts.

Thirdly, we must stop normalizing discriminatory practices. We must stop sending all-male delegations to meet with the Taliban or having women present only in administrative functions. We must commit to gender parity in international interactions with the *de facto* authorities. We must ensure that all decision-making forums concerning the future of Afghanistan address women's rights as part of their agendas and include the meaningful participation of women, whether through quotas for each delegation or through women's delegations.

Afghan women have consistently told us that they want the international community to facilitate direct

talks between them and the de facto authorities. They are telling us that we are failing them, and that must change. We do not claim that those and other actions will change Afghanistan overnight. And neither will they bring girls back to school right away. But they are achievable, and they will plant the seeds of change in the future. That is what we can do now, today, and our action or inaction in those extremely feasible and practical ways are what we will be judged by, not only by the women and girls of Afghanistan, but also by the world.

It is eminently understandable that, to many, the situation of Afghanistan's women and girls may appear intractable and hopeless. I tell the Council that it is not. It is not hopeless, and we are not helpless. We can decide now to put our political will and resources behind our solidarity with Afghan women. We can decide now to fund women's organizations, women's businesses, women's leadership and services for women. We can decide now to create spaces in every possible policy forum available to Afghan women so that they can be heard from directly.

In conclusion, we can act. We can redouble our efforts. We can maintain our relentless progress down a path that is hard and long but is there. I again implore the Council not only to stay this course, but also to commit to it with renewed determination. We stand alongside Council members and all partners as we do this together.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Mina.

Ms. Mina: Hello. My name is Mina, and I am from Afghanistan. Three years ago on this very date, 18 September 2021, I was in Afghanistan. I would like to read out a page of my diary from that period of my life, which was not long ago.

“September, Qala-i Mahtab Qalam,
Dasht-e-Barchi, Kabul, Afghanistan.

“Things are tough these days. I spent more than two weeks crying, weeping and mourning. I am sleeping all day and night because I do not want to wake up to the life that has turned into my nightmare. I am thinking of all of my dreams and goals that are impossible now, unless I find a shelter and go where I am safe and supported on my way to success. But can I ever survive?

“I am something between hopeful and hopeless. If you look at things logically, there is no way for me to get out of the country. But I believe there is a god who is watching me, who can make the impossible possible. I am totally broken. My freedom has been taken away from me. They choose what I want to wear, how I should behave, where I should go, whom I should go with and what I should do, and they decide whether I live or die. Why do I have to live then, if I am just like a robot controlled by others?”

I left Afghanistan a couple of months after the Taliban seized control. I survived that life, that chaos, that misery, but the chaos that I escaped continues to affect millions of girls in Afghanistan still.

On 18 September 2021, I was desperately searching for a way to escape the country in order to survive. For me, survival did not mean only that I could continue living. Survival meant also that I could live like any other human being on this Earth, that I could go to school and go to work and that I could choose who I wanted to become in the future, rather than that being decided for me. Survival meant that I would be seen as a human being and not an object. In Afghanistan, that was no longer possible for me.

I cannot fully express how difficult the journey has been for me — packing my entire life into a backpack and leaving behind everything I knew about life — my family, friends, home and memories. But if Council members were to ask me what would do if I could go back to that moment, I would still make the same choice, because, for me, the alternative was to stay, and to stay meant I could not go to school or go to work or live with any sense of freedom or dignity. How was I supposed to live like that? How is anyone supposed to live under such circumstances?

The time since the Taliban seized control in Afghanistan has been marked by upheaval and regression, especially concerning the right to education for Afghan girls. I go to college here, while my peers in Afghanistan are confined to their homes, unable to go to school. Education is banned if one is born as a girl in Afghanistan.

I graduated from school in Afghanistan, and I feared going to school every single day. But I feared not going to school even more. I believe that no young person should have to choose between those two fears.

In Afghanistan, where schools were frequent targets of violence and terror, and every day brought with it the harrowing possibility of tragedy. The mere act of attending school became an act of courage, as students braved the dangers lurking outside their classroom doors. The relentless onslaught of attacks left a trail of devastation, claiming the lives of innocent students and teachers and shattering the hopes and dreams of countless families.

One day, as I was sitting in my math classroom along with my classmates, excited for the next chapter, I was shaken from my studies by an ear-splitting sound. The chaos was indescribable. In another moment, I found myself in the alley looking at the terrified faces of people running and rushing to look for their dearest ones among bodies ripped into pieces. I looked at the truck loading the dead bodies of students whose hearts had been beating just a moment earlier. They no longer existed. There were 25 deaths and 57 injuries. I sat in a corner numb with what I had witnessed. I was exhausted. I wanted to scream as loud as I could: “Let me breathe, let me live, let me learn.” Every time I breathed, I felt lucky to be able to breathe again. I felt lucky to be able to go to school again and learn.

I was in my class along with my classmates the next day. That is how we fought for education, every single day. Despite those challenges, the thirst for knowledge and the hope for better future drove us forward. We clung to our education with unwavering determination, knowing that it was our only means of breaking the chains of oppression and poverty.

Despite the unfortunate circumstances, I still have hope for Afghanistan. I have hope because of the girls who are imprisoned in their homes, yet still hold onto their books, striving to educate themselves and learn. I have hope because of the girls who are brave enough to ask for their equal rights. Those girls are waiting for us to help them escape that nightmare.

However, I have to admit that I am also afraid. I am afraid that if we do not take action now, it will be too late. The next generation of Afghan girls will grow up believing and learning that they are inferior and do not deserve education. They will lack any concept of what it means to go to school, to have rights and to live in freedom.

The last sentence that I heard from my mother before I left the country was, “I am happy your future will be different from mine.” In her voice, I heard

the echo of a lost generation — a generation of girls and women who could only dream about going to school and getting an education. Their dreams never came true, but they made it happen for me, for their daughters. I do not want my generation to repeat that same sentence to their daughters. We must listen to the girls in Afghanistan and do anything we can to stop that oppression.

The reality of the situation and the gender apartheid in Afghanistan weighs heavily on my heart. Afghan girls live under restrictive conditions in which opportunities for education, work and growth are banned for them. Their lives are confined by political and social constraints that stifle their potential and suppress their dreams. What can they really do in such an environment? It would be better to ask, what are they allowed to do when their freedoms are curtailed and their aspirations are deemed unimportant?

Growing up in the male-dominated society of Afghanistan in which girls were often marginalized and isolated, I found my refuge in school. It was my shelter, my safe zone. I escaped the tragedies of life to go to school and dream of a better future. School was where I felt seen and heard as a person, as a girl. Girls are now more vulnerable than ever because they have no place to take refuge. The future looks dark and uncertain for Afghan girls. I implore Council members to bear witness to their suffering, raise awareness about their situation and advocate for their basic human rights in the face of adversity.

I want to call on States, the United Nations, United Nations agencies, human rights organizations and other stakeholders to advocate and negotiate to enable girls and women in Afghanistan and around the world to realize their basic right to education. I ask them to prioritize girls’ and women’s education and freedom in their negotiations and debates on the humanitarian crisis happening in Afghanistan. I believe international organizations can provide valuable support and resources to empower Afghan women and advance their rights and well-being. Thus, I urge Council members to recognize and stop gender segregation in Afghanistan for women, life, freedom.

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

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

Mr. Yamazaki (Japan): First of all, I warmly welcome to you, Madam President, to the Security Council. I appreciate you presiding over this important meeting.

I would like to thank Special Representative Otunbayeva and Executive Director of UN-Women Bahous for their updates. I also thank Ms. Mina for courageously sharing her heartbreaking experiences with us, despite the difficult situation. I take her message as a serious plea on behalf of Afghan women and girls.

Three years have passed since the Taliban's return to power. I must say, regrettably, that the social, economic and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan remains bleak. Extreme poverty and the significant deprivation of rights and freedoms persist. While the overall security situation has improved, the threat of terrorism continues. The country's challenges are compounded by natural disasters and climate change. This is not sustainable and cannot be addressed by Afghanistan or its neighbours alone.

Japan welcomes the result of the recent Special Envoys meeting in Doha, where the Taliban participated in a United Nations-sponsored conference for the first time. The Taliban expressed their views to the participating countries and heard directly the concerns of the international community, especially regarding the issue of women's and girls' rights. In subsequent follow-up discussions on the way forward, Japan has supported the Organization's step-by-step approach, and we are ready to make constructive contributions in any area that could improve the situation.

Despite the positive momentum on the international front, the Taliban announced the so-called "vice and virtue law". Japan is deeply concerned about this new law because it further restricts the rights of people, especially women and girls, and grants inspectors broad powers of enforcement. That has undoubtedly stirred anxiety among the Afghan people and would lead the human rights situation in an undesirable direction. Japan once again urges the Taliban to swiftly reverse its discriminatory and repressive policies. This is not only about human rights. It also undermines international engagement and confidence-building efforts, including the Doha process.

