

Position Paper for Parliamentary Hearing on Afghanistan

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Marten Treffers, interim Country Director Cordaid Afghanistan

marten.treffers@cordaid.org

1. About Cordaid

Cordaid is an internationally operating value-based emergency relief and development organisation, working in and on fragility. The organisation has been active in Afghanistan since 2001. Abiding by the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and operational independence, Cordaid is committed to stand by the people of Afghanistan and deliver its lifesaving support.

2. Context

Afghanistan has suffered four decades of war and conflict that have killed, displaced, and disrupted millions of lives. At the same time, the country is prone to natural hazards including droughts, floods, earthquakes, and harsh winters in its mountainous areas. Through our work and need-based programming, we are committed to delivering lifesaving, resilience, and development assistance to the people of Afghanistan. The regime change in August 2021 has led to an unprecedented humanitarian, economic and development crisis which jeopardize the achievements of 20 years of international engagement in Afghanistan. The human rights, and in particular, the women's rights situation in the country is also very worrisome.

3. Our role

To address the needs of the most vulnerable people including women, children, elderly, disabled and chronically ill people, Cordaid is providing needs-based emergency and early recovery assistance to those affected by conflict and or natural disasters, including internally displaced people and returnees. Cordaid aims to reduce the vulnerability of affected people through the provision of food and short-term livelihood support, shelter and non-food items, water and sanitation services and hygiene promotion and multi-purpose cash transfers. Because of the current multifaceted crisis, Cordaid is also providing emergency health services and intends to continue supporting the health sector also for the longer term. Cordaid is strengthening private sector initiatives mostly in urban areas, but rural livelihood interventions are strongly needed too. In the delivery of principled humanitarian assistance Cordaid is adhering to the Core Humanitarian and SPHERE standards, and protection and gender are mainstreamed.

4. Humanitarian crisis

Currently more than 22 million people (out of 35 million) in Afghanistan need humanitarian assistance, and 5,7 million Afghanistan that are outside the country need lifesaving support. For this reason the UN launched last week a funding appeal of over USD 5 billion, the largest ever appeal for a single country for humanitarian assistance and three times the amount needed, and actually fundraised in 2021. The UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths warned that if insufficient action is taken now to support the Afghanistan and regional response plans, "next year we'll be asking for \$10 billion". Most needs are in the sectors of Food Security, Health, Protection and WASH.

Responding to questions from journalists that the funding would be used to support the Taliban's grip on de facto government, Mr. Griffiths insisted that it would go directly into the

pockets of “nurses and health officials in the field” so that these services can continue, not as support for State structures.

Indeed, there are sufficient operational organizations on the ground – UN, INGOs and Afghan NGOs – able and willing to provide the needed humanitarian support. It is a matter of political will to make sure the funding appeal is met.

The Netherlands have provided a significant amount of humanitarian assistance in 2021, and more has been announced in the recent parliamentary letter for 2022, but we plead for an even higher Dutch contribution in short term. The assistance is needed very quickly, in light of the harsh Afghan winter, which make the circumstances for many Afghans even worse.

>> The Netherlands and other countries should quickly scale up humanitarian funding for Afghanistan and make sure the money is not only committed but channeled as soon as possible via humanitarian organizations.

5. Collapse of basic services

One of the few successes of 20 years’ involvement of the international community in Afghanistan was the relatively high quality of the Afghan health and education systems. This achievement has come now very much under pressure as a result of the freezing by many donors of structural funding for Afghanistan as a result of the UN Sanctions regime. Although we understand and appreciate the reasons behind it, we are very concerned what this will mean for the access of Afghan women, men and children to healthcare services and the access of children to schools. If the situation does not improve rapidly, it will without any doubt lead to the creation of another lost generation which is completely disillusioned by the lack of perspectives for the future.

>> It is good to observe that The Netherlands, Germany and other countries are discussing ways to resume funding in basic services, without channeling via state structures. We plead for a coordinated, longer-term approach by the international community. The Netherlands government, and like-minded countries, are well positioned to play a leading role in this process.

6. Economic crisis and livelihoods

Uncertainty, lack of financial means and the difficult supply of goods have caused the collapse of the Afghan private sector. This has a huge negative impact on incomes and has led to a deepening of the poverty situation of many Afghans, especially in the rural areas where markets currently hardly function, and imported goods arrive much harder.

>> Afghanistan has again become completely dependent on external assistance. In the last two decades the private sector, especially the agricultural sector, at least resulted in some autonomy from the aid flows of the donor community. We plead for a strategy to find ways to stimulate the Afghan private sector, amongst others by solving the very pressing cash issue (item 7).

7. Cash issue

The banking system in Afghanistan has been non-functional since the take-over by the Taliban. This has resulted in the fact that cash money is now a very scarce good in the country. Afghan NGO’s, INGOs, private sector companies and basically the entire population have tremendous difficulties to generate cash, to pay salaries of staff and to procure goods. There are alternative systems in place to get cash in the country, like the hawala system, but most of the donors (including the Dutch government) do not allow this system to be used by

implementing organizations because of the lower transparency of transactions and the risk of fraud.

>> The cash situation is becoming more pressing every day and needs to be resolved soon to make sure that organizations like Cordaid can continue its operations. We plead for a pragmatic approach by donors to allow the hawala system until a more structural solution has been found to resume banking services.

8. Position of women

The situation for women in Afghanistan has steeply deteriorated since August 2022. New conditions have been introduced by the Taliban leadership that make it more difficult for Afghan women to go to work. For example, it is mandatory for single women to be accompanied by a male family member (mahram). We are also very concerned by the fact that only girls younger than 12 can go to school. All this is a strong encroachment on the rights and freedoms of women and girls with long-term consequences.

>> The Netherlands have traditionally been very vocal and committed to support the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, and we ask for a continuation of that support under the new circumstances. By closely monitoring the situation and supporting initiatives that contribute to women's rights and gender equality in Afghanistan. One of the concrete contributions can be via support to basic services (item 4): women teachers, nurses and doctors are desperately needed to sustain the education and health system. By supporting their work, their freedoms and rights will already be enhanced, and from there on can be expanded.