

**Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief  
Coordinator Martin Griffiths' remarks at High-Level Ministerial Event on The  
Humanitarian Situation in Afghanistan**

*Geneva, 13 September 2021*

*As delivered*

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Last week, as the Secretary-General has already mentioned, I travelled to Afghanistan. I met with the de facto authorities, members of the humanitarian community and Afghan men and women.

I saw for myself the conditions on the ground and the work of the humanitarian community.

I left in no doubt that the people of Afghanistan – especially Afghan women and girls – need us more than ever.

The upheavals of recent weeks are deepening a pre-existing humanitarian crisis. They threaten, as the Secretary-General has already said, to tip the country into catastrophe. We have already heard about the dire humanitarian needs from the Secretary-General.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

We have all been watching – the whole world has been watching – in horror the scenes of turmoil and desperation unfolding in Afghanistan in recent weeks.

Today is about turning exactly that concern into action.

The humanitarian system needs immediate, generous, flexible funding.

And you have been generous. Donors have given more than US\$500 million to the humanitarian response in Afghanistan in 2020. With that funding, agencies and national and international NGOs have helped 8 million people in Afghanistan so far this year.

Your support to the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund has allowed us to be at the forefront of the response, translating \$70 million from donor Governments here present into life-saving humanitarian action by some 44 NGOs and local partners.

But more is now needed.

With \$606 million in this flash appeal today, we can help nearly 11 million people over the next four months.

The lives of millions of Afghan civilians are at stake. So, any sanctions or counter-terrorism measures applied by Member States must always exclude, exempt impartial humanitarian activities from their scope.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The humanitarian community stands with the people of Afghanistan.

We are determined to stick by them as they enter this next deeply uncertain phase. And as we help them deal with the immediate humanitarian crisis in front of us, we will also help them protect hard-won development gains.

The role of women and girls is crucial, as anywhere. They must have access to education, they must have rights and access to all other essential services, as anywhere else in the world.

A better future for Afghanistan in particular depends on the meaningful participation of women in all sectors of Afghanistan's economy and governance.

I mentioned my visit to Kabul last week where I met with the Taliban leadership, and we discussed and agreed on several important issues. We have received assurances in writing subsequently. Please allow me to read excerpts from the letter. I quote:

- 1. We assure you that we will remove previous and current impediments in front of your assistance and all related projects working under supervision of UN and other international organizations in Afghanistan, and all partners will be fully allowed to help the vulnerable people in Afghanistan in the current situation.*
- 2. We will protect life, property and honour of the humanitarian workers and will remove hurdles in front of them.*
- 3. We will safeguard sanctity of the compounds of the United Nations and all other humanitarian organizations and will draft a mechanism on the basis of mutual consent.*
- 4. We have made it clear in all public forums that we are committed to all rights of women, rights of minorities and principles of freedom of expression in the light of religion and culture, therefore we once again reiterate our commitment and will gradually take concrete steps with the help of the international community.*

The letter also includes the Taliban's requests for international support in a number of areas to include reconstruction, counter-narcotics programmes, the need for economic assistance, the return of Afghans on a safe basis and a number of other factors.

In Kabul, I gave my personal thanks and those of the Secretary-General to the humanitarian workers – from UN agencies, and national and international non-

governmental organizations. We work with 156 partners in the Afghan humanitarian programme.

Afghanistan is a dangerous place to be an aid worker. These brave women and men – the majority of them Afghan nationals – put their lives on the line to help others.

And I share the Secretary-General's thanks to each and every one of them.

What we are doing here today is to do everything possible to ensure their efforts are sustained and expanded. The United Nations is rapidly increasing staff presence, mobility and delivery to meet the extraordinary needs facing the people.

The Secretary-General has already referred to the resumption of UN air operations. We also had written agreements and security commitments with the Taliban only yesterday as regards UN road missions, which have now started to take place from today.

Now is the time not only to resume operations and mobility, but to expand beyond what was possible in recent years. And we face the prospect of winter.

United Nations imports of essential supplies continue. For example, in a joint World Health Organization and World Food Programme operation yesterday, a series of three planes delivered around 50 metric tons of essential drugs to Mazar-i-Sharif. This is the second such delivery.

Finally, it is vital that Afghans do not lose hope.

We can each help by giving generously today and work quickly.

Thank you.