The Taliban must listen broadly to the voices of the Afghan people. To send a clear message to that end, two weeks ago Japan held a joint stakeout on behalf of

12 Council members. I thank the countries who joined that initiative. This message was recently enhanced by a stakeout led by you, Madam President. It is our strong hope that the Taliban will take it seriously. Through our Embassy in Kabul, we continue to monitor the situation surrounding this new law and to communicate with Taliban officials.

Despite the difficult situation, Japan will not stop its engagement with Afghanistan and its support for the people on the ground. In July, Japan announced new assistance worth \$10 million to improve the health and well-being of the Afghan people, while supporting the reduction of drug demand and supply in Afghanistan through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The intent is to build on the significant reduction of poppy production achieved by the Taliban and, hopefully, improve the environment for women as an important element of empowering local communities. Japan is sincere in its desire to help ease the suffering of the Afghan people, and we continue to do what we can.

Lastly, we take this opportunity to reiterate Japan's support for the role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and Special Representative Otunbayeva. We strongly believe that the Mission needs to be strengthened, and a United Nations focal point should be nominated to facilitate that process. In that regard, we welcome the recent appointment of the new Deputy Special Representative Gagnon and look forward to working with her. As a penholder, we will continue to be actively involved in the situation in Afghanistan.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett (Guyana): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council, namely, Algeria, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, as well as my own country, Guyana (A3+).

The A3+ thanks Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Ms. Sima Bahous, Executive Director of UN-Women, for their briefings. We also listened carefully to the statement delivered by Ms. Mina.

In his report (S/2024/664), the Secretary-General lists myriad challenges faced by the Afghan people — including a weak economy, persistent poverty, food insecurity, climate change and natural disasters, a dire humanitarian situation and significant

deprivation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, particularly for women and girls.

The A3+ reiterates our firm commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan and reaffirms our unwavering solidarity with the Afghan people.

The people of Afghanistan need significant international assistance in these difficult times. The third Doha meeting, held from 30 June to 2 July 2024, was a crucial and potentially transformative first-time opportunity for the Taliban to engage directly with the international community and key stakeholders. To build on that, we call on the Taliban to comply with Afghanistan's international obligations for the well-being of the Afghan people.

The A3+ believes that it is important that the international community continue engagement with Afghanistan and reiterates that in order to achieve sustainable development, stability and durable peace in Afghanistan, there must be an inclusive approach underpinned by respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights for all. The economic and social development of Afghanistan will be achieved only through the participation of all its people.

The Afghanistan Gender Country Profile 2024, released by UN-Women in June 2024, indicates that since their takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, the Taliban has systematically targeted the fundamental rights and freedoms of women and girls through more than 70 decrees, policies and practices that

“dictate attire, curtail freedom of mobility and restrict access to education and professional opportunities — effectively erasing the voices and perspectives of women and girls from public spaces and impeding realization of their inherent human rights”.

The A3+ is deeply concerned about the further oppression of Afghan women by the new morality law, on the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice.

The recent round of quarterly consultations undertaken by UN-Women, UNAMA and the International Organization for Migration in January and February 2024, show that only 1 per cent of women surveyed feel that they have influence over decision-making in their communities and 64 per cent do not feel safe leaving their homes by themselves, a stark contrast to 2 per cent of men. That disparity is a

clear indication of the negative environment in which women and girls live in Afghanistan.

We have also noted the reduction of salaries of women civil servants applied to “women who do not attend work daily or do not perform their duties according to their job description”, which, according to UNAMA, affects 5,000 women civil servants who were ordered by the Taliban to stay at home.

The A3+ reiterates its urgent call for the Taliban to reopen all schools and universities in order to ensure that women and girls have access to all levels of education, and to swiftly reverse all laws, policies and practices that discriminate against women and girls, infringe their human rights and fundamental freedoms and limit their full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in all spheres of life.

We deplore the implementation of judicial corporal punishment, which is in violation of Afghanistan's international human rights obligations.

The A3+ views the continued regional engagement with Afghanistan on economy, trade and transit as positive for Afghanistan's development and economic growth. We welcome the efforts to eradicate opium poppy cultivation and call for the continued support of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and partners for alternative sources of income for farming households.

The security situation in Afghanistan remains worrisome, with attacks perpetrated and claimed by the terrorist group Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan victimizing Afghan and foreign citizens. We condemn all acts of violence and encourage the Taliban to sustain efforts to combat terrorism and ensure the safety of Afghan citizens. We also encourage countries in the region to intensify joint efforts to stabilize the security situation in Afghanistan to ensure peace dividends for the entire region.

The A3+ is concerned that children continue to be killed and maimed by unexploded ordnance. We reiterate our call for all parties to take measures to ensure explosive ordnance clearance and explosive ordnance risk education, as recommended in the conclusions on Afghanistan adopted by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan remains of grave concern, with more than half of the population in need of humanitarian assistance. We note that, despite

some improvements, attributed to humanitarian food and emergency agricultural assistance, an estimated 12.4 million people are acutely food insecure. The A3+ commends the contributions of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Health Organization in providing critical support to those affected and encourage international donors to scale up their support. We call on the Taliban to lift the restrictions on Afghan women humanitarian workers, recognizing that those restrictions are negatively impacting the delivery of humanitarian aid, particularly to women and girls.

In conclusion, we express our sincere appreciation to UNAMA and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva for their dedicated work and tireless engagement with the Taliban and all relevant actors to improve the overall situation in the country.

Mr. Fu Cong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank you, Your Excellency Ms. Fajon, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Slovenia, for presiding over this meeting. I also thank Special Representative Otunbayeva and Executive Director Bahous for their briefings.

Last month marked the third anniversary of the Afghan interim Government. In the face of the confusion left behind by the hasty withdrawal of foreign troops, the Afghan authorities have worked hard to stabilize the security situation, to improve the economy and people's livelihoods and to strengthen regional and international dialogue and cooperation. That momentum was not easily achieved.

Afghanistan continues to face multiple challenges. The recent vice and virtue law has raised international concerns, and we note that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is continuously tracking and studying its practical implications. We call on the Afghan interim Government to pay attention to the legitimate concerns of the international community and to take measures to effectively protect the basic rights of women and girls.

However, we must be aware that women's rights and interests cannot be realized in a vacuum and that megaphone diplomacy will not help to solve the problem. We hope the international community will take a comprehensive and objective view of the situation in Afghanistan, support its peaceful reconstruction and economic recovery, help it to eliminate the root causes of instability and underdevelopment and create

conditions conducive to safeguarding the rights and interests of all its people, including women.

I would like to highlight the following points.

First, the momentum of interaction with the Afghan authorities must be maintained. China appreciates the fact that the United Nations made it possible for the Afghan authorities to send representatives to attend, for the first time, the third Doha meeting and interact effectively with all parties. We hope that the implementation of the outcome of the meeting will serve as an opportunity to encourage the international community to strengthen its engagement and cooperation with the Afghan authorities, on the basis of the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned principle, so as to gradually enhance mutual understanding and trust and to find pragmatic ways to resolve contradictions and differences. In order to respond to the trend of engagement and dialogue between the international community and Afghan authorities, the Council should promptly reactivate the package of exemptions to travel bans on members of the interim Government of Afghanistan and adjust the 1988 sanctions regime in a timely manner.

Secondly, we must scale up our efforts to help Afghanistan to overcome its difficulties. Nearly 24 million people in Afghanistan are in need of humanitarian assistance, and 12.4 million people are facing serious food insecurity, while less than one third of the necessary humanitarian funds are available. With winter approaching, many people in Afghanistan are facing the harsh test of survival. Traditional donors need to invest more, and more effectively, in relief efforts and not use humanitarian aid as a means of political pressure. The overseas assets of Afghanistan represent life-saving money for the Afghan people. The United States should unconditionally unfreeze and return them in full to the Afghan authorities. Development is the most important path towards the improvement of the livelihoods of the Afghan people. We look forward to rapid and real impacts of the efforts of the two working groups, on private-sector development and counter-narcotics, established at the third meeting of Special Envoys, so as to help Afghanistan to address those urgent needs. The Secretary-General's report (S/2024/664) repeatedly highlights that the rebuilding of the financial system is key to unlocking Afghanistan's economic potential. However, illegal unilateral sanctions are a heavy burden on the Afghan banking sector. We urge the countries concerned to

immediately end illegal unilateral sanctions and to respect Afghanistan's legitimate right to development.

Thirdly, the Afghan interim Government must be supported in its resolute fight against terrorism. Terrorist forces such as Da'esh, Al-Qaida and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement are still active in Afghanistan, posing a threat to the country and to international and regional security. We call on the interim Government of Afghanistan to take vigorous action to resolutely combat the various terrorist forces on its territory and to prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming an enclave for terrorist organizations. Terrorism is often interlinked with drug-related crimes. The international community should support Afghanistan in launching alternative crop production and drug rehabilitation programmes and in combating narcotics smuggling networks so as to continuously consolidate achievements in the fight against narcotics.

China appreciates the efforts made by Special Representative Otunbayeva and UNAMA to help Afghanistan address humanitarian and development challenges and to reintegrate into the international community.

