

Team of Humanitarian Experts Concludes Mission to Afghanistan and Calls for Support to Life-Saving Humanitarian Action

(Kabul, 25 February 2022): Concluding a five-day field mission to observe the dire humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, a delegation of senior UN and NGO representatives have found that humanitarian organizations have shown their ability to scale up operations to provide life-saving assistance to people who desperately need aid.

In Kabul and travelling to humanitarian projects in Kandahar, Panjwai, and Spin-Boldak, the team met with frontline aid workers, healthcare professionals, and humanitarian coordination teams. They also spoke with women and men directly affected by decades of conflict and displacement, climate events including recurrent drought, and the severe economic decline in Afghanistan since 15 August.

“The enormity of human suffering and the urgent needs of Afghans was tragically evident from what we saw and the people we spoke with during our mission, but it was also clear that humanitarians remain absolutely committed to deliver principled and unconditional humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan,” said Reena Ghelani, Director of Operations and Advocacy Division at OCHA. “As the humanitarian and economic crises in Afghanistan grow, the resolve of the international community must remain steadfast in support of humanitarians, health-workers, and other frontline responders.”

The group of senior humanitarian professionals visiting Afghanistan represent the Emergency Directors Group, an advisory body that provides recommendations to the international humanitarian community on strategic and operational issues.

“I met a woman who told us she has not cooked in the last 14 days because her kitchen is empty. I have seen first-hand women skipping meals to ensure their children and families are fed first, and this is simply unacceptable,” said Deepmala Mahla, Vice President of Humanitarian Affairs at CARE. “People need access to basic services like food, education, the ability to heat their homes in freezing temperatures, and people need cash to pay for their needs and choices. We as an international community have to come together to serve the people of Afghanistan, because every single day we delay means lives lost.”

Despite an extremely challenging operating environment, including ongoing banking and liquidity constraints, humanitarian organizations operating in Afghanistan are scaling up operations and are achieving their objectives in providing humanitarian aid to vulnerable people in need.

In the last quarter of 2021, humanitarian partners assisted almost double the number of people reached earlier in the year. By the end of 2021, humanitarian partners reached 19.6 million people across the country, 2 million people more than the 17.7 million people initially prioritized in the 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan. By December 2021, 180 humanitarian partners – both international and national – had delivered multi-sector assistance across 397 of the 401 districts of Afghanistan.

“Now is the time to stand by the people of Afghanistan, we don’t have a minute to spare and right now reaching those in the remotest and furthest parts of the country is a priority” said Margot van der Velden, Director of Emergencies at WFP. “Families have already gone through so much. I met women who want jobs, mothers who have no food and their children are malnourished.”

The level of humanitarian needs in Afghanistan is unprecedented. Over 24 million people – 59 per cent of the population – now require lifesaving assistance, a staggering 30 per cent higher than in 2021. The second severe drought in four years combined with disruptions to agricultural production have increased the risk of food insecurity and water shortages. Houses and shelters that were severely damaged over decades of conflict urgently need to be repaired, including for displaced people who wish to return home. Livelihoods have been devastated by the economic crisis. People’s limited reserves have been exhausted, forcing many into harmful coping mechanisms to survive, including

child marriages and child labour. Women and girls are particularly affected amidst a tightened chokehold on their human rights, participation in society, ability to work, and access to education.

Launched by the UN and humanitarian partners on 11 January, the 2022 Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan is the largest humanitarian appeal ever launched for a single country, calling for US\$4.44 billion to provide vital humanitarian relief to over 22 million people. If funded, aid organizations can further ramp up the delivery of life-saving food and agriculture support, health services, treatment for malnutrition, emergency shelter, access to water and sanitation, protection, and emergency education.

“Visiting communities in rural Afghanistan highlights just how urgently scaled-up humanitarian assistance, including healthcare, education for girls and boys, and protection, is needed,” said Jeremy Wellard, Head of Humanitarian Coordination at ICVA. “Vital projects are already being delivered by national and international NGOs and their partners, and with further funding and international support much more can and must be done; now and in the future.”

Notes to Editors:

Key facts on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan:

- More than half of the population is facing crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity. Twenty-three million people face acute hunger, close to 9 million them at emergency levels (IPC 4).
- More than half of all children under-five are now expected to face acute malnutrition in 2022. Without urgent life-saving humanitarian aid, over 4 million children under-five will be acutely malnourished this year, over 1 million of them severely so. More than 130,000 children could perish this year without immediate action.
- Millions of displaced people and returnees remain in some form of displacement since 2012 and are living in precarious shelter conditions during the harsh winter and with limited access to basic sanitation facilities and health services.
- Preventing famine demands a combination of food aid and agricultural aid, provided at the right time. Agriculture is key to enabling people to remain in their homes and on their land. There is a need for sustained attention to agriculture to both address existing hunger crisis and avert a wider economic collapse.
- Protection initiatives for the most vulnerable people are needed, including safeguarding their rights to access to basic services.
- The [2022 Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan](#) was launched on 11 January 2022.
- The UK Government recently [announced](#) that it will co-host a high-level pledging summit with the UN in March 2022 to support the response to the growing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

The [Emergency Directors Group](#) is composed of senior humanitarian professionals who advise on strategic and operational issues for the [Inter-Agency Standing Committee \(IASC\)](#), a long-standing and high-level humanitarian coordination forum bringing together aid organizations to formulate policy, set strategic priorities, and mobilize resources in response to humanitarian crises

The mission team was in Afghanistan between 20-24 February 2022 and was composed of the following emergency directors:

- **Ms. Reena Ghelani**, Director of Operations and Advocacy Division, OCHA
- **Ms. Margot van der Velden**, Director of Emergencies, WFP
- **Mr. Jeff Labovitz**, Director of Operations and Emergencies, IOM
- **Mr. Jeremy Wellard**, Head of Humanitarian Coordination, ICVA
- **Ms. Shoko Shimosawa**, Director of Emergency, Security and Supply, UNHCR
- **Ms. Deepmala Mahla**, Vice President of Humanitarian Affairs, CARE
- **Mr. Manuel Fontaine**, Director of Office of Emergency Programmes, UNICEF
- **Mr. Altaf Musani**, Director of Health Emergency Interventions, WHO

Media Resources

- Hand-out photos from the mission are available to the press at: <https://bit.ly/3LTWx1Y>
- B-roll video from the mission is available upon on UNifeed at: <https://bit.ly/3t7DAk4>

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