



## **STATEMENT OF ACBAR DIRECTOR AT THE LAUNCH OF AFGHANISTAN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PLAN (HRP)**

January 11, 2022

The scale of suffering in Afghanistan today is unprecedented. The Afghan population is hanging by a thread- with their resilience stretched beyond limits and facing extreme hardship. Today, more than ever, the majority of the Afghan people are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance and access to basic essential services.

Delivering principled, safe, and accountable assistance in Afghanistan, despite the multitude of challenges, is possible. Overall, ACBAR members report that they have better access now to communities in need than they have had for a long time. As the humanitarian community aims to scale up, comprehensive, transparent and context-specific access negotiation must remain a top priority.

Authorities at all levels (national and local) have been largely receptive and encouraging of humanitarian assistance, indicating space for principled humanitarian action may be opening up. Collectively, we have a window of opportunity to reach people with urgent assistance now – including in areas previously inaccessible. Of course, there remains a lot of uncertainty with regards to upcoming policies and chains of command. There is a dire need to enhance the present authorities' understanding of humanitarian organisations and their work, International Humanitarian Law, our humanitarian principles, our ways of working and why they are important, compliance requirements, and, why the inclusion of women in humanitarian work is vital for any humanitarian response. Female staff, for example, are still facing multiple access challenges. Organizations have reported that female staff movement to offices even in Kabul have been stopped by the de facto authorities, asking for a justification to allow female staff to attend office.

The recent Security Council unanimous resolution regarding a humanitarian exemption carve-out from sanctions is indeed encouraging. We urge that as a next step that Member States domesticize the December resolution so that NGOs can operate in Afghanistan and deliver the required humanitarian assistance without any fear of legal consequences.

We also urge the international community to rapidly identify functional interim and long-term international banking solutions to overcome the biggest operational obstacle to humanitarian assistance, and enable financial transactions that allow us to adequately scale up. Existing alternatives to bank transfers are costlier, riskier and are not predictable enough. This is causing aid teams to divert precious time and resources that would be otherwise be dedicated to programmes.

An overwhelmed banking system in Afghanistan and the unprecedented instability of the Afghani currency undermines the ability of NGOs to carry out activities in due time. Liquidity is the prime concern of all humanitarian organizations. National NGOs are particularly hit hard by the liquidity

challenges and seek support from the international community not only in terms of funding, but in addressing the liquidity crisis. A number of our NNGO members report financial challenges, and as a result imminent collapse. NNGOs are the backbone of any humanitarian response, and without them fully operational, the delivery of humanitarian assistance will be severely hindered.

August 2021 upheaval in the government structure and take-over by de facto authorities has resulted in tremendously blurred lines between humanitarian and development needs of the country. In a precarious humanitarian situation like that of Afghanistan, it is imperative that the definition of humanitarian action and priorities are clearly communicated with all de facto authorities, and that all actors – de facto authorities and the international community alike avoid the politicization of any assistance to Afghanistan.

We urge the international community to collectively advocate with the de facto authorities for consistent, clear policies in all sectors affecting humanitarian actors, in order to contribute to viable solutions to operational issues such as employment of women and interference of third parties and de facto authorities in programming and operations.