



UN Acting Assistant-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ramesh Rajasingham

Statement on mission to Afghanistan, 5-11 December 2020

I am just completing a week-long visit to Afghanistan to draw attention to the massive increase in humanitarian needs due to COVID-19, conflict and climate change. During my visit, I met with First Vice-President Amrullah Saleh, government ministers, and the provincial governor of Kandahar. I also met with humanitarian and development agencies, including national and international NGOs who are the backbone of the response.

While in Dand District, Kandahar, I visited and spoke to newly displaced people who were among the tens of thousands of people in southern Afghanistan forced to flee conflict that just took place in October. They told me they were farmers who were able to support themselves and their families, but when they fled violence they left behind their homes, land, livestock and livelihoods. Now they are internally displaced and living in tents on the side of a mountain with relief assistance as their only support. The UN and humanitarian partners are providing them with assistance such as food, water, medicine and more. Like these families, 300,000 people across the country have been forced to flee conflict this year.

People in Afghanistan have suffered 40 years of war amid a worsening climate crisis and natural disasters. For most, recovery has never been a realistic option – only survival. Their situation has now been further battered by the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. Unemployment in the formal and informal sectors has risen steeply. Household income and savings have disappeared and needs have increased dramatically. Almost half of children under-five are now facing acute malnutrition and require treatment to save their lives. Everywhere I went people pleaded that what they need most is peace and security. They desperately hope that the Afghanistan Peace Negotiations result in a credible peace that is inclusive of all people in Afghanistan, especially women and girls. The conflict has to stop immediately and civilians must be protected at all costs if they are to have a fighting chance for a normal life.

Humanitarian agencies are stepping up to keep pace with massively increasing needs. Next year, we aim to reach almost 16 million people with assistance — 5 million more than six months ago — or double the number of people compared to a year ago. The drastic increase is due mainly to the needs created by the COVID-19 crisis and conflict, leading a growing need for health and food assistance. Right now, we only have half the money we need to provide life-saving winter support and need an additional US\$71 million.

We are prepared to scale up the response to meet needs; humanitarian capacity in Afghanistan is robust. In fact, our access to vulnerable families remained strong despite the impact of COVID-19. Aid agencies, carrying much risk, have stayed and delivered — reaching 99 per cent of all districts. Throughout the country, almost 8 million people have been provided with humanitarian aid so far this year. In 2021, \$1.3 billion is needed to provide assistance to almost 16 million people. More than ever, we call on the international community to generously support the people of Afghanistan at this critical time.

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