

UN warns Afghanistan at risk of total breakdown



The UN is warning that Afghanistan faces 'total breakdown' without access to funds frozen overseas [File: M Sadiq/EPA]

United Nations, September 10 (RHC)-- The United Nations has warned that Afghanistan is at risk of “total breakdown” of the international community does not find a way to keep money flowing into Afghanistan despite concerns over the Taliban government.

Nearly \$10 billion of Afghanistan’s central bank assets are currently frozen overseas and considered key leverage over the new administration. But the UN special envoy on Afghanistan Deborah Lyons told the Security Council on Thursday that a way needed to be found to get the money into the country “to prevent a total breakdown of the economy and social order” noting that Afghanistan was facing a storm of crises including a plunging currency, a sharp rise in prices for food and fuel and a lack of cash at private banks. The authorities also do not have the funds to pay salaries, she said.

“The economy must be allowed to breathe for a few more months, giving the Taliban a chance to demonstrate flexibility and a genuine will to do things differently this time, notably from a human rights, gender, and counterterrorism perspective,” Lyons told the 15-member Council, saying safeguards could be devised to ensure the funds were not misused.

Foreign donors led by the United States provided more than 75 percent of the public expenditure for the Afghanistan government that crumbled as the US withdrew its troops after 20 years in the country.

President Joe Biden’s administration has said it is open to donating humanitarian aid but says that any direct economic lifeline, including unfreezing the central bank assets, will be contingent on Taliban actions including allowing safe passage to people to leave. The first civilian flight out of Kabul – carrying more than 100 passengers – landed in Qatar on Thursday

The International Monetary Fund has also blocked the Taliban from accessing some \$440 million in new emergency reserves. “The Taliban seeks international legitimacy and support. Our message is simple: any legitimacy and support will have to be earned,” senior US diplomat Jeffrey DeLaurentis told the Security Council.

Russia and China, which has offered millions in emergency aid to the country, have both argued for the release of Afghanistan’s frozen assets. “These assets belong to Afghanistan and should be used for Afghanistan, not as leverage for threats or restraints,” China’s Deputy UN Ambassador Geng Shuang said.

Lyons’s warning came shortly after a stark report from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) that warned the country could be facing universal poverty as the economy contracts. The UNDP says the country of 18 million is already one of the world’s poorest with 72 percent of people living on no more than one dollar a day.

Afghanistan’s UN Ambassador Ghulam Isaczai, who was appointed by the US-backed government that collapsed as the Taliban advanced, urged the Security Council to “withhold any recognition of any government in Afghanistan unless it’s truly inclusive and formed on the basis of free will of the people.”

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