

Joint statement by WHO Regional Director for Eastern and Mediterranean Region, Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, and UNICEF Regional Director for South Asia, George Laryea-Adjei



A WHO-supported mobile health clinic caters to urgent health needs of newly displaced people arriving in Kabul @WHO Afghanistan

KABUL/CAIRO/KATHMANDU, 22 August 2021: “As humanitarian needs in Afghanistan increase, the abilities to respond to those needs are rapidly declining. WHO and UNICEF call for immediate and unimpeded access to deliver medicines and other lifesaving supplies to millions of people in need of aid, including 300 000 people displaced in the last two months alone.

“While the main focus over the past days has been major air operations for the evacuation of internationals and vulnerable Afghans, the massive humanitarian needs facing the majority of the population should not - and cannot – be neglected. Even prior to the events of the past weeks, Afghanistan represented the world’s third largest humanitarian operation, with over 18 million people requiring assistance.

“WHO and UNICEF are committed to stay and deliver for the people of Afghanistan.

“However, with no commercial aircraft currently permitted to land in Kabul, we have no way to get supplies into the country and to those in need. Other humanitarian agencies are similarly constrained.

“WHO and UNICEF call for the immediate establishment of a humanitarian airbridge for the

sustained and unimpeded delivery of aid into Afghanistan. We are also closely following up with all UN and international partners to explore options for expediting aid shipments.

“In the first few days of the recent hostilities, both WHO and UNICEF — like all other UN agencies — prioritized the safety and security of our staff. But our work continued even when the hostilities were at their worst. We remain committed to staying in Afghanistan and delivering, and we rapidly shifted gears to address the needs of millions of Afghans who remain in the country.

“Conflict, displacement, drought and the COVID-19 pandemic are all contributing to a complex and desperate situation in Afghanistan. Humanitarian agencies need to be supported and facilitated to meet the enormous and growing needs in Afghanistan, and make sure that no one dies unnecessarily due to lack of access to aid.

## **Notes to editors**

### **About WHO’s humanitarian work in Afghanistan**

In the past week, WHO distributed lifesaving supplies to partners and hospitals from its stocks in-country. But supplies are rapidly dwindling, and WHO currently only has enough to meet urgent needs for up to one and a half weeks. Most planes flying into the country to evacuate personnel have been arriving empty, missing crucial opportunities to bring in urgently needed health supplies and other humanitarian aid. More than 500 metric tones of WHO supplies, scheduled to be transported over three flights to Afghanistan this week and next week, remain in WHO’s logistics hub in Dubai’s International Humanitarian City. These include trauma medicines, essential medicines and medical supplies, pneumonia medicines, supplies for the management of severe acute malnutrition, and supplies for the management of chronic diseases. WHO operates through 8 offices in Afghanistan and works with local implementing partners to provide urgently needed health care for all. As the Health Cluster lead WHO also ensures that partners continue delivering a coordinated response in all corners of the country.

### **About UNICEF’s humanitarian work in Afghanistan**

UNICEF has 13 offices in Afghanistan and a range of partners that support us in delivering lifesaving supplies to the most disadvantaged.

To support the about 10 million children, and their families, affected by the humanitarian crisis, UNICEF is currently delivering life-saving services such as ready to use therapeutic food to nourish starving children and mobile health clinics to give urgent medical care. UNICEF is also

delivering water to those most affected by the drought, including in camps for internally displaced people. Despite the ongoing humanitarian crisis, UNICEF is distributing hygiene kits and continuing vaccination for babies and young children. UNICEF is also expanding its humanitarian response in the country by prepositioning supplies. In the past week, in several of the new camps for internally displaced people in Kabul, UNICEF established child-friendly spaces, nutrition hubs, and vaccination sites.

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## About UNICEF

UNICEF works in some of the world's toughest places, to reach the world's most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone.

UNICEF's [Regional Office for South Asia](#) (ROSA) works with UNICEF Country Offices in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to help to save children's lives, defend their rights, and help them fulfil their potential. For more information about UNICEF's work for children in South Asia, visit

[www.unicef.org/rosa](http://www.unicef.org/rosa)

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For more information about COVID-19, click [here](#) .

## About WHO

The World Health Organization provides global leadership in public health within the United Nations system. Founded in 1948, WHO works with 194 Member States across six regions, to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable. Our goal for 2019-2023 is to ensure that a billion more people have universal health coverage, to protect a billion more people from health emergencies, and provide a further billion people with better health and well-being.

For updates on COVID-19 and public health advice to protect yourself from coronavirus, visit [w  
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