

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, MARTIN GRIFFITHS**

Opening remarks at the launch of the 2022 Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan

Geneva, 11 January 2022

As delivered

A warm welcome to everyone in this meeting.

Excellencies, partners, friends, ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for joining us for a very important moment of profound consequence today in this launch for the people of Afghanistan.

Conditions on the ground, for most families, are simply untenable for women, men, children and older people, all, and all of this through no fault of their own.

More than half of the population of Afghanistan now depends on life-saving assistance, a staggering 30 per cent increase in 2022 over those in need in 2021.

Health care and other essential services are faltering and at risk of collapse.

Millions of people depend on food assistance to survive.

And without intervention of the sort that we are describing today, nearly 4 million children under age 5 will be malnourished this year – over 1 million of those children severely so.

Our staff on the ground, our partners and agencies, national and international, are witnessing this tragedy unfold every day and across the country: 4-year-olds weighing only 9 kg – hollowed-out versions of what they should be, with desperate parents seeking their survival and being treated in facilities managed by our partners and funded by your generosity.

Livelihoods have been crushed. People's limited reserves expended. Many are forced into harmful and irreversible coping mechanisms to save their lives and to survive, including child marriages and child labour. People are burning household possessions to keep warm or selling off items used to run small businesses in a kinder time to cover the cost of food for their families.

And although the level of internal displacement has slowed – and we will hear of course more from Filippo on this – millions of people remain displaced because of decades of relentless conflict and violence.

And this is the reason why today we are launching together the world's largest-ever single-country humanitarian appeal and its consequences in the region, marking the enormity of the crisis in Afghanistan.

This response plan and the relief we have planned is a vital lifeline for millions of people.

Last year, with your contributions and our collective commitment to scale up operations, humanitarian partners reached 18 million people across the country, over 60 per cent more than the year before.

And the generosity of donors last year meant that the Afghanistan programme was the best-funded appeal in the world, and we hope this will continue this year too, because much more is needed now.

In 2022, in Afghanistan itself, we need US\$4.4 billion to assist more than 22 million Afghans with food, health care, livelihoods and other life-saving assistance. And more will be needed, as we will hear, in the neighbouring countries.

While we have seen significant progress – and I need to emphasize the progress – in allowing women to work in the humanitarian sector across all provinces, as had been promised to the United Nations by the Taliban, we are grateful for this, we welcome it, but we recognize that more needs to be done. The space is there for humanitarian operations and it needs to be managed and used.

The protection of women and girls – it hardly needs saying – is central to all our efforts. They must have access to all education and employment opportunities, health care and other essential services.

And for women to work in humanitarian operations is a condition precedent for delivery of assistance and protection to women and girls throughout the country.

One of the most sinister of recent developments in Afghanistan since those weeks in the second half of August has been the extraordinary impact on the economy – which resulted from the suspension of international assistance and engagement – with a GDP contraction of an estimated 40 per cent – what has been described elsewhere as a freefall in the economy. This trend will continue, and has only been made worse by a series of droughts.

Wheat and fuel have become so expensive that a family now spends almost all its income on food to survive.

The Central Emergency Response Fund, or CERF, and the Country-based Pooled Funds – many financed very generously by people in this meeting – have helped us to rapidly scale up responses in those last months of last year.

A stop-gap \$45 million allocation, for example, from CERF with the assistance and delivery and leadership of UNICEF and WHO, helped to prevent Afghanistan's health-care structure from collapse and those saved services which enabled people to stay working or to go home.

Last year, CERF allocated a total of \$93 million to life-saving action in Afghanistan, making it by far the largest recipient country in the world.

The Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund, now the largest Country-based Pooled Fund in the world, in 2021, \$257 million was made available through again the generosity of so many Member States. By the year's end, the Fund had allocated \$158 million of that for prioritized life-saving assistance.

Your contributions – and I speak to so many representatives in this room – have made an enormous difference, and I know it will again this year.

We welcome, and take note of, the leadership that led to the Security Council of the United Nations' humanitarian exception to the UN sanctions regime announced in the middle of December after detailed negotiation by those members. This is an extraordinarily important decision which will enable agencies to operate without fear or favour and enable operations to continue. We thank the Security Council for that, and also other Member States that made exemptions from their own sanction regimes, because the message today is simple: It is our duty to save the millions of Afghan lives that are at stake.

We must also act now to prevent the quality of life in Afghanistan from deteriorating further.

We recognize that life-saving assistance is but one element for the international response and needs to be linked to attention to the economy, attention to capacity, attention to the stabilization of basic services.

But for now, life-saving assistance is the essential first step, and we rely on your generosity for it.

Thank you very much.