Neighbouring countries and others in the region are also playing an active role in improving the situation in the country. This July, the Astana summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization unanimously supported the peaceful development of Afghanistan. The fifth meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan's neighbours will be held in Turkmenistan this year. As a friendly neighbour of Afghanistan, China is ready to work with the countries of the region and the international community to continue to provide assistance to the Afghan people, to the best of its ability, and to promote lasting peace and security, development and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Let me begin, Madam President, by welcoming you, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Slovenia. We are grateful for the proposed focus of this meeting on women and peace and security. I would also like to thank the Special Representative, Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, for her briefing and her commitment, and express our deep appreciation also to Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director of UN-Women, for her clear briefing that, while highlighting a dramatic situation, offers the hope that it can change. Finally, I

would also like to thank Ms. Mina for her poignant and touching testimony.

In 2020, four women peace negotiators participated in the intra-Afghan peace talks in Doha. The film entitled *The Sharp Edge of Peace* documents their unwavering commitment. We hear them say "My hope is that we will have an honourable peace, peace we will not regret". Switzerland remains determined to continue actively supporting Afghanistan, alongside the other members of the Security Council, while placing the interests, concerns and aspirations of the Afghan people at the heart of its action in order to work in favour of that "peace that we will not regret".

I would like to highlight two points.

First, as underscored by the recommendations of the independent assessment of the Special Coordinator (see S/2023/856) and resolution 2721 (2023), Afghanistan's reintegration into the international community requires tangible progress in meeting its international obligations. Switzerland remains committed to the path towards an Afghanistan at peace with itself and its neighbours. We insist on the fact that those efforts must include the immediate lifting of all restrictions contrary to international obligations affecting the rights of women and girls and their fundamental freedoms, including compliance with, or the repeal of, the new so-called morality laws. Accountability for human rights violations remains imperative.

The country's major challenges, notably the convergence of economic, climate and security crises, can be met only with the active participation of women and the protection of, and respect for, their rights. By denying girls access to education, the Taliban are denying an entire generation the opportunity to prepare for the future challenges facing their country, at a time when women's participation as workers, leaders and entrepreneurs is essential to reviving economic activity. Their active participation in resource management is crucial to mitigating the environmental impacts exacerbated by climate change and to strengthening community resilience. Their inclusion in all preventive measures and peace initiatives is essential if we are to succeed in the long-term fight against armed violence and terrorism in Afghanistan.

Together with Indonesia, Ireland and Qatar, my country is organizing an event next Monday on the theme "Including women in Afghanistan's future".

On that occasion, we will hear from the women who took part in the 2020 talks and those who are currently working on the ground in Afghanistan. We must support women and amplify their voices, and we call on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan to continue its strong commitment to them.

Secondly, Switzerland is committed to continuing its support for Afghanistan, in particular by strengthening the resilience of vulnerable populations. It is a matter of deep concern that more than half of the Afghan population continues to depend on humanitarian assistance for their survival. In order to ensure the effectiveness of that assistance, it is essential to ensure full, safe and unhindered access to populations in need. In that regard, and as the Secretary-General clearly emphasizes in his report (S/2024/664), the Taliban must lift restrictions on female aid workers and refrain from interfering with humanitarian operations. Violence against humanitarian personnel, their premises and their property in Afghanistan has created a hostile environment for those working to protect the population. We underscore that humanitarian personnel must be protected and respected at all times.

It is that hope of an honourable peace, in a country where the human rights and fundamental freedoms of every individual are respected, that must continue to guide our joint commitment. Switzerland will remain a reliable partner in that endeavour.

Mr. Hwang (Republic of Korea): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva and Executive Director Bahous for their sombre briefings and highly appreciate their tireless work under difficult circumstances. My appreciation also goes to Ms. Mina for sharing her perspective, which we greatly value.

Since the previous United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) briefing in June (see S/PV.9663), the international community has been on a roller coaster. The ride started with hopes and expectations coming out of the third Doha meeting of Special Envoys, which have now been overshadowed by disappointment and deep concerns regarding the so-called morality law.

Against that backdrop, I would like to make the following points.

First, the Taliban should understand that their extreme and aggressive measures are not in anyone's

interests, including their own. The unique United Nations-led engagement process regarding Afghanistan was embarked upon because the people of Afghanistan deserve good governance and the normalization of their lives. But that United Nations process should not be taken for granted. Many actors, including the Security Council, the Secretariat and countries in the region, chose to support the process despite doubts about whether engagement with the Taliban would actually benefit the Afghan population. Those patient endeavours emerged from the belief that the international community cannot remain hopeless or helpless. Afghan women and civil society have also showcased a great amount of patience in that course. However, the Taliban's recent disconcerting decisions are seriously jeopardizing the plausibility of engagement and may discourage many who have joined those efforts to date.

For the Republic of Korea, the news of the so-called morality law came at the moment when we were considering possible ways to contribute to the establishment of working groups on counter-narcotics and the private sector as a follow-up to the third Doha meeting. While we still sympathize with the need to proceed with the road map suggested in the independent assessment report (see S/2023/856), the Taliban would have no one to blame but themselves if that momentum were stalled.

Secondly, we reiterate that the inclusion and well-being of the Afghan population, in particular of women and girls and minorities, are prerequisites to the country's peace, stability and long-term development. In response to the Taliban's claims that "evaluating Afghanistan through a Western lens is inappropriate", we would like to share our own Korean perspective.

In the 1940s, when we gained independence and inaugurated a new Republic of Korea, the country was in abject poverty, and the literacy rate among Korean women was well below 20 per cent, much lower than that of Afghan women today. However, the starting point of the Republic of Korea's nation-building was investment in human resources, including women. Our first Constitution, of 1948, stipulated universal suffrage and equal rights to education for girls. By 1960, the literacy rate of the whole population had surged to around 80 per cent, and now it is widely known that Korea's rapid economic development was largely driven by the enthusiasm in education for all. Indeed, our modern history underpins our belief that human rights and fundamental freedoms for all are inseparable from

political stability and economic development. And that is not a Western experience.

We do not deny the Taliban's efforts, such as their ban on opium cultivation and the counter-terrorism operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K), but the interlinked challenges facing Afghanistan require a holistic response that encompasses human rights. The recent reports of ISIL-K increasing recruitment within ethnic minority communities exemplifies the need for inclusivity and social cohesion in countering terrorism.

We respect regional cooperation involving Afghanistan, given the various concerns and interests of neighbouring countries, such as refugees, economic connectivity and water resources. However, it should be constantly recalled that the reintegration of Afghanistan into the international community is a United Nations-scale project. Creating synergy between ongoing regional engagement and the United Nations-led process will be critical as we move forward. It is important to rally around the goal of coordinated and principled international engagement with the Taliban. We advocate proceeding with clear benchmarks. The Charter of the United Nations and existing Security Council resolutions on Afghanistan, including the sanctions list established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), will continue to serve as common guidance. As a long-standing donor, a Council member and a Doha participant, Korea stands ready to seek an active role in all those endeavours.

Ms. Jambert-Gray (United Kingdom): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva and Executive Director Bahous for their insightful briefings. I want to especially thank Ms. Mina for her powerful insight into the human cost of what is happening inside Afghanistan today.

First and foremost, the United Kingdom unequivocally condemns the so-called "vice and virtue" law issued by the Taliban. As my Foreign Secretary said, that law marks another tragic setback for the country and for its people. The international community must speak with one voice in our total opposition to the Taliban's continued assault on human rights. We call on the Taliban to immediately reverse those abhorrent policies and ensure the fundamental freedoms of all Afghans. The United Kingdom is unwavering in its support for Afghan women and for providing platforms for their voices to be heard. We are

pleased to co-host a General Assembly side event later today that will shine a spotlight on Afghan women and girls in the fight against food insecurity.

Secondly, we call on the United Nations to drive forward progress on resolution 2721 (2023). That includes the urgent appointment of a Special Envoy. But let us be clear: the Taliban cannot expect the international community to move forward on the United Nations process without first meeting their international obligations pertaining to the fundamental freedoms of women and girls, political inclusion and counter-terrorism.

Finally, the international community needs to step up the humanitarian response in Afghanistan, which remains only 30 per cent funded. As the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2024/664) sets out, 23.7 million people will require humanitarian assistance in 2024, 12.4 million people are acutely food insecure and 6.6 million people remain internally displaced. The recent Taliban restrictions will only make that appalling situation worse for Afghanistan's most marginalized and most vulnerable.

Since 2021, the United Kingdom has provided more than \$800 million to address the humanitarian crisis. We urge others to take similar steps to alleviate the suffering of the Afghan people. We remain committed to working constructively with parties inside and outside of Afghanistan for an Afghanistan at peace with itself, its neighbours and the international community.

Mr. De La Gasca (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Special Representative, Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, the Executive Director of UN-Women, Ms. Sima Bahous, and Ms. Mina, civil society representative, for their briefings.

