



Preventing mass starvation in Afghanistan

A letter to the international community

We, the Council on State Fragility, call on the international community to not abandon the people of Afghanistan and to take urgent action to prevent mass starvation over the coming winter months.

Forty years of war, recurrent natural disasters, chronic poverty, drought and the COVID-19 pandemic have had a devastating impact on the people of Afghanistan.

The world watched in shock as the rapid collapse of the Afghan government unfolded and the country spiralled into chaos, culminating in Kabul falling into the hands of the Taliban movement on 15 August 2021.

More than 600,000 people have been displaced due to the escalating conflict, and 8.7 million Afghans are now at risk of famine-like conditions. An additional 14.1 million face crisis levels of acute food insecurity. While all groups across the country have been impacted, the consequences for women and girls have been most acutely felt.

The suspension of foreign aid to the country is a significant contributor to the unfolding humanitarian crisis. Afghanistan is highly dependent on foreign aid, which constitutes around 43% of Afghanistan's GDP and accounts for about 75% of government spending on services including education, health, and infrastructure. In addition to the cessation of bilateral aid by major Western donors, the International Monetary Fund has halted Afghanistan's access to its resources, and the World Bank suspended disbursements from the \$12.9 billion Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund that it administers on behalf of donors. Roughly \$9 billion in foreign reserves belonging to Afghanistan's central bank have also been frozen.

The global community is facing an urgent challenge: how to support the people of Afghanistan, prevent mass starvation, and avoid a complete collapse of basic services at a time when international organisations and key countries are, understandably, unwilling to immediately recognise the Taliban regime.

We, therefore, urgently call for the following:

First, it is important to recognise that inclusive peace is key to stability. There remains as much need for an inclusive political settlement in Afghanistan today as there was before the Taliban took over Kabul. Rather than write off the Afghan peace process as dead in the water, it is more constructive to view it as a multi-year, adaptive, and ongoing process of bringing all sides together to build bridges and reach a common understanding of the future of Afghanistan.





The past mistakes of exclusion and the pitfalls of winner-takes-all politics should be avoided as they will only lead to endless cycles of conflict in Afghanistan. Local consensus-building mechanisms such as the loya jirga, a meeting of the elders to strike a consensus among the country's tribes on decisions of national importance, should be prioritised and supported.

Second, as Afghanistan continues to slip into a devastating economic and humanitarian crisis, there is one global actor that can help the country pull

through: the United Nations. While its member states continue to debate whether to recognise the Taliban's government, the UN can still play a significant role in supporting the Afghan people. A critical first step is for the UN Secretary-General, acting with the full support of a united Security Council, to strengthen the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan, send his Special Representative to be based in Kabul with their team and the staff of UN agencies, and tasked with maintaining persistent, consistent, and clear engagement and communication channels with the Taliban leadership and ensuring an integrated approach across humanitarian, development, and peace efforts. The UN and its agencies are not new to this: there have been models where a strong, coordinated UN response had a clear impact in difficult contexts – for example in North Korea, Yemen, and Sudan. In Afghanistan itself, UN agencies have already been successfully negotiating and delivering programmes in Taliban-controlled areas outside of Kabul.

Third, Afghanistan's immediate neighbours, primarily Iran and Pakistan, as well as key regional actors engaged in the country such as Qatar, Turkey, and India have a critical role to play in stabilising the country. The international community should urge these countries to help peace efforts in Afghanistan and to align their support to existing constructive engagement by regional actors, such as Qatar, who have established a track record as trusted interlocutors between the Taliban and the international community.

The crisis in Afghanistan is severe, but the international community can and should step up to support Afghans at this deeply challenging time. We need the UN's leadership, and we need to urgently channel the knowledge and experience we have gained from similar situations to support reconciliation and peace processes that genuinely work; deploy the key ingredients needed to prevent economic collapse; and utilise the transformational technology we have at our fingertips to deliver aid where it is needed.

About the Council on State Fragility – The Council brings together global leaders who are passionate about addressing the challenges of state fragility and supporting governments of fragile and conflict-affected states as they transition out of fragility. Eradicating extreme poverty and achieving global peace, stability, and prosperity is not feasible without realistic approaches to address the interlocking characteristics that define state fragility, and the Council aims to advance new ideas and evidence-based thinking to forge new approaches in this space.





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