

U.S. drives half of Afghan population to starvation by not releasing frozen funds

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Afghan internally-displaced children sit outside their temporary mud house at Shaidayee refugee camp in Injil district of Herat province, on February 20, 2022. (Photo by AFP)

Kabul, June 9 (RHC)-- The United States continues to drag its feet on unfreezing assets of Afghanistan even as half of the crisis-hit country grapples with acute hunger almost 10 months after the Taliban made a stunning comeback and the U.S.-led forces beat a hasty retreat.

A coalition of family members of 9/11 victims, Afghan diaspora organizations, and diplomats appointed by the former Afghan government have joined the campaign now, calling for the US government to take urgent steps to release the Afghan money.

Following the chaotic and disastrous withdrawal of the US-led allied forces from Afghanistan after the Taliban laid siege to Kabul in August last year, the administration of US President Joe Biden froze Afghanistan's \$7 billion in banking reserves.

The impact of such a decision by Washington has further devastated Afghanistan, already one of the poorest on the earth, where the United Nations estimates that roughly half of the population is currently battling with acute hunger.

Back in February, Biden issued an executive order to set aside half of the frozen \$7 billion for some future undetermined use on behalf of the Afghan people, while ordering the other half to be used to settle lawsuits previously leveled by victims of 9/11 against the Taliban.

Biden's confiscation order means that ordinary Afghans, who still suffering from the collapse of the former government, are now facing a liquidity shock that has left many people unable to withdraw cash or perform even basic financial transactions.

This is while that a recent report compiled by a group of aid agencies estimates that as many as 120,000 Afghan children may have been married off to suitors for financial reasons by families desperate to survive due to extreme poverty.

"There are people waiting in bread lines and very poor children with malnutrition visible in public, but there are also many middle-class people rapidly falling into poverty. This is being driven in part because there's no longer a functioning banking system and people are unable to access their salaries. It's a problem that humanitarian aid alone is not going to be able to solve," said Kelly Campbell, co-founder of the organization 9/11 Families for Peaceful Tomorrows.

She made the remarks after leading a delegation to Afghanistan to observe conditions in the post-Taliban country. "The fact of the matter is that these reserves are the Afghan people's money. The idea that they are on the brink of famine and that we would be holding on to their money for any purpose is just wrong.

The Afghan people are not responsible for 9/11, they're victims of 9/11 the same way our families are. To take their money and watch them literally starve — I can't think of anything more sad," Campbell said.

Washington claims that it fears that if the assets are released, the Taliban will use them to solidify their hold on the country. However, even officials who served under the former Afghan government argue that the funds should be released as the property of the Afghan Central Bank, which is considered an independent entity from the Taliban governing regime, which has not been recognized politically by any country so far.

The Afghan funds in the US are also in part being held up in legal limbo due to lawsuits against the Taliban by families of 9/11 victims, and counter-suits by Afghan advocates to release all of the money to the starving country.



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