

UK co-hosts Afghanistan Pledging Conference 2022: Foreign Secretary's speech

Secretary-General, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for joining this critical event.

As a direct result of the Taliban's violent takeover, Afghanistan is the scene of the world's largest humanitarian crisis.

...More than twenty million people in dire need of humanitarian support...Over one million children at risk of dying from hunger.

Even while we respond urgently to the crisis in Ukraine, we can't neglect the people of Afghanistan.

That is why the United Kingdom is proud to be co-hosting this conference with the United Nations, Qatar, and Germany, to strengthen the international response which has already saved lives this winter.

The UK has led by example.

Under our G7 Presidency, we rallied our allies in calling on the Taliban to respect the freedom and human rights of all Afghans.

We've doubled UK aid to Afghanistan, disbursing £286 million – \$380 million – this financial year. And I am pleased to announce that we will match that with the same amount in the financial year which starts tomorrow.

As part of a global effort, we have provided health services for over 300,000 people.

We have provided over 6 million people with emergency health, food, water, shelter and education support through the UN Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund.

I want to thank the UN agencies and NGOs for working hard to deliver in these tough times.

We worked closely with partners in the UN Security Council to agree the humanitarian exception to the UN Afghanistan sanctions regime.

But there is more we can, and must, do together.

Now is the time to dig deep by pledging to support the Afghan population, particularly those most in need.

The UN has launched its largest ever appeal, for Afghanistan this year.

We need to work through the UN to deliver real change for the Afghan people,

upholding their rights and holding the Taliban to account.

Our friends and partners in the region continue to play a critical role.

I'd like to thank countries across the region that have offered support and delivered urgent humanitarian aid. I especially welcome the OIC's new trust fund.

We know there are no easy fixes to Afghanistan's problems.

Whilst humanitarian assistance is vital now, it won't be enough to restart Afghanistan's economy.

All Afghans have the right to basic services like education and health.

And we want to see Afghanistan able to grow so it can in time finance its own development.

But our potential to provide support will depend on how constructively the Taliban engage on key issues like the rights of women and girls and also ethnic and religious minorities.

Women and girls are amongst the most marginalised groups. They have been denied opportunities in education and employment – which are key drivers of equality.

No nation can succeed if half of its population is held back.

Women and girls must be allowed the chance to study at all levels. Children have the right, regardless of where they are born, to build their own future through education.

Most Afghan women suffer violence in their lifetime, and more girls are being pushed into early marriages.

That isn't acceptable, and it is why we must put women and girls at the heart of our response.

Afghan women are fierce advocates for their country and deserve the opportunity to realise their potential.

The UK is committed that at least 50% of those we reach with our aid should be women and girls.

We'll continue to monitor the Taliban's actions, especially in this area.

We have to work in unison to deliver a better future for Afghanistan.

And by stepping up to the plate, we can enable freedom to flourish.

Our aim cannot be merely for the Afghan people to survive – we want them to thrive.

And that's the key to building a better and safer future for us all.

Thank you for your support.