Amid the interrelated crises facing Afghanistan, the increase in terrorist acts, the rise of violent extremism, the deterioration of the human rights situation, the seriousness of the humanitarian situation and economic stagnation are of particular concern. In the recent period, there has been an increase in terrorist acts attributed to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan, cementing its status as a threat not only to the peace and security of the country, but also that of the region. Strengthening bilateral and regional cooperation is therefore vital to counteract the pernicious links between terrorism and transnational organized crime, which fuels such illicit activities as trafficking in persons, weapons trafficking and

drug trafficking. It is also necessary to guarantee the funding required to meet the enormous humanitarian needs of the population, needs that are compounded by the adverse effects of climate change.

Let us tell it like it is: it is not possible to talk about unity and national reconciliation while women and girls, who make up half the Afghan population, are marginalized and rendered invisible. A dignified and prosperous future for Afghanistan is inconceivable if girls do not receive formal education and women are not able to contribute to building that future from within the public sphere, hence the need to put an end to all actions that violate human rights and to reverse the institutionalized system of discrimination against women and girls.

The third Doha meeting provided an opportunity for representatives of the international community, together with the de facto authorities, to develop an agenda that reflects Afghanistan's main challenges. Promoting an intra-Afghan dialogue, establishing two working groups, in the areas of finance and counter-narcotics, and supporting women-led enterprises are practical measures that should be brought to the discussion table and reinforced during the fourth Doha meeting. The international community must contribute to the implementation of those and other strategies, bearing in mind that peace and development are mutually reinforcing. Promoting the inclusion of multiple ethnic, political and social actors and facilitating the full, meaningful and safe participation of women are indispensable for peacebuilding.

I would like to conclude by reiterating my country's support for the work of Special Representative Otunbayeva and the staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

Ms. Shea (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Otunbayeva, Executive Director Bahous and Ms. Mina for their briefings. In particular, I want to thank Ms. Mina and acknowledge her compelling story and hard-earned voice of advocacy.

Today I would like to address the deteriorating human rights situation in Afghanistan. Since the briefing three months ago (see S/PV.9663), the Taliban's so-called Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice has issued a new directive that codifies further restrictions, including on the ability of women and girls to participate in public life, in a manner that amounts to gender persecution. Today Afghan

women and girls are not to be seen or heard in public. That directive comes on top of earlier restrictions on their education, travel and other personal freedoms. Based on that new directive, so-called morality police can detain and punish Afghan citizens without any need to prove their guilt.

That continued regression towards misogynistic authoritarianism is deeply troubling, and it comes in the context of increasing poverty and a weak economy, as detailed in the Secretary-General's recent report (S/2024/664). The report notes that Afghanistan's long-standing economic and social problems have been exacerbated by the Taliban's increasingly restrictive policies.

The United States remains committed to addressing the humanitarian needs of the Afghan people, and we have continued to support a policy of engaging with a wide range of Afghans, including the Taliban, on areas of mutual interest. But to be frank, the rapidly deteriorating human rights situation is increasingly raising questions in many corners regarding the merits of engaging the Taliban. The United States continues to see the role of the United Nations as central, both in coordinating assistance efforts and in facilitating international engagements with the Taliban and other Afghans. The United Nations-convened meetings of Special Envoys in Doha are an important element of that engagement, and the participation of the Taliban in the most recent session in July was an important step. We support the United Nations initiative to establish working groups on counter-narcotics and private sector engagement in order to help streamline engagement with the Taliban and other Afghans on specific areas of mutual interest. It will be important to focus within those groups on actions and outcomes that support the Afghan people, especially Afghan women and girls, and that advance collective interests.

At the same time, the United Nations must not lose sight of resolution 2721 (2023), adopted last December, which underscored the importance of the United Nations independent assessment (see S/2023/856) and the need to develop a political road map towards an Afghanistan that is at peace with itself and its neighbours, fully integrated into the international community and meeting its international obligations. Importantly, the resolution calls for the appointment of a Special Envoy to lead that effort, and it recognizes the need to ensure the meaningful participation of Afghan women throughout the process.

That is clearly not the path that the Taliban are currently on. With each new intolerant decree, they are moving away from the Afghan people and away from the international community. For our part, the United States has been clear in its engagements with the Taliban that meaningful steps towards normalization will be based on their own actions, including respect for the rights of all Afghans, engagement in an inclusive process on the country's political future and fulfilment of their counter-terrorism commitments. Even as we pursue a policy of constructive engagement, we must hold the line on any actions that legitimize the Taliban as a Government, and we must prioritize launching a process, as envisaged in the independent assessment and resolution 2721 (2023), to develop a viable and mutually acceptable political road map toward normalization.

Mr. Dharmadhikari (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to first thank the Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, and the Executive Director of UN-Women, Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, for their briefings. I would also like to thank Ms. Mina for very powerful testimony.

Three years after taking power by force, the Taliban have hit a new low in their policy of systematic oppression of Afghan women. The decree entitled "On the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice" henceforth prohibits women from taking public transport alone, forces them to hide their faces and makes even the sound of their voices illegal. That new decree, which comes on top of many others, makes the aim clear: the Taliban want to make women disappear from the public space.

France condemns that policy of segregation in the strongest terms. The decisions constitute gender-based persecution, which may amount to a crime against humanity. Those decisions add to the daily human rights violations by the Taliban, affecting all Afghans — women and men. Discrimination, torture, corporal punishment in public and extrajudicial executions of political opponents have become commonplace in Afghanistan.

The security situation is also a matter of concern. Terrorist attacks are perpetrated almost every month. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan and Al-Qaida are active in Afghanistan and pose a significant threat to regional and international security. Drug trafficking continues and is fuelled by an increase in the production of synthetic drugs.

In that context, France remains resolutely engaged alongside the Afghan people. Since 2021, France has provided more than €160 million in humanitarian aid. It is providing tangible support for health care, education and food security to meet the needs of Afghans on the basis of clear principles and will continue to provide humanitarian assistance in line with the "by women, for women" principle.

On the political front, France is supporting the international community's initiatives aimed at improving the situation of Afghan women and men and at promoting stability in the country, which is why it is taking part in the process kickstarted in Doha. Those initiatives must, however, also be consistent with the principles adopted by the Council, in particular those set out in resolutions 2593 (2021) and 2681 (2023). Clear international obligations have been imposed upon the Taliban, first and foremost in relation to women's rights. It is our responsibility to call for those obligations to be fully fulfilled and implemented, in the face of the Taliban's failure to demonstrate any progress on those fundamental principles. Any dialogue with the Taliban must be grounded in a unified strategy that serves the entire Afghan population, irrespective of gender or ethnicity. Respect for human rights must be at the heart of that dialogue.

I would like once again to underscore France's support for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and all of the United Nations agencies and their partners who are working on the ground for the benefit of the Afghan population.

Mr. De Bono Sant Cassia (Malta): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva and Executive Director Bahous for their briefings, and Ms. Mina for her courageous and impactful testimony.

The systematic oppression of women and girls in Afghanistan represents the most extreme and critical women's rights emergency of our time. Malta condemns the Taliban's recent enactment of the so-called vice and virtue law, which further institutionalizes the systematic oppression of Afghan women and girls, restricts their rights and exacerbates their oppression.

The law, together with existing edicts, effectively erases women from public life. Those edicts have effectively silenced women's voices. They undermine the freedom of expression, access to education and information, the freedom of movement, public

participation and press freedom. We join the international community in demanding their immediate reversal.

Despite widespread condemnation of those extreme policies, a coherent international approach that advances a political pathway for Afghanistan while ensuring accountability for human rights remains elusive. As Executive Director Bahous underscored, engagement with the Taliban must not come at the expense of women's rights.

We are also deeply concerned about the situation faced by ethnic and political minorities in Afghanistan, including the Hazara community, the Tajik community and other groups. Their marginalization and persecution are of significant concern to us. We call for the protection of all minority rights and the inclusion of diverse voices in any future political process. The Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Afghanistan has urged that human rights be a fundamental part of any engagement with the Taliban. In that regard, we urge the Taliban to grant him unhindered access to the country.

Just as women's rights must be central to the agendas of all decision-making on Afghanistan's future, we must also use all United Nations, regional and bilateral mechanisms to advocate for Afghan women's and girls' fundamental rights and freedoms. We emphasize the critical role of Afghan women and civil society in those processes. Their full, equal, meaningful and safe participation is essential for sustainable peace and development.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2024/664) is dire. Urgent humanitarian assistance is required by 23.7 million Afghans, with women and children disproportionately affected. The ban on women working for non-governmental organizations and the United Nations severely hinders aid delivery and data collection, exacerbating a precarious situation. It is also an assault on humanitarian principles. Malta is deeply concerned by the eroding operating space for national and international organizations across all sectors and the growing restrictions on women-focused and gender-related programmes. Priority must be given to supporting women's civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations that are still operating in Afghanistan and working to advance gender equality and women's rights.

