

Reinforcing our support for the rights and freedoms of all Afghans

Thank you Madam President. Let me join others in wishing you and your team all the best for your Presidency. And let me thank SRS Lyons and Mariam Safi for their powerful and sobering briefings.

The situation in Afghanistan remains of deep concern. Afghanistan is facing the world's most severe food security crisis and more than half the population is in need of emergency assistance. The risks of a humanitarian catastrophe remain real and urgent action is needed to avert economic collapse.

So, the work of UNAMA and UN leadership in leading an adequately resourced, prioritised and coordinated international response remains absolutely crucial.

The United Kingdom remains one of the foremost supporters of the humanitarian response.

UK aid to Afghanistan has already doubled this year to \$381 million. The UK has also agreed to co-host a Pledging Conference on 31 March to raise funds for the UN's Humanitarian Response Plan. I urge all member states to step up their support.

However, humanitarian assistance can only go so far. We welcome the UN's Transitional Engagement Framework, a whole of UN system approach to the provision of life saving assistance and support for basic human needs. The international community must act quickly to find creative solutions to address the liquidity crisis and to establish principles and mechanisms for providing assistance beyond basic humanitarian aid.

For its part, the Taliban needs to address the international community's concerns, as we set out in Security Council Resolution 2596.

We are particularly concerned by reports of increased reprisals against former security forces and government officials, as well as attacks against minority groups and detentions of civil society representatives.

The recent arrests of female activists, and members of their families, for protesting peacefully in support of women's rights were especially worrying, as were announcements that appear to further restrict women's ability to travel.

In the last few weeks in certain provinces, some women have been able to return to university, and the Taliban has made important public commitments that all girls will be able to return to secondary school at the end of March when schools reopen following winter break.

Educating healthy women and girls will contribute to peace, stability and

development, and we will be watching closely to see that the Taliban meets their commitments

Madam President, it is vital that we in this Council continue to speak with one voice in support of the UN's work in the months ahead, and we look forward to discussions on the upcoming UNAMA mandate renewal.

The United Kingdom fully supports an empowered and effective UN Mission responsible for delivery of the humanitarian response; monitoring and advocating for the freedoms and rights of all Afghans; and promoting stability. We hope all members of the Security Council unite behind this in support of the people of Afghanistan.

Thank you.