

Joint Statement by the ACBAR Advocacy Working Group: Five Years On, Afghanistan Must Not Be Forgotten

Five years after Afghanistan's political transition, international support has helped prevent one of the world's largest humanitarian crises from becoming an irreversible catastrophe. Yet nearly half of the population still requires humanitarian assistance. The challenge now is not only to sustain life-saving support, but to reduce the vulnerabilities that continue to drive repeated crisis.

Support since 2021 has saved lives, sustained essential services and helped millions of Afghans withstand drought, earthquakes, economic contraction and unprecedented population movements. But emergency assistance cannot, on its own, address the conditions that repeatedly push families and communities back into crisis.

The resilience of Afghan people, communities and civil society organisations must not be mistaken for recovery. Fragile livelihoods, weak local economies, water insecurity, climate pressures, limited access to services and constrained institutional capacity continue to drive humanitarian need. Afghanistan remains one of the world's most challenging places for children to grow up, while women and girls face severe restrictions on education, employment, mobility and participation in public life.

Since 2023, more than six million Afghans have returned from neighbouring countries, many under coercive or involuntary circumstances, often with few assets and limited livelihood opportunities. These pressures are being absorbed by communities already facing economic fragility, climate shocks and protection risks.

Humanitarian resources are also declining. Around half of Afghanistan's population requires assistance, while the 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan remains critically underfunded. Life-saving assistance therefore remains indispensable. But preserving humanitarian assistance alone will not change Afghanistan's trajectory.

The international community should pursue three complementary priorities:

First, protect essential humanitarian assistance. Continued support is necessary to save lives and prevent further deterioration. But emergency assistance should be one part of a broader approach, not the endpoint of international engagement.

Second, invest in tackling the drivers of vulnerability. International support should strengthen the foundations that allow communities to withstand shocks and reduce reliance on repeated emergency assistance. This means sustained investment in livelihoods, local markets, agriculture, water security, climate resilience, basic services, community infrastructure and economic opportunity, alongside the systems and institutions needed to sustain them. This is particularly important in areas receiving large numbers of returnees, where short-term assistance alone cannot support durable reintegration.

Third, strengthen Afghan systems and leadership. Afghan communities, civil society organisations and local and national organisations should play a stronger role in identifying priorities, shaping approaches and making decisions about the support their communities receive. International engagement should strengthen, rather than bypass, local capacities and systems. Afghan actors should be partners in setting priorities and adapting programmes, not simply implementers of externally determined plans.

Predictable, flexible and multi-year financing is essential if structural vulnerabilities are to be addressed rather than repeatedly managed through short funding cycles.

The urgent humanitarian posture of 2021 should not become a permanent model of crisis management. International engagement must seek not only to prevent catastrophe, but also to reduce the conditions that make repeated humanitarian intervention necessary.

Five years after the political transition, Afghanistan stands at a crossroads. Humanitarian assistance remains essential, but it must be accompanied by sustained investment in resilience, livelihoods, local systems and Afghan leadership, helping communities not only survive the next shock, but recover, adapt and shape their own futures.