

If the Taliban abuse basic human rights, they cannot expect legitimacy in the eyes of the Afghan people or the international community

Thank you, Mr President. And thank you, Secretary-General, for your briefing.

Mr President, what is happening now in Afghanistan is a tragedy.

We have long believed that the only path to a sustainable peace in Afghanistan and regional stability lay in a negotiated political settlement. We have worked hard to breathe life into peace negotiations between the Afghan Government and the Taliban, working closely with the US, our leading allies and other regional powers.

The Taliban pledged at Doha to engage in those talks in good faith. Their actions on the ground betrayed that promise.

Mr President, the Taliban must immediately do three things.

First, they need to cease all hostilities and military action, to ensure the protection of civilians, and to allow the safe and orderly departure of foreign nationals and others who wish to leave.

Second, they must commit unequivocally not to harbour or give safe haven to terrorist groups which endanger other countries.

And third, the Taliban must honour their promises to protect and uphold human rights, including those of women, girls and minorities. We have seen evidence of Taliban human rights abuses in areas where they have taken control, including persecution of minority groups, harsh restrictions on women, allegations of forced marriage and using civilians as human shields.

If the Taliban continue to abuse basic human rights, they cannot expect to enjoy any legitimacy in the eyes of the Afghan people, or the international community.

Mr President, given the fragile security situation, Afghanistan is now facing a catastrophic humanitarian crisis. Lack of access has masked the true scale of the problem. Half the population were already in need of humanitarian assistance at the start of the year, and the situation is much worse now. The Taliban must respect International Humanitarian Law and permit humanitarian organisations to continue their work with unhindered, safe access to those in need.

The United Kingdom has long been a leading provider of humanitarian aid to Afghans, both in Afghanistan and in the region. Over recent years the UK has been proud to be one of the leading contributors to the Afghanistan

Humanitarian Fund.

We will continue work with our partners in this Council, in the Human Rights Council and most importantly in the region to deliver a more stable and inclusive Afghanistan for all of its people.

It is vital that the international community coordinate closely in the coming days and weeks to ensure that we speak with a single message in our engagement with Afghanistan. The UK will use its Presidency of the G7 and membership of this Council to help forge such closer coordination, and to address the humanitarian plight that the Afghan people now face.

Thank you, Mr President.