In that context, the role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan remains crucial. The Mission must be fully equipped to continue its

monitoring and reporting on human rights violations, with a particular focus on gender-based abuses. We welcome its continued efforts to mediate local conflicts and urge that women be included in those processes. Moreover, the broader geopolitical context, including regional instability and security challenges, narcotics trafficking and climate change — issues discussed in the Doha meetings — underscore the need for a coordinated and sustained international response. The terrorist activities of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan are a serious threat to regional and international peace and security. It is crucial that Afghanistan not become a safe haven for terrorists.

In conclusion, Malta reaffirms its unwavering solidarity with the people of Afghanistan, especially its women and girls. The Council must make sure that their rights remain at the forefront of our response. Only by upholding the rights and freedoms of all Afghans can we hope to see a peaceful, prosperous and stable Afghanistan.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are pleased to welcome you, Madam Minister, in your capacity as President of the Security Council. We thank Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for her assessment of the current situation in Afghanistan. The Russian Federation has consistently supported the work of UNAMA under her leadership within the framework of the tasks entrusted to the Mission. We note Kabul's interest in developing contacts with her. We welcome the unwavering commitment of the United Nations to maintain its presence in Afghanistan and provide the necessary assistance to Afghan people. We have listened attentively to the statements by the Executive Director of UN-Women and the civil society briefer, Ms. Mina.

Frankly speaking, we were astonished about the format of the previous briefing. It raises questions and, moreover, was not agreed upon with Council members. We were told that the civil society representative would be speaking via VTC, which stands for video-conference. There was no video whatsoever in the Chamber. I wonder how we can trust the authenticity of that audio briefing, not to mention the fact that it is unprecedented in the practice of the Council. We promise that we will come back to that issue.

We are pleased that the countries in the region have also been given the floor in the discussion today. We have taken note of the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2024/664). We would like to point out the following.

Over the past three years since the Taliban came to power, despite the predictions of our Western colleagues about the imminent political and economic collapse of the country, Afghanistan has held out. In the context of unprecedented unilateral sanctions and a humanitarian crisis, the country, which for years lived off handouts from the international community, has not plunged into another civil war or turned into a black hole. However, given the scope and scale of the threats and the enormous problems accrued over the past 20 years of war and still remaining after the disgraceful flight of Western forces, its people need our sustained assistance and support more than ever. At the same time, it is encouraging that the de facto authorities themselves have managed to soberly assess the situation and focus on strengthening regional cooperation and restoring social and economic potential. They are seeking their own development path for Afghanistan without looking for Western assistance.

The Russian Federation has consistently advocated taking a realistic and comprehensive approach to Afghanistan, based on objective analysis and a balanced assessment of the situation. It is imperative to have constructive cooperation within the international community itself on the Afghan issue. First and foremost, that means paying due heed to the needs of the Afghans themselves and rejecting the narrow interests of individual States, as well as engaging in patient dialogue with the de facto Afghan authorities on a wide range of pressing issues without blackmail or pressure. We see that the Taliban are interested in developing such pragmatic cooperation, which is borne out by their participation in the recent meeting of Special Envoys on Afghanistan in Doha from 30 June to 1 July. As the discussion there showed, regional players also share that approach.

At the same time, it is evident that any progress in the further development of dialogue with the de facto authorities is hardly possible if certain Western donors continue to be guided by the principle of my way or the highway, pinning all responsibility solely on the Taliban and insisting on establishing additional conditions for and obstacles to the resumption of broad humanitarian assistance. While we have long ceased to be surprised at

that Western tactic of identifying the guilty and shifting the burden of responsibility onto others' shoulders, but it is a path to nowhere. It has nothing to do with real assistance in resolving the Afghan problem. In the end, ordinary Afghans will once again be the victims of such manipulation and pointless haggling.

We agree with the Secretary-General's assessment of the difficult domestic political situation in Afghanistan. We remain particularly concerned about the ongoing security risks posed by the continued terrorist activity of the Afghan branch of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Despite the efforts being made by the de facto authorities, the terrorists are extending their influence in the country and are deliberately destabilizing the situation there by carrying out new terrorist attacks. Their intentions are clear to us — they are trying to establish themselves as an alternative force and undermine stability in Afghanistan and the region. The victims of their high-profile terrorist attacks are representatives of religious and ethnic minorities, including women and children. The fighters make no bones about the fact that terrorist groups receive funding from abroad and that there are foreign terrorist fighters in their ranks. The ISIL fighters constantly change their tactics. They are actively using social media to recruit new members and attract financing for their terrorist activities. Given the amount of weaponry left behind by the Western military in the country, the risk of those weapons falling into the hands of fighters and subsequently spilling over into the region and beyond is increasingly real.

Terrorism is also closely linked to the drug problem. It is clear that the Taliban's ongoing efforts alone are insufficient. There is a need for comprehensive international and regional assistance, inter alia, through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Ensuring support for Afghan farmers also remains a crucial problem. A source of particular concern is the production of synthetic drugs.

We are especially focused on the socioeconomic situation in the country. We note the efforts being made by the United Nations and regional organizations to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. The dedicated work of humanitarian agencies and their staff deserve our support. They remain on the ground under all circumstances to help the Afghan people. At the same time, we see that those steps are not sufficient. United Nations efforts to expand assistance beyond basic needs are still being blocked by a number of Western

donors who categorically reject any possibility of contributing to the country's development and refuse to rebuild schools and hospitals or build roads connecting provinces and cities to agricultural areas. Our country has been systematically providing targeted assistance to those in need in Afghanistan. We will continue to work actively on that track.

We are closely monitoring the development of the situation in the area of the rights of all Afghans, including women and girls. It is of particular significance given the recent additional bans, specifically the so-called morality law. We believe that the Afghan authorities need to build a system of governance that will take into consideration the rights and needs of the entire population of the country. We also deem it important to form a genuinely inclusive government with the participation of all ethnic and political groups in the country.

The Russian Federation fully supports the right and aspirations of the Afghan people to live in a peaceful and prosperous country free of drugs and terrorism. That is the key to order and stability in the region. However, building a long-term lasting peace is not possible without patient cooperation with the de facto authorities. There is no alternative to that path. That will lead to a swift breaking of the current deadlock and the subsequent international reintegration of Afghanistan.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of Slovenia.

Allow me first, in response to the statement by the representative of the Russian Federation, to clarify the following.

The civil society briefer is in the Secretariat building, and I met her earlier. The presidency arranged for an audio format to ensure the safety of the briefer. We are increasingly conscious of the threat of reprisals against representatives of civil society who engage with the United Nations. The presidency took all the required precautions to ensure the absolute safety of the briefer, which is in line with the practice of the Council.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): There is a practice in existence in the Council. The President cannot violate that practice, and neither can anyone else. Making a decision on changing the format must be reached by agreement, facilitated by the presidency, with all members of the Security Council. That was not done. The format of this meeting raises significant questions. I promise that we will return to discussing this issue with all members of the Security Council.

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

I wish to thank Special Representative Otunbayeva and Executive Director Bahous for their briefings. My sincere appreciation also goes to Ms. Mina for sharing her powerful personal experience and for her insightful remarks.

Let me begin by commending the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for all the activities it has been undertaking. UNAMA's presence in Afghanistan remains crucial, particularly with regard to its work on human rights, its humanitarian assistance and its good offices for dialogue between all relevant stakeholders in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan continues to face a wide range of societal, human rights, political, security, economic, climate, developmental, humanitarian and other challenges. Today I wish to focus on one pressing issue — the rights of girls and women and their access to education.

Last month marked three years since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. Despite their pledge in 2021 to uphold the rights of women and girls, the following three years have been marked by a relentless series of actions directly targeting women and girls, which may amount to gender persecution — a crime against humanity under the Rome Statute. We cannot and will not stay silent in the face of this institutionalized system of gender discrimination, segregation and oppression.

The human rights situation in Afghanistan was not exemplary before August 2021, however it was far better than it is today. It is shocking how quickly progress painstakingly reached over years can be systematically dismantled in very little time. The future of any country, including Afghanistan, cannot be prosperous if only half of the population has a chance to participate fully

and freely in society and public life or make decisions about their own lives.

The possibility of obtaining education is a cornerstone of deciding one's future and contributes to the development of any country. In Afghanistan, girls are allowed only a basic education, up to the age of 12. It is deeply concerning that there is no indication for girls and women to return to secondary and tertiary education. Quite the opposite, if there ever was such a possibility, it seems dead now.

These restrictions will affect generations of Afghans to come. In a not-so-distant future, the shortage of highly skilled graduates will widen and will affect the pace of Afghanistan's development. When we hear about the need for development in Afghanistan, this is part of our answer.

With every passing day, Afghanistan and the international community are losing more of the potential of these girls and young women to develop into responsible adults who are knowledgeable, skilful and capable of guiding their country to a peaceful, safe, secure and prosperous future.

Recent legislative developments, which imposed even further wide-ranging and far-reaching restrictions on personal conduct and behaviour, paint an even bleaker future for Afghan population — again, particularly for women and girls. We condemn the new policy, which extends the already intolerable restrictions on women's and girls' rights and fundamental freedoms.

