

Afghanistan

Flash Analysis and Prediction

13 September 2021



The UN says staff are increasingly being harassed by the Taliban.

Deborah Lyons, UN Special Envoy on Afghanistan, said on 09 September, that the UN was **"increasingly worried by the growing number of incidents of harassment and intimidation against our national staff"**. This comes following a leaked UN report seen by Reuters on 25 August that catalogued dozens of incidents where Afghan UN staff members have been threatened by Taliban fighters.



Analysis

The Taliban entered Kabul on 15 August, following the swift collapse of the Afghanistan Army, taking control of the country. Senior Taliban figures promised they would be more inclusive and rule with a less extreme hand than they had between 1996 and 2001, and would include women and minorities in decision making. However, their 33-strong cabinet, revealed on 07 September, included no women or minority Afghan citizens, instead, a hard-line all male leadership with at least two members wanted by the FBI and/or on the UN Global Terror watchlist.

The Taliban at first had appeared keen to welcome humanitarian missions, meeting with the Head of OCHA, and aid organisations reporting a cooperative atmosphere. However, harassment by ground Taliban fighters has increased, with reports in mainstream media from 19 August (see **25 August-07 September** Aid in Danger Bi-Monthly News Brief, Afghanistan section) noting Afghan staff had been stopped from travelling or searched by the Taliban. The 25 August report adds that there have been dozens of reports of Afghan UN staff receiving "veiled threats, the looting of UN offices and physical abuse of staff since 10 August" – even prior to the Taliban taking control of the country.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres announced on 13 September that donors had pledged over 1 billion USD at the UN hosted donor conference in Geneva. The US estimates that over 600 million USD are needed before December to keep aid programmes afloat. Many countries willing to provide aid have expressed growing hesitation due to concerns about how funds will be spent with the Taliban in power. The German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said that it was up to the international community to "take responsibility" for the people in Afghanistan. He noted that aid agencies needed "proper access" and aid workers had to be able to carry out their work "without fear of intimidation, tyranny or restriction by the Taliban" after he pledged 500 million EUR to support Afghanistan and neighbouring states.



Prediction

- Afghanistan's economy needs aid donations to keep finances stable, with international donors providing more than 75% of public expenditure over the last 20 years. The Taliban are aware that this needs to continue, whilst the UN itself has urged further global donations "to prevent a total breakdown of the economy and social order". Although the UN donor meeting of 13 September successfully gained promises from international donors, the Taliban will need to prove that they will allow aid agencies to work unhindered as promised to the EU and UN to ensure continued financial support.
- Both global donors and aid organisations will have to expand their role to be able to work round the current financial sanctions in place against some of the Taliban leadership. This will involve creating parallel structures to fund these projects. Aid agencies will need to find ways of operating

within a climate of contradictory messages from the Taliban as to what extent their services are wanted amid threats on the ground.

- The **UN reportedly** reiterated this message to senior Taliban members at a meeting on 04 September where, the UN's emergency-relief coordinator, Martin Griffiths warned "any TV image of flogging, beating, reinforces the 'old' Taliban reputation," and said staff must be allowed to carry through humanitarian projects, with security guarantees paramount. However, although the message was "well received and fully agreed", ensuring it is acted on by Taliban foot soldiers and followed through is **UNLIKELY**: harassment of aid staff, especially females, is therefore liable to increase.



Mitigation

- Organisations who have not received permission to resume activities are well advised to ask staff to work from home.
- Advise staff not to share photos or locations on social media.
- Advise staff to delete apps from phones and laptops and use web browsers instead. Delete browser history daily.

You may be interested in

- Joining our **Afghanistan mailing list** to receive future updates.
- Afghanistan **Data**: Including aid workers killed, kidnapped and arrested (KKA) so far this year.
- Violence Against and Obstruction of **Health Care** in Afghanistan in 2020

Help support our work by sharing this resource with your networks. Please copy and paste this link: bit.ly/AfghanistanFlash13Sept2021

This Vigil Insight report is published by Insecurity Insight. It is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of Insecurity Insight and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the U.S. government.

Insecurity Insight. 2021. 'Afghanistan: Vigil Insight Flash Analysis and Prediction, 13 September 2021.' Switzerland: Insecurity Insight.

