



ACBAR Statement on the 2022 High-level Pledging Conference for Afghanistan

Beyond Saving Lives



ACBAR welcomes the international community's continued commitment to Afghanistan. Large scale humanitarian funding is needed to meet the needs of 24 million people, including 13 million children, who require life-saving assistance this year. The Pledging Conference comes at a time when there are new and competing humanitarian crises that demand global attention. Nonetheless, the catastrophic situation that Afghan families and their children face, both now, and in the months ahead, cannot not be ignored.

At present, 59 percent of the population requires lifesaving assistance. The fact that this reflects more than half the population of Afghanistan speaks volumes of the gravity of the situation. Afghan men, women, and children need unwavering humanitarian assistance to find their way out of this intricate web of crises that their country faces. It is heartbreaking to know that without immediate action, one million children could lose their lives this year because of severe acute malnourishment. This is just a sliver of a wide range of challenges in the country. Therefore, it is important that the requirements of the Humanitarian Response Plan are fully-funded, including key sectors such as protection and education, to deliver a response that is principled, safe, and equitable.

Humanitarian assistance must as much as possible be through or in partnership with national and local humanitarian actors with a strong track record of appropriate and needs-led use of funds. It is critical that



women, girls, boys, and members of ethnic and religious minorities can access humanitarian assistance, especially in the current context of increased vulnerability, displacement, and reduced resilience. In this regard, the ability of

female aid workers to operate safely and freely, as part of humanitarian response teams is indispensable to ensure principled humanitarian action and that women and girls have access to assistance and life-saving services.

Access to liquidity and the absence of a functioning bank system remains one of the most significant challenges to humanitarian operations and scale-up. At the moment, none of the existing financial services used by NGOs for money transfer in Afghanistan are sufficiently safe, scalable, and cost-effective to meet humanitarian needs. Worse still, most mechanisms are almost entirely inaccessible to local aid organizations and Afghans themselves, contributing to rising needs and economic freefall. Humanitarian actors need commitments from Member States to support financing channels to process large-scale humanitarian transactions in Afghanistan along with a framework for tracking and following up on pledges to ensure commitments are met.

The understanding that current economic restrictions are the root cause of exponentially rising humanitarian crises would make it possible for international community to realize that it is essential that the central bank is restored to its previous credentials of being fully functional at the international level, or a similar alternative is found to stabilize the economy, and thus reduce humanitarian needs in the country. Pledging aid money for Afghanistan is not a viable solution unless complemented by strong economic activity to pay salaries, suppliers, and beneficiaries. This needs to be factored into any donor agreements on financial arrangements. The UN, States and International Financial Institutions must commit to develop a shared framework – in collaboration with NGOs – toward supporting the central bank and reinvestment in key public services. We ask donor governments and the international organizations to take bold decisions to help stabilize the financial system and the wider Afghan economy. We urge donors to agree on mechanisms to disburse these funds in line with the basic principles of aid effectiveness, avoiding the creation of parallel structures. The Pledging Conference is a key opportunity for an agreement on a coherent roadmap to safeguard critical services and financial institutions from collapsing.

Despite many challenges, providing principled assistance in Afghanistan is indeed possible, thanks to a continued, transparent, context-specific access negotiations that include enhancing the authorities' understanding of humanitarian work and organizations; international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles; compliance requirements; and women's inclusion in humanitarian work. Engagement of the international community with the authorities at all levels in Afghanistan would further support and facilitate a scaled-up humanitarian response in Afghanistan.

ACBAR therefore calls on Member States to immediately and fully fund with maximum flexibility the Humanitarian Response Plan so that partners can further ramp up the delivery of food and agriculture support, health services, malnutrition treatment, emergency shelter, access to water and sanitation, protection, and emergency education. Measures must be put in place to ensure that these funds are accessible to NGOs and local CSOs – who are crucial in effectively reaching affected populations.

KEY ACTION MESSAGES TO MEMBER STATES

- Ensure that any sanctions or counterterrorism measures comply with IHL (International Humanitarian Law) and international human rights law, and do not impede the carrying out of impartial humanitarian assistance activities. Continue to support humanitarian safeguards in sanctions regimes and pro-actively reach out to banks to provide additional reassurances.



- Fund multi-year, flexible, and directly available assistance where possible to frontline NGOs, safeguarded from impediments to principled humanitarian action caused by sanctions, counter-terrorism measures, and other similar restrictive measures. Donors should promote localization through strengthening local and national NGOs with continued funding and long-term support.
- Agree on mechanisms to disburse funds in line with the basic principles of aid effectiveness, avoiding the creation of parallel structures.
- Continue supporting the payment to essential civil servants such as teachers and health workers; this would not only stimulate public sector activity but would inject cash into the wider economy.
- Address the barriers to continued provision of principled humanitarian assistance to people in need, and to not impede the delivery of crucial private sector services to Afghanistan, including banking services, vital imports, and humanitarian supplies.
- Advocate for gender equity as a part of a principled humanitarian action and drive collective positioning on women's unfettered work in humanitarian operations as well as women's and girls' equitable access to humanitarian assistance and basic services.
- Leverage diplomatic influence to spotlight operational constraints and shrinking humanitarian space in order to support all Afghans with lifesaving humanitarian relief.
- Prioritize risk management in both policy and practice for contextual, programmatic, and contextual risks to humanitarian organizations, staff members, and operations through increased investment in resources and capacity, and greater coordination among all actors.



Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR)
Published March, 2022

Website: www.acbar.org

Cover Photo: World Vision International

An elderly woman is one of the beneficiaries of the Unconditional Cash Distribution Programme in Pakyal by World Vision International

For more information, contact our Manager Advocacy & Communications

at: advocacymanager@acbar.org