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## KEY MESSAGES

### SAVING LIVES, SECURING FUTURES: TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN IN AFGHANISTAN

- One year since the Taliban seized power and UNICEF pledged to ‘stay and deliver,’ life in Afghanistan, already strained by decades of insecurity and natural disasters, and now isolated by the global community, has not been better. The country remains in crisis, and it’s a child rights crisis.***
  - Afghanistan has long been one of the toughest places on earth to be a child.
  - But this is a pivotal juncture for a generation of children in Afghanistan. Their rights under attack; their childhoods marred by deprivation.
  - This time last year, 1 million girls were in high school, women could work, the health system functioned, measles and acute watery diarrhoea were less prevalent, water systems were more reliable, girls were better protected from early marriage and families were better able to feed themselves.
  - One year on, the picture is different; the very future of the country’s children is at stake.
  - As a child rights organisation, we were hoping for better. The rhetoric from the de facto authorities’ press conference last August has not completely translated into reality.
- UNICEF salutes the courage and resilience of the people of Afghanistan. We see you; we hear you; and we are staying here with you.***
  - When others left last August, UNICEF stayed and delivered. We’re still here. We’re not leaving. We will not give up on the people of Afghanistan.
  - We’re here for those in need. The poor families who don’t know where their next meal is coming from...the girls who are being denied the education that is their right.
  - We’ve been in Afghanistan for more than 70 years; we have the trust and support of the people of Afghanistan. We couldn’t do what we do without them.
- In the face of alarming restrictions and rollbacks of girls and women liberties in Afghanistan, UNICEF will not stop advocating for them.***
  - UNICEF has been advocating for girls’/women’s rights in Afghanistan for decades.
  - But, since August 15 last year, in an alarming roll-back of their rights, over 1 million girls from grade 7-12 have been barred from high school. Not only is this a violation of their fundamental right to education, it exposes girls to heightened anxiety, early marriage, exploitation and abuse
  - Forbidden from leaving their homes without a ‘mahram’, adolescent girls are languishing at home, missing vital schoolwork, deprived of their friends, and worried about their futures.
  - We’re also struggling to reach adolescent girls with the vital services they need, such as anaemia prevention support and menstrual health and hygiene, which we used to provide at schools.
  - We will not give up on education for children, especially girls. They have a right to education. We want to see every girl and boy across Afghanistan in school and learning. We will continue to advocate to get all children back in school, for as long as it takes.
  - UN Human Rights Commissioner, Michelle Bachelet, has called what’s happening in Afghanistan “*the most serious human rights crisis for girls and women in the world.*”
  - Demand for education nationwide is at an all-time high, particularly in areas where there are no schools and children have been deprived of education for years.
  - UNICEF’s strategy is to respond to the commitment we see from communities to keep schools open for high school age girls by providing 38 million textbooks in schools, training 1,200 female teachers and expanding 10,000 Community-Based Education classes to 17,000 by the year’s end.

