

UN chief urges international community to provide lifeline for Afghans



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres looks on during a conference on Afghanistan, in Geneva, September 13, 2021. (Photo by AFP)

Geneva, September 13 (RHC)-- United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres has called on the international community to provide humanitarian aid and a “lifeline” for Afghan people following years of conflict and the Taliban’s shock takeover of the war-ravaged country.

Guterres made the plea at a donor conference attended by European Union ministers in Geneva on Monday, saying the international community should dig deep and provide desperately needed aid to Afghans as "the people of Afghanistan need a lifeline."

"After decades of war, suffering and insecurity, they face perhaps their most perilous hour. The people of Afghanistan are facing the collapse of an entire country — all at once," he warned at the gathering. "Let us be clear: This conference is not simply about what we will give to the people of Afghanistan. It is about what we owe."

Guterres made the comment a month after the Taliban swept into power in Afghanistan following the hasty withdrawal of NATO troops that ended the United States' 20-year military presence in the country.

The Monday conference is seeking to raise the \$606-million humanitarian agencies say is urgently needed to provide life-saving aid to millions of Afghans by the end of the year. Among other things, the money is needed for critical food and livelihood assistance for nearly 11 million people and essential health services for 3.4 million.

Deborah Lyons, the UN secretary-general's special representative on Afghanistan, urged countries last week to keep money flowing in despite concerns over the Taliban government to "prevent a total breakdown of the economy and social order."

During the Monday conference, Guterres also highlighted the need to safeguard human rights in Afghanistan and to support women whose rights appear threatened by the Taliban. "One of the bright spots of Afghanistan today is the new generation of women leaders and entrepreneurs, educated and flourishing over the last two decades," he said.

"Afghan women and girls want to ensure that gains are not lost, doors are not closed and hope is not extinguished," Guterres stressed. The government of Afghanistan rapidly collapsed on August 15 and President Ashraf Ghani fled the country in the face of the lightning advances of the Taliban.

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