The education ban, along with other gross, widespread and systematic violations of women's and girls' rights, is a clear violation of international law, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Afghanistan is a State party. International obligations must be upheld, including by Afghanistan. Slovenia continues to strongly advocate an immediate shift and reversal of all discriminatory policies and practices. In that context, we also reiterate our full support to Special Rapporteur Bennett and once again urge the Taliban to grant him immediate and unhindered access to the country.

As part of the international donor community, Slovenia supports coherent, coordinated and structured engagement on Afghanistan, as positively noted by the Council in resolution 2721 (2023). The independent

assessment (see S/2023/856) and the envisaged road map for Afghanistan's reintegration into the international community remain the most pragmatic way to address the future of Afghanistan.

We do not expect quick solutions. However, the international community, particularly the members of the Security Council, should not turn a blind eye to Afghan women and girls disappearing from public life. The United Nations must lead by example and must ensure that every engagement with the Taliban includes Afghan women, as mandated by the resolutions of the Security Council and recommended by the independent assessment.

In Afghanistan women are being silenced. We must provide a space for their voices to be heard. We must continue to invest in them and empower them. The international community cannot abandon Afghan women and girls. The approach we take — or fail to take — for all Afghan women and girls is a test of who we are as a global community.

Slovenia will continue to hear, listen to and support Afghan women.

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, Madam President, for convening this critical meeting on the situation in Afghanistan focused on education for women and girls. I commend you and your team for your excellent leadership of the Council, and I thank you for the joint press statement issued by the Security Council signatories of the statement of shared commitments on women and peace and security (SC/15812), delivered this morning. We thank Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for her remarks, and we thank Ms. Sima Bahous, for her practical, realistic and factual presentation on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan. We commend the UN-Women team for their wonderful job and leadership. We also appreciate the continued support of the Council, international partners and donors to Afghanistan, particularly on behalf of our women and girls, who face immense challenges under Taliban rule. Their support and principled stance offer a beacon of hope during these dark times. I also thank Ms. Mina for her powerful, courageous and moving presentation on her personal experiences.

It is my solemn duty to reflect the real agony of the people of Afghanistan — a people whose suffering, resilience and hope demand the urgent attention of the global community. Afghanistan today faces a devastating array of complex challenges: a deepening humanitarian catastrophe, severe poverty, rampant unemployment, widespread human rights violations, natural disasters, displacement, forced migration and a growing sense of despair and uncertainty about the future. People are being pushed to flee their homeland in search of safety and opportunity.

The Taliban's military return to power in August 2021 marked a devastating turning point. Their hostile policies and full suppression of the Afghan people's prosperity have transformed the country into a landscape of deepening crisis. Afghanistan was not perfect before the Taliban's takeover. However, citizens' rights and freedoms were protected by constitutional order and, despite ongoing conflict, people were hopeful for a peaceful and prosperous future.

It has been four years since the Taliban's disregard for international norms and the legitimate demands of the Afghan people exacerbated the current crisis and further isolated Afghanistan. The humanitarian crisis unfolding in Afghanistan is catastrophic. Since the Taliban's takeover, the country has spiralled into a dire state in which basic survival is the only concern for millions of its people. As stated in previous speakers' statements and briefings, 85 per cent of Afghanistan's population is now living below the poverty line. Some 23.7 million people suffer from acute food insecurity, with 6 million people at immediate risk of famine. The country's gross domestic product (GDP) has contracted by 20 per cent since the Taliban assumed control.

That is not simply a problem of inadequate resources; it is a crisis of access, distribution and neglect. The people of Afghanistan are starving because they have been denied access to the tools, resources and governance necessary for survival. International aid, a critical lifeline, is shrinking at a time when need is greatest.

The plight of children and youth is heartbreaking. UNICEF reports that almost 3 million children under the age of 5 are acutely malnourished. Boys and girls are systematically deprived of access to equal and quality education and are encouraged to pursue their studies in jihadi madrasas. Afghanistan is the only country where girls are not allowed to study beyond the sixth grade.

With more than 70 decrees aimed at excluding women from public life, including barring Afghan women from working for non-governmental organizations, a systematic erasure has led to a gender apartheid regime with economic implications that have already cost Afghanistan an estimated \$1 billion, or 5 per cent of its GDP.

The crisis has fuelled a migration emergency, with hundreds of thousands fleeing violence and economic collapse. Neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan and Iran, are overwhelmed, and Afghans who returned home face dire conditions with no jobs or security. That displacement destabilizes the region and threatens global security. Both Taliban policies and international inaction have failed those refugees. A coordinated global response is needed to address immediate needs and ensure long-term safety and dignity.

The Taliban's human rights violations remain a serious concern, marked by forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture and arbitrary detentions, especially of former Government officials and Afghan national security forces. Civilians are detained and tortured based on accusations of links to the National Resistance Front or the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Retirees are denied pensions, women's salaries are withheld or reduced and the Hazara and Shia communities are prohibited from practicing their religious ceremonies. Forced and child marriages are on the rise. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Afghanistan has been banned from visiting the country. Just two days ago, polio vaccination campaigns were halted. In addition, a new morality law codifies oppressive policies under a distorted interpretation of sharia law, affecting all Afghan citizens, both women and men.

Security concerns over the presence of terrorist groups and foreign terrorist fighters under Taliban control have raised fears that Afghanistan could once again become a hub for terrorism, threatening both national and global security. Targeted attacks on Hazara and Shia communities continue unabated. Just last week, 14 Shia Hazara members were killed and six injured in an attack, underscoring the Taliban's inability to protect vulnerable groups. That incident highlights the worsening persecution of the Hazara minority and the Taliban's failure to ensure safety, further destabilizing the nation.

The Taliban's rule, politically, fails to represent the will of the Afghan people or reflect true Islamic values or the culture of our people. They have distorted Islamic laws to enforce a harsh ideology, effectively holding the Afghan people hostage.

Against that backdrop, I would first like to acknowledge and express thanks for regional and international efforts, including the United Nations-led Doha meetings, Security Council resolutions and statements from special representatives of countries of the region, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and Security Council members and their joint press statements. However, despite those noble efforts, we must ask: is the world doing enough? Are we, as an international community, truly meeting the scale of the challenges before us?

The reality is that Afghanistan is not just a national crisis. What is happening in my country has global implications, and it requires a united and coherent international approach, as well as strong international political will. While we welcome efforts under the United Nations-led Special Envoys meetings in Doha, aimed at a coherent, united approach to international engagement on Afghanistan, unfortunately the process is being diverted and sabotaged by the Taliban's preconditions, disregarding human rights themes and Afghan women's voices. There are serious concerns that it risks normalization without tangible progress on the core issues.

To avoid further diversion, the process should refocus on implementing the recommendations of the independent assessment report (see S/2023/856) by adopting a transparent action plan with specific benchmarks. That requires the appointment of a Special Envoy to spearhead regional and international efforts, facilitating a genuine national dialogue to establish a legitimate governance system that reflects the people's will, upholds the rule of law and ensures the full and meaningful participation of women. A united international approach is crucial to create an inclusive, representative Government where women's rights are respected and their voices are heard.

In conclusion, the fate of Afghanistan serves as a litmus test for the international community and the Council's commitment to protecting the most vulnerable and upholding the principles we have pledged to defend.

I would like to end my remarks by emphasizing the following urgent calls for action.

First, humanitarian aid must be increased and sustained. Afghanistan's humanitarian needs are immense and growing. We call on all donor countries to increase their aid contributions and to maintain support for life-saving interventions through transparent and monitored mechanisms.

Secondly, women's rights must be restored. Afghanistan cannot recover or rebuild without its women. The international community must demand the full restoration of women's rights, including their right to education, employment and public life in all formats of engagement. Women are the key to unlocking Afghanistan's potential, and their exclusion is a violation that cannot stand.

Thirdly, the migration crisis must be addressed. The Afghan refugee crisis demands a coordinated global response. Neighbouring countries cannot shoulder that burden alone. We urge the international community to increase support for Afghan refugees and work towards long-term solutions that provide security, dignity and opportunity. While we thank neighbouring countries for hosting refugees, we also call for the protection of their fundamental human rights in line with international humanitarian laws.

Fourthly, the Taliban must be held accountable. The international community must use every available legal mechanism to hold the Taliban accountable for their human rights violations and crimes, particularly the systematic gender-based violence and gender apartheid policies they are committing against Afghan women and girls in Afghanistan.

Fifthly, the United Nations-led Doha meetings should prioritize achieving a comprehensive political settlement through a national dialogue that leads to the formation of a broad-based legitimate political structure and system that reflects the people's aspirations and enjoys their support so that we can achieve a long-term and sustainable peace, stability and prosperity in the country. That requires engagement with all Afghans and democratic political forces, including women and civil society representatives, to help to find a concrete solution to the crisis.

We must act decisively, with unity and determination, to reverse the course of destruction and restore hope to the millions of Afghans who continue to suffer. That is

not only a moral imperative, but a responsibility that we all share as members of the international community. Let us not fail the people of Afghanistan. Let us not fail the generations that will follow. The time to act is now.

