

# Special Session of the Human Rights Council on Afghanistan: UK Statement

Madam President, High Commissioner Bachelet, Colleagues,

The United Kingdom welcomes this session and wishes to add its thanks to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation for requesting it.

The United Kingdom – like other partners and countries – remains gravely concerned about the human rights situation in Afghanistan.

And I am particularly grateful to Shahrzad Akbar [Chairperson for the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission] for her insights that she has provided to the Council today.

Over the last twenty years, the United Kingdom and our NATO allies have worked to promote human rights in Afghanistan, especially for women and girls.

Twenty years ago almost no girls went to school, and women were banned from positions of governance. Now, 3.6 million Afghan girls are in school, and women hold over a quarter of the seats in Afghanistan's parliament.

Maternal mortality has almost halved, and infant mortality has decreased faster than in any low income country.

These gains must not be reversed.

We therefore urge the Taliban to ensure the protection of civilians, to refrain from reprisals, and to uphold human rights, especially those of women, children and members of minorities, including all ethnic and religious communities – a point well-articulated by the High Commissioner.

Those who have worked tirelessly to improve human rights in Afghanistan, including civil society, human rights defenders, and members and staff of the Human Rights Commission: they must not be harmed.

We urge the Taliban to allow the safe and orderly departure of foreign nationals, and those who wish to leave Afghanistan.

Madam President, the Taliban need to make a political decision to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. And they must understand that they will be held accountable if they do fail to do so.

We also call for a coordinated and concerted effort from the international community to address the humanitarian emergency, which has been exacerbated by famine, COVID and internal displacement.

And let me assure you of this, Madam President, finally: the UK will play its part. We have already announced a doubling our humanitarian aid and

development assistance commitment to Afghanistan, to £286 million.

Madam President,

The Council has a crucial role to play. The international community has a crucial role to play in holding the Taliban to account – their actions must match their words. And collectively, we must give the human rights situation our total and utter focus, sustained attention in future sessions.

Thank you.