**Humanitarian assistance for the Afghan people**

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Pakistan is hosting the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers’ Extraordinary Session on the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan in Islamabad on December 19. There are a number of questions. Will the meeting also discuss recognition of the Taliban regime? Why is the humanitarian situation so dire? What will happen if not addressed? How can it be mitigated? What can the OIC hope to achieve by itself and as a catalyst? What are the concrete measures it should recommend as the conference outcome and the difficult implementation process beyond working towards a sustainable humanitarian effort? The success of the conference in unfolding more humanitarian assistance for the Afghan process will not depend upon polemics, rather on response measures set in motion through an institutionalised process involving governments within and outside the OIC, IFIs, the UN family, and civic society.

As to the scope of the meeting, recognition of the Taliban regime will not be on the table. That there is a humanitarian crisis is recognised on all sides. The UN bodies estimate that 22.8 million Afghans face crisis levels of hunger which worsen daily; 3.2 million children are at risk of extreme malnutrition; 665,000 people have been internally displaced this year, adding to the 2.9 million already displaced. 97 percent of Afghans could fall below the poverty line unless this crisis is addressed. Drought affects half of Afghanistan. Afghanistan is in free-fall, the economy is imploding. The suspension of development and external assistance by former donors and the IFIs, coupled with the freezing of Afghan assets abroad, is leading to an economic collapse.

[Audience bashes Mansha Pasha, Junaid Khan on their recent dance video](https://nation.com.pk/18-Dec-2021/audience-bashes-mansha-pasha-junaid-khan-on-their-recent-dance-video)

If the situation worsens economic migrants will flow outwards—towards Pakistan and Iran and then onwards towards Europe. 42 years after the first influx, Pakistan still hosts some 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees, one million Afghan card holder economic migrants, and 1.6 Afghan unregistered economic migrants; four million in all. Iran has a lesser number. In the face of declining and inadequate foreign assistance, increased population, and inadequate resources, Pakistan lacks the capacity to absorb more economic migrants. There is no equitable burden sharing. For instance, between 2001 and 2015 only 9,966 Afghans in Pakistan, of which only 674 from 249 families were registered refugees, were resettled abroad in 18 developed countries. In Europe, economic migrants are already a political issue, fuelling the rise of right-wing parties. Some Afghan migrants have already tried to enter the US through people-smuggling routes via Latin America.

A solution which permits Afghans within their own country to earn a livelihood; to live in honour and dignity with their human rights respected; and look forward to economic, educational, and other opportunities is morally correct and in the interests of the global community. The alternative of an implosion, collapse, and chaos would lead not only to further misery for the long-suffering Afghan people: but also to outward migrant flows, and the rise of terrorist organisations posing a security threat to the region and far beyond.

[ECC approves launch of Ehsaas Targeted Commodity Subsidy Program](https://nation.com.pk/18-Dec-2021/ecc-approves-launch-of-ehsaas-targeted-commodity-subsidy-program)

The reason why economic collapse is around the corner is the result of both the US’ and the UN Security Council’s sanctions regime which have targeted the Taliban since UNSC counter-terrorism Resolution 1267 of October 1999, and subsequent UNSC Resolutions which under mandatory Chapter VII of the UN Charter obliges all UN member states to enforce asset freezes against individuals and entities linked to the Taliban as well as a travel ban, an aviation ban, and an arms import embargo.

Steadily increasing US sanctions since 1999 further enhance the sanctions effect. Of the 155 US sanctions related to Afghanistan since 9/11, roughly 70 percent (107) relate to counterterrorism financing, while nearly all the remaining sanctions involve counternarcotics trafficking. The financial aspect of US sanctions has a chilling effect on potential banking channels as banks and companies are very risk-aversive to transactions even when the US and the UN Security Council permit humanitarian exemptions.

[Gold prices increase Rs750 to Rs 125,850 per tola](https://nation.com.pk/18-Dec-2021/gold-prices-increase-rs750-to-rs-125-850-per-tola)

The US Treasury has, it should be noted first, issued non-public specific licenses and assurances in early September that “authorise the US government and its contractors to support humanitarian assistance to people in Afghanistan, including the delivery of food and medicine.” Secondly, the Treasury issued more extensive, public, general licenses for humanitarian assistance and related activities on September 24, 2021.

$9.4 billion Afghan reserves remain blocked by the US, as is the IMF’s $460 million in emergency reserves for Afghanistan and its capacity to access its special drawing rights(SDRs). Civil servants including teachers, medical staff, and security forces cannot be paid; food and fuel imports not financed; and remittances by the Afghan diaspora to assist their families remain beyond reach.

The international community broadly agrees that the Afghan people need and deserve humanitarian assistance to survive, and perhaps developmental assistance may also gain more acceptance. However the modalities beyond the UN system, which itself is unable to access banking channels inside Afghanistan, remain inchoate.

[Sindh reports one death, 213 COVID-19 cases: Murad Ali Shah](https://nation.com.pk/18-Dec-2021/sindh-reports-one-death-213-covid-19-cases-murad-ali-shah)

This is where the OIC conference comes in. Its first objective should be to provide a mechanism to widen access to funds and in-kind goods for humanitarian assistance. A trust fund preferably based in the Islamic Development Bank with a governance which invites inclusion by the UN and the other IFIs. To begin with, it could use existing UN assistance channels to funnel assistance. Secondly, it should work with both the UN and major donors to negotiate with the US and the UNSC Security sanctions mechanism to rationalise and update the sanctions regime so that humanitarian flows can better recommence.

On the US side, individual listings rather than entire organisations can be proposed. At the end of this year there will be a mandate review by the UNSC 1988 monitoring team which provides an opportunity to review and revise sanctions targeting the Taliban. Priority efforts should be towards the establishment of one or more humanitarian banking channels within Afghanistan exempted from UN and US sanctions. Extensive lobbying work is required.

[One killed, three injured in road mishap in Vehari](https://nation.com.pk/18-Dec-2021/one-killed-three-injured-in-road-mishap-in-vehari)

The third objective should be to set up a dashboard of schools, colleges, medical facilities, irrigation works and power stations; and the numbers of their personnel, as all require finances and in kind assistance for staff salaries, books, and other teaching material, medical supplies, and spare parts to keep working. Such an extendable dashboard would provide a tangible picture to governments and to civic society, which could select specific facilities to assist. The conference must not ignore the power of civic society, including our own, to come forward. We have seen this in every humanitarian disaster, including in the response of our own people and the international community to the October 2005 Earthquake disaster in Pakistan.

Pakistan, a major donor, will continue to provide a logistical land and air gateway for humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. However the gateways from Afghanistan’s other neighbours China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan which has recently extended its already significant electricity supply line in Afghanistan; and Iran must also be recognised and encouraged. The trucking logistics from Pakistan have to be professionally organised, taking a cue from commercial logistic firms that crisscross the world, in order to optimise assistance flows.

The conference has been organised at short notice, and its progress has been commendable. By the time the OIC senior officials meet on the 18th, the organisers must have an outcome document in hand with specific proposals to set this humanitarian process of solidarity in motion so that concrete measures are adopted in the Conference next day and there is a result-oriented framework for follow up action which will deliver.