- We're also exploring other pathways to education, including financial support to small-scale education initiatives, and lessons on tablets and via radio or TV.
  - The roll back of individual rights of women and girls is also a major blow to the socioeconomic development of Afghanistan and will affect every aspect of its society for years to come. No country can get ahead if half its population is left behind.
- 4. *The deteriorating purchasing power of families, armed conflicts and natural disasters are exacerbating one of the world's largest and most complex humanitarian emergencies and threatening children's rights. 13 million children in Afghanistan need urgent help.***
- With 90% of the country on the brink of poverty, the very youngest are fighting for survival.
  - Families are being crippled by poverty and hunger. Destitute parents are being forced to make desperate choices. We have heard reports of young daughters being exchanged for dowry, children forced to work, and infants being sold.
  - Nutritious food is available but crushing poverty means families simply cannot afford it.
  - Over 3 million children are at risk of acute malnutrition, making them vulnerable to preventable disease. Of them, over 1 million children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition.
  - The malnutrition crisis is fuelled by the worst drought for 37 years. 8 out of 10 Afghans drink contaminated water making them susceptible to repeated bouts of acute watery diarrhoea.
  - Already this year, 288 children have been killed and maimed by explosive remnants of war, reminding us that Afghanistan is one of the most weapons-contaminated countries in the world. Of the victims, children represent 80% of all casualties.
  - Armed conflict did not end with the withdrawal of international military forces. Sporadic fighting and insecurity continue to threaten children and their families.
  - Natural disasters – from drought to earthquakes -- push the poorest further into deprivation.
  - Funding freezes, conditionalities and sanctions, by the global community and with little investment in the nation's development, are making life in Afghanistan more precarious, especially for its youngest citizens.
- 5. *Despite challenges in the operating environment, UNICEF is scaling up, delivering like never before, and achieving results for children.***
- With WHO, UNICEF is working to prevent the collapse of Afghanistan's health system by supporting 2,300 health facilities with operating costs and medicines, and paying the salaries of 24,000 health workers.
  - We've provided treatment to at least 300,000 children with severe acute malnutrition; established 1,000 new nutrition sites, formed over 170 mobile health & nutrition teams to get into previously inaccessible areas, and doubled the number of nutrition counsellors to detect and treat malnutrition before it becomes life-threatening.
  - To alleviate poverty, provide aid with dignity and empower women, we've reached 1 million people with cash transfers – money, that our evaluations show, that goes towards nutritious food, medicines, clothing, school supplies and upkeep of households.
  - We are ready to deliver relief and aid at a moment's notice. Hours after the devastating earthquake in June, we had aid trucks on the road and mobile health and nutrition teams on the ground in the affected communities.
- 6. *UNICEF will continue to engage with the de facto authorities to guarantee access to children in all areas where support is needed.***
- UNICEF doesn't operate unilaterally anywhere. We achieve results for children by working with a range of partners. In Afghanistan, this includes the de facto authorities. We want to recognize the de facto authorities for enabling us more geographical access across the country in the last year, and for allowing us to continue

programming unimpeded. The recent earthquake was a good example of how we worked together, under pressure, to support the communities most in need and get them urgent humanitarian aid.

- As part of a principled humanitarian approach, UNICEF had invested in dialogue and acceptance of programs with the Taliban long before August 2021, so we already had foundations on which to build our technical coordination.
- While the de facto authorities are becoming increasingly interested in how we work and are looking for decision-making roles, UNICEF engages regularly and flexibly with them and we continue to advocate at the highest levels in support of results for children. In particular, we're prioritizing local channels of dialogue that go to the heart of communities.

**7. *The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan has fallen out of the headlines but we cannot turn our backs on the children of Afghanistan.***

- We understand the pressure of different emergencies, including the war in Ukraine. While the global response to the war in Ukraine has been fast and generous, the growing funding and attention on Ukraine risk leaving millions of children trapped in crises around the world, including in Afghanistan, without life-saving help.
- It's vital that support is given equitably to all children. A child is a child, no matter who he is, no matter where she is from.
- To secure their futures, to ensure their rights, and safeguard the gains of the last 20 years, we need the world to come together for the boys and girls of Afghanistan.

**8. *UNICEF needs US\$2 billion to help meet children's immediate humanitarian needs this year. This is the largest single-country appeal in UNICEF's 76-year history.***

- We aim to reach 15 million people, inc. 8 million children, with humanitarian assistance in 2022. The \$2 billion appeal (now only 40% funded) will help avert the collapse of the critical health, nutrition, water, sanitation, education and protection services on which children/families rely for survival.
- UNICEF's priorities include: treating children with severe acute malnutrition, vaccinating children against measles, providing safe water, helping children resume learning, expanding humanitarian cash transfers to meet the basic needs of the most vulnerable, and supporting payments to frontline workers -- health care providers, WASH technicians and social workers.
- Our priorities are not just to save lives today, but to ensure communities receive long-term support for their futures. A solar powered water plant, for example, not only provides safe water today, it's also an investment in the long-term futures of communities. It keeps them together, where their support networks are and where they can access vital services.
- We thank our donors/partners for their generosity to date, but we urge them to continue their lifesaving support to children through funding the HAC – especially with winter around the corner.
- Eight months after its launch, the Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) appeal for Afghanistan is only 40% funded. Programmes that are under-funded are Humanitarian Cash Transfers, Child Protection, and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene.
- We urge the global community to put children first and depoliticise humanitarian aid. We urgently need funding to prevent outbreaks of measles and make water safe to drink. We can only do that by working with our technical counterparts in the de facto authorities.
- The stakes for boys and girls in Afghanistan couldn't be higher right now. They must not be held hostage to politics.