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

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank you, Madam President, for convening and presiding over this important meeting. We also thank Ms. Otunbayeva and Ms. Bahous for their insightful briefings.

We take note of the Secretary-General's recent report (S/2024/664), which underscores the severe economic and humanitarian challenges, with 23.7 million people still in need of assistance. The situation remains a serious concern for the neighbouring countries directly affected by the humanitarian crisis. Iran in particular is facing challenges due to the influx of illegal migrants. Since the irresponsible withdrawal of the United States in August 2021, mass migration from Afghanistan has placed a heavy burden on our country, already strained by unlawful unilateral sanctions. With more than 6 million Afghans currently living in Iran, the annual cost exceeds \$10 billion. However, the international community has shown little concern for that pressing issue. The international community must provide adequate, sustained support to countries such as Iran and Pakistan, which are bearing the brunt of the ongoing challenges in Afghanistan.

Iran also remains deeply concerned about the ongoing narcotics problem. While the de facto authorities have expressed a willingness to collaborate with the international community, the issues of alternative livelihoods and the prevention and treatment of drug use conditions remain severely underfunded. As emphasized in the Secretary-General's report, counter-narcotic efforts require urgent attention and action to ensure both security and economic stability for the Afghan people. We welcome the outcome of the recent Doha meeting, which agreed on establishing a working group on narcotics. Iran stands ready to actively participate in that mechanism.

Iran remains deeply alarmed by the growing threats posed by Da'esh-Khorasan, which continues to carry out attacks and spread propaganda, jeopardizing the security and stability of the country and the region. We condemn in the strongest possible terms the recent terrorist attack by Da'esh specifically targeting Hazara Shia communities. We reiterate our call on the de

facto authorities to fulfil their responsibility to combat terrorism equally and to dismantle all terrorist groups.

The restrictive measures imposed on girls, women and ethnic minorities, especially regarding access to education and the curtailment of their political and social rights, are deeply concerning. We call on the de facto authorities to reconsider their policies and to lift all those restrictive measures. Iran remains committed to engaging with the de facto authorities to support the Afghan people, as it is crucial for peace and stability in the country and the entire region. We are also dedicated to working closely with neighbouring countries, partners and the United Nations to foster lasting peace and security in Afghanistan. In that context, Iran plans to host the third quadripartite meeting at the foreign minister level involving Iran, China, Pakistan and Russia during the seventy-ninth session of the General Assembly. The meeting will focus on coordinating efforts in engagement with Afghanistan authorities to promote peace and stability in the country.

Finally, Afghanistan's frozen assets must be returned without political conditions, and sanctions should not hinder efforts to revive its economy, as the Secretary-General has called for. In addition, Western countries that occupied Afghanistan for more than 20 years and then irresponsibly withdrew must fulfil their commitment to help to rebuild Afghanistan's economy and fight terrorism. We recognize the critical role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan and fully support the Special Representative in fulfilling UNAMA's mandate. As the Secretary-General emphasized in his report, the way forward will be long and difficult. Success will require patience and willingness to find a step-by-step approach in order to build trust over time.

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

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I thank the Slovenian presidency for convening this important meeting today. I also want to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, for her briefing. We also took very careful note of the statements made by the other briefers.

Ensuring the security, peace and progress of Afghanistan are high priorities for the foreign policies of Kazakhstan and the countries of Central Asia. The

independent assessment submitted to the Security Council (see S/2023/856) is an important compass for our deliberations. Kazakhstan strictly follows the position of the Security Council on the issue of the international recognition of the Taliban. Yet the people of Afghanistan need support from its neighbours, partners and international organizations today. We cannot allow the continuation of misery, poverty and hunger in this long-suffering country.

In that respect, the integration of Afghanistan into the regional economic system is of mutual benefit to Central Asia, Afghanistan itself and the international community. Kazakhstan and its neighbours have been actively developing economic ties to help the Afghan people. Kazakhstan is one of Afghanistan's 10 main trading partners. To pursue economic cooperation, we opened the Kazakhstan Trade House in the Herat province, following various bilateral trade exchanges. Last year, in Astana, we held an exhibition of Afghan products. Kazakhstan intends to increase its trade with Afghanistan to \$3 billion in the near future. Kazakhstan continues to provide humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, cooperating closely with United Nations agencies, in particular the World Food Programme. We serve as a reliable supplier of wheat and grain and participate in various procurement projects.

My President, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, has proposed establishing a regional centre on sustainable development for Central Asia and Afghanistan in Almaty. That centre seeks to, among other objectives, first strengthen the Afghan economy to promote sustainable development, including job creation for Afghan youth, and secondly, develop trade and commerce to integrate Afghanistan into the Central Asian region. All Central Asian countries support that initiative. We all do share the concern of the international community about the miserable fate of women and girls in Afghanistan. However, in our view, economic stability will, over time, create the conditions for Afghanistan's gradual political transformation, with women's rights emerging. It is only close interaction, and not isolation, that will accelerate that process. We need structured, well-coordinated programmatic activities from all United Nations agencies and donor countries to fully realize the Secretary-General's motto — delivering as one.

The Doha meetings of the Special Envoys confirmed the importance of dialogue between the international community and the Taliban, primarily in the trade,

economic and humanitarian spheres. The Central Asian States have already been actively assisting the people of Afghanistan. We call on the international community to help Central Asia to help Afghanistan, and the proposed centre could be a viable tool for doing so. We join others in the common vision of a peaceful, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

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

Mr. Parvathaneni (India): I thank you, Madam President, for convening this very important meeting. We appreciate the briefing by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Otunbayeva and thank her for updating the Security Council on the recent developments. We also listened very carefully to the views and very useful insights of UN-Women Executive Director Sima Sami Bahous and to those of the civil society briefer, Ms. Mina.

India has civilizational ties with the people of Afghanistan as its contiguous neighbour. Those historical people-to-people exchanges have forged the unbreakable bonds of a special relationship. That is the basis of our contemporary engagement with Afghanistan.

India is closely monitoring the situation in Afghanistan and has been actively engaged in regional and international efforts to maintain stability and peace in Afghanistan. Our participation in the United Nations meetings in Doha, the Moscow format and other forums are a reflection of our efforts to secure peace and stability in Afghanistan. India has also joined the two United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan working groups on counter-narcotics and enabling the private sector in Afghanistan.

The Council, through its resolution 2593 (2021), had demanded that Afghan territory not be used to threaten or attack any country and had reiterated the importance of combating terrorism in Afghanistan. That continues to guide the international community's approach to combating that menace. The resolution's call on all donors and international humanitarian actors to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan should continue to be a shared global priority.

India has been working with various United Nations agencies to provide assistance to the Afghan people in the areas of health, food security, education,

counter-narcotics, sports and capacity-building. Since 2001, India has been committed to the rebuilding and reconstruction of Afghanistan. Our development partnership includes more than 500 projects spread across all provinces in Afghanistan. Since August 2021, we have delivered 27 tons of relief material, 50,000 metric tons of wheat, 40,000 litres of pesticides and more than 300 tons of medicines and medical accessories, apart from the 1.5 million doses of coronavirus disease vaccine during the pandemic.

India has continued scholarship schemes for Afghan students and, since August 2021, has granted new admission to 2,260 Afghan students, including 300 girls. Three thousand Afghan students are pursuing education in India, while almost 1,000 are doing so remotely. The signing of the contract to develop the Chabahar port between India and Iran is a long-term arrangement. It is a visible expression of our intent to foster the growth of bilateral trade and commerce, and it can also serve the requirement of connectivity for Afghanistan.

In conclusion, let me reaffirm India's steadfast commitment to the friendly people of Afghanistan. India looks forward to continuing to work closely with all stakeholders and will leave no stone unturned in the global community's efforts to support Afghan society in its quest for peace, stability, development and prosperity.

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

Mrs. Ataeva (Turkmenistan): At the outset, I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of Slovenia for convening this very important meeting. We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, for her briefing and assessment.

The 13 June report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/469) to the Security Council clearly indicates that the situation in Afghanistan is complicated and that the humanitarian needs continue to be pressing.

While we are actively engaging in the Doha process, we believe that key solutions should be found by regional players, in particular the Central Asian countries, for whom peace and security in Afghanistan are imperative. Turkmenistan pays special attention to its relations with Afghanistan, investing in the

economic stability of that neighbouring country and in the well-being and unity of the Afghan people. We consistently provide assistance to that fraternal country by building and reconstructing social infrastructure and by sending humanitarian convoys. On 11 September, just a week ago, Turkmenistan sent another shipment of humanitarian cargo to that neighbouring country, bearing food and agriculture products, construction materials, diesel fuel and gasoline.

The implementation of large-scale infrastructure projects in Afghanistan, particularly in such vitally important fields as energy and transport, is a priority factor in the political stabilization and economic and social revival of that country and its successful engagement in regional and global relations.

