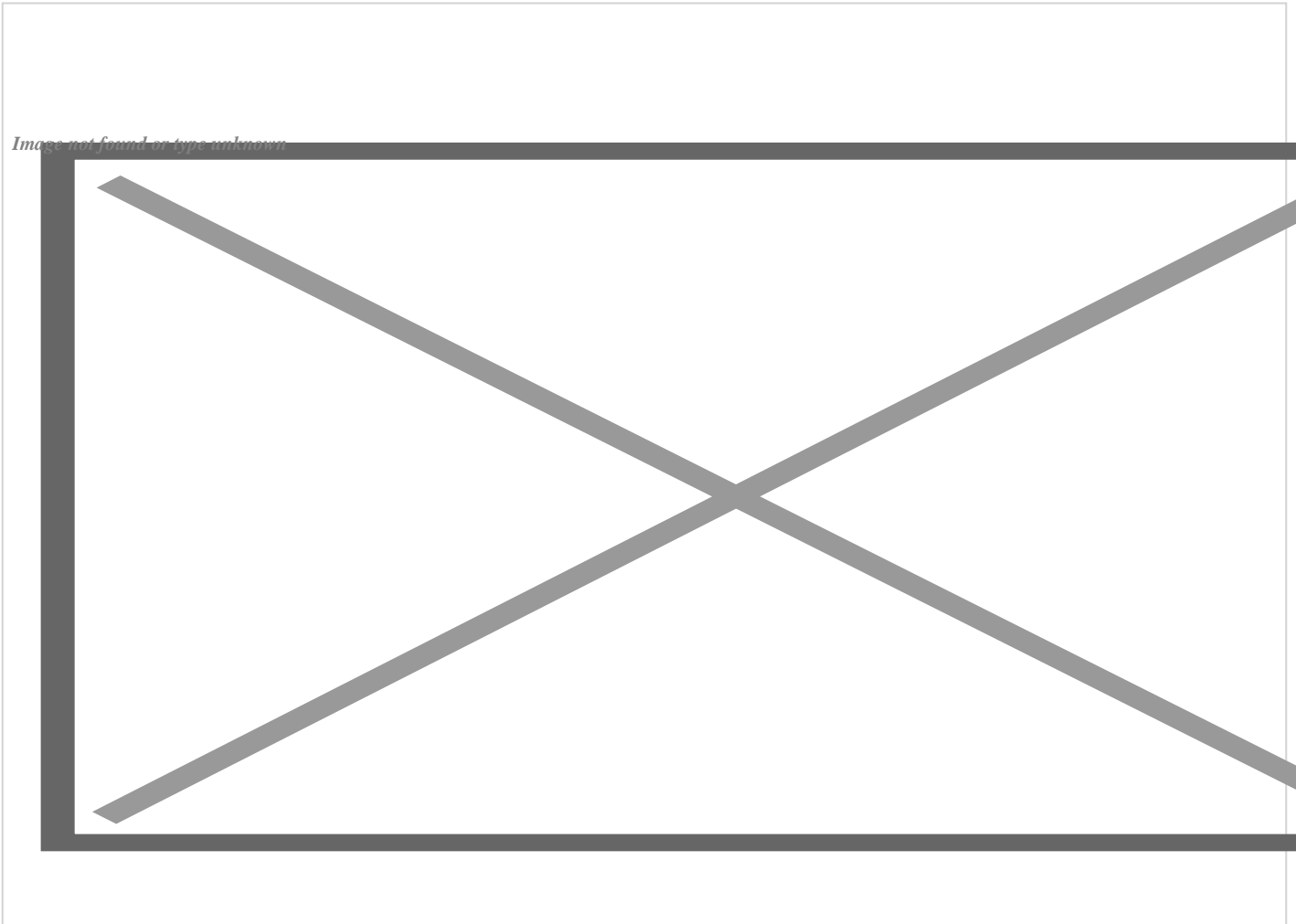


UN reports five million more Afghans will need help in 2021



United Nations, December 16 (RHC)-- The United Nations expects to have to help five million more Afghans in 2021 than this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and an increase in conflicts, a UN official said. The need is increasing and "funding is urgently needed," the acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Ramesh Rajasingham said during a press conference at the United Nations.

Rajasingham, who just returned from a trip to Afghanistan, highlighted the very harsh winters that the country usually experiences. The rise in need is the result of "the COVID-19 crisis, increased conflict and displacements" of the population, he said.

"We are going from a situation where we have (asked) for support to target around 11 million people in 2020 to what we estimate will be almost 16 million people next year," Rajasingham said. Aside from the millions of internally, or temporarily displaced Afghans, another 4.6 million of them live outside of the country, of whom 2.7 million are registered refugees. Collectively, they represent one of the longest-displaced, longest-dispossessed populations worldwide.

On Monday, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said he hoped peace talks between the government and the Taliban would continue in Afghanistan, instead of Qatar, deeming it insulting for the Afghan population that the negotiations take place in luxury hotels in Doha.

Opened in September in Doha, the peace talks, which follow a landmark U.S.-Taliban agreement reached in February in Qatar, were suspended and will resume on January 5th. The U.S. agreed to withdraw all troops from Afghanistan by May 2021 in exchange for security guarantees and a commitment from the Taliban to talk with Kabul.

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