In that regard, I would like to draw the Council's attention to a number of grand opening events that took place on 11 September on the Turkmen-Afghan border. Those events include, in particular, the official launch of the construction of the Serhetabat-Herat section of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline and the fibre-optic communication line along the same route; the start of construction of the Shatlyk-1 gas compressor station for the pipeline in Turkmenistan's Mary province; the opening of the railway bridge along the Serhetabat-Turghundi railroad and the initiation of the Turghundi-Sanabar section of the railway to Herat and a complex of dry port warehouses at the Turghundi railway station in Afghanistan; and the launch of the Nur-ul-Jihad power plant in Herat province within the first phase of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan power transmission project.

All those projects and support activities will create 12,000 jobs in Afghanistan and generate more than \$1 billion in annual revenue, which will have a positive impact on bilateral and interregional transport and energy connectivity. Those developments are the practical projection of Turkmenistan's policy of permanent and positive neutrality, the aim of which is to promote peace and strengthen regional and global security.

Turkmenistan will continue to intensify its economic and social cooperation with Afghanistan and provide humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people, supporting the international efforts in that regard. The Afghan people, just like anyone else, deserves the right to live in peace and stability.

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

Mr. Lapasov (Uzbekistan): We thank the Slovenian presidency for convening this meeting. Allow me also to extend our gratitude to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Otunbayeva, and the Executive Director of UN-Women, Ms. Bahous, for such a comprehensive report on the situation in Afghanistan.

As a close neighbour of Afghanistan, Uzbekistan has been and remains in favour of establishing an open, equal, pragmatic and mutually beneficial dialogue with Kabul. In that regard, the President of Uzbekistan, Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, attaches special priority to that aspect of the country's foreign policy and is doing his utmost to support the people of Afghanistan and to help Afghans overcome the difficult period of post-conflict reconstruction.

We believe that in order to establish long-term peace in Afghanistan, proper attention should be focused on rebuilding the national economy and on implementing large-scale energy and transport projects. Among them is the construction of the Termez-Mazar-e-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway line. The route proposed by the Uzbek side passes through the most densely populated areas of Afghanistan, where most of the country's population is concentrated. Eight of the 10 largest Afghan cities and provinces in terms of population are located in close proximity to that corridor.

Cooperation with the interim Government in terms of expanding the planting of alternative crops, providing fertilizers and technology and training Afghan farmers is of great importance to us. Uzbekistan has established a certain degree of cooperation with the Afghan side to that aim. Uzbekistan is not only providing humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, but it has also built an international transport and logistics hub in the border town of Termez, the services of which are being actively used by the United Nations agencies. We are also continuing the process of training the Afghan youth at the educational centre in Termez. It is also worth noting that we are working with the Government of Qatar on the issue of training more than 100 Afghan girls in Uzbekistan in the most in-demand medical professions.

We believe that the time has come for effective measures to rebuild Afghanistan's national economy and banking system. The active involvement of the

entire world community, including international financial institutions, is needed.

The current situation in Afghanistan remains complex and unpredictable. While the efforts of the interim Government in maintaining security, combating corruption, drug abuse, smuggling and in a number of other areas are commendable, there are still question marks surrounding human rights — in particular the right of women and girls to education and to work, and the protection of the rights of national minorities — and the formation of an inclusive Government.

Unfortunately, the approaches of international partners to address these issues are divided and, regrettably, no visible progress has yet been made in that regard. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that discussions on these issues have not stopped, including with the Afghan side, and that, in our view, is already a positive development.

In conclusion, I once again would like to thank the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for its ongoing efforts in the comprehensive reconstruction of Afghanistan and express our readiness for a constructive and productive dialogue with the international community on Afghanistan's trajectory.

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

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): Let me first congratulate you, Madam President, and the Slovenian delegation on your very successful presidency of the Council this month. We welcome the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2024/664) on the situation in Afghanistan and the briefing provided by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Ms. Roza Otunbayeva. We commend her wise leadership and her efforts to promote normalization in Afghanistan under very difficult circumstances. We also welcome the informative briefing provided to us by Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, the head of UN-Women.

Three years after the Taliban assumed the reins of power in Afghanistan, the situation there continues to be dire and deeply concerning. A total of 23.7 million Afghans are destitute and need urgent humanitarian assistance. The international community has an obligation to provide such humanitarian assistance without conditions. Regrettably, the Afghanistan humanitarian needs and response plan has received less

than 25 per cent of the required \$3.06 billion that was requested. The plan should be fully funded from all possible sources for the sake of the Afghan people.

Pakistan also supports Afghanistan's economic revival, including the revival of the Afghan banking system, efforts to address the liquidity crisis and the creation of conditions for unfreezing Afghanistan's national reserves. Pakistan remains committed to expanding trade and commercial relations with Afghanistan and implementing the planned infrastructure and regional connectivity projects, which have been mentioned here by previous speakers.

Pakistan was the first to advocate sustained engagement with the Afghan interim Government. We welcome the Government's participation in the Doha process initiated by the Secretary-General and the establishment of the two working groups, on counter-narcotics and the private sector, at the third Doha meeting. Pakistan desires to take the co-lead in the working group on the private sector.

However, it is clear that Afghanistan is nowhere near normalization, three years after the Taliban assumed power. There will be no normalization until the fundamental issues that trouble Afghanistan are addressed: terrorism, human rights, political exclusion, illegal Afghan migration and the problem of Afghan refugees. Terrorism within, and from, Afghanistan poses the single most serious threat to the country, to the region and to the world.

The thirty-fourth report (see S/2024/556) of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted to the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities illustrates the disturbing dimensions of the terrorist threat from Afghanistan. While the Afghan interim Government is fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan — that is, Da'esh — without complete success thus far, other terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and others, are not only present in Afghanistan but also appear to have been given safe haven and protection by the Afghan interim Government.

The TTP, which we in Pakistan call Fitna al-Khawarij, is an organization of special concern to Pakistan and should be of concern to the entire region and the world. The TTP, with approximately 6,000

fighters and 50,000 family members, is now the largest designated terrorist organization in Afghanistan. It has been given safe haven close to Pakistan's borders. From there, the TTP is conducting almost daily terrorist attacks against Pakistan. Hundreds of Pakistani soldiers and civilians have been martyred. We have hard evidence that at least some of the TTP's cross-border infiltration and attacks are being facilitated by elements of the Afghan interim Government. The TTP also obtains sponsorship from Pakistan's major adversary. The TTP has been provided with some of the modern weapons acquired by the Taliban from the stocks left behind by the withdrawing foreign forces. Indeed, some of the Afghan interim Government's own commanders have promoted border incidents with Pakistan's forces, with casualties on both sides.

Enjoying the protection of the Afghan interim Government, the TTP is emerging as an umbrella organization for other terrorist groups, whose objectives are the destabilization of other neighbours of Afghanistan. The TTP is also now coordinating with secessionist groups such as the Majeed Brigade. And, given its long association with Al-Qaida, it will not be long before the TTP becomes the spearhead of Al-Qaida's planned regional and global terrorist goals. Therefore, while some of our friends may believe that they are only threatened by ISIL-K/Da'esh, they should also be concerned by the threat they could confront from a strengthened TTP in the not-too-distant future. For its part, Pakistan will take national action and cooperate with regional and international organizations to eliminate the threat from the TTP and its associates.

Pakistan also shares the desire of most of our neighbours and of the international community to promote greater political inclusivity in Afghanistan. That will enhance the prospect for stability and normalization in Afghanistan. Likewise, we share the international community's concern about the Afghan interim Government's violations of human rights, especially the rights of women and girls. The Afghan interim Government has resigned from its earlier commitments regarding women and girls, as it has resigned from its commitments on counter-terrorism. Instead of easing earlier restrictions, the Afghan interim Government has doubled down on misogyny with new edicts to literally stifle the voices of women and girls. We are especially appalled that those abhorrent measures are being justified by reference to Islam. Those backward and obscurantist measures violate the

principles of our enlightened religion, which was the first to uphold equal rights for men and women.

While Pakistan has been the first and strongest advocate of constructive engagement with the Taliban regime, we cannot allow them to gain the impression that they can play off their neighbours and the international community against each other to ignore their own obligations and pursue policies that are both a violation of Afghanistan's international obligations and the source of internal, regional and global instability. Unfortunately, the international community appears to have lost the clarity of our objectives regarding Afghanistan. Engagement cannot be pursued for its own sake. If we do not know where we are going, we will never get there. We must seek the steps that are essential to establish normalcy in Afghanistan and its eventual integration as a member of the international community.

To that end, we would propose that the international community build on the report (see S/2023/856) of the

Secretary-General's Special Coordinator, Ambassador Feridun Sinirlioğlu, which envisaged a road map of reciprocal actions by the Afghan interim Government on counter-terrorism, human rights and political inclusivity, as well as by the international community on economic revival and development and the eventual easing of sanctions and political recognition.

In terms of history, geography, ethnicity, language, faith and culture, there is no country that is closer to Pakistan than Afghanistan. Our sympathy and affection for our Afghan sisters and brothers is boundless. Peace, stability and development in our two nations are inextricably intertwined. We will continue to endeavour — at the bilateral, regional and international levels — to achieve those mutually beneficial objectives for our two peoples.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.