

6 Million Afghans Facing Famine as US Refuses to Return \$7 Billion in Seized Funds

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“Biden should immediately reverse his executive order,” said one humanitarian. “With millions of Afghans impoverished and starving, the U.S. must return to the Afghan people what is rightfully theirs.”

The United Nations aid chief on Monday led calls for a resumption of the humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan that ended after the Taliban reconquered the war-ravaged nation one year ago—pleas that came as six million Afghans face famine and the Biden administration continues to refuse to return billions of dollars in frozen funds.

“The people in Afghanistan continue to face extreme hardship and uncertainty,” U.N. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths [told](#) the world body’s Security Council.

Noting that the U.N.’s Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan is currently facing a more than \$3 billion shortfall, Griffiths called on donors to immediately provide \$754 million in aid to help Afghans survive the coming winter.

“Close to 19 million people are facing acute levels of food insecurity, including six million people at risk of famine,” he warned. “More than half of the population—some 24 million people—need humanitarian assistance. And an estimated three million children are acutely malnourished. They include over one million children estimated to be suffering from the most severe, life-threatening form of malnutrition. And without specialized treatment, these children could die.”

[#Afghanistan](#) is more than a humanitarian crisis. But it is not a hopeless crisis.

Preserving basic service delivery alongside humanitarian assistance remains the only way to prevent a catastrophe even greater than what we have seen in the past year.

My remarks:

— Martin Griffiths (@UNReliefChief) [August 29, 2022](#)

Griffiths continued:

This malnutrition crisis is fueled by recurrent drought, including the worst in three decades in 2021, and whose effects are still lingering. Eight out of 10 Afghans drink contaminated water, making them susceptible to repeated bouts of acute watery diarrhea. Around 25 million people are now living in poverty and three quarters of people's income is spent on food. There's been a 50% decline in households receiving remittances; unemployment could reach 40%; and inflation is rising due to increased global prices, import constraints, and currency depreciation.

"So these relentless layers of crisis persist at a time when communities are already struggling," Griffiths added. "In June, a 5.9-magnitude earthquake affected over 360,000 people living in high-intensity impact areas. And since July, heavy rains have led to massive flash floods across the country, and indeed the region, killing and injuring hundreds of people, and destroying hundreds of homes as well as thousands of acres of crops."

Not only has the US deprioritized Afghan refugees. The US continues to fuel crisis in Afghanistan with the criminal economic warfare on the Afghan economy which starves the Afghan people. [#UnfreezeAfghanistan!](#)
<https://t.co/4Wh2Ewgtmz>

— CODEPINK (@codepink) [August 30, 2022](#)

Because the Taliban—which fought for two decades to oust U.S.-led forces and the coalition-backed Afghan government in a war that [claimed](#) over 170,000 lives—is not formally recognized by any nation and is under international sanctions, it is difficult to deliver humanitarian assistance to the country.

U.S. policy is exacerbating the crisis. Despite [pleas](#) from economists and humanitarians, the Biden administration continues to withhold around \$7 billion in Afghan central bank funds stored in the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

On Monday, a U.S. federal judge [concluded](#) that relatives of victims of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States should not be allowed to claim billions of dollars of the frozen funds to settle legal judgments against the Taliban, who sheltered al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden before [unsuccessfully offering](#) to turn him in for trial in a third country as the U.S.-led invasion began. However, another judge can decide whether to accept that conclusion.

U.S. President Joe Biden had sought to set aside \$3.5 billion of the \$7 billion to settle 9/11 claimants' cases, while signing a February [executive order](#) allocating the remainder "to be used for the benefit of the Afghan people."

However, six months later, the administration still has not released the funds, [citing](#) the Taliban's apparent sheltering of al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri—who was [killed](#) by a U.S. drone strike on Kabul on July 31.

Also addressing the U.N. Security Council on Monday, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the U.S. ambassador to the world body, [contended](#) that “no country that is serious about containing terrorism in Afghanistan would advocate to give the Taliban instantaneous, unconditional access to billions in assets that belong to the Afghan people.”

Today marks a year since U.S. forces withdrew from Afghanistan.

Several key indicators reveal that people in Afghanistan are suffering more now than before the U.S. invasion in 2001.

Read the full infographic: <https://t.co/6GAKlrd8Bl> pic.twitter.com/TNhh0DmYAz

— The Costs of War Project (@CostsOfWar) [August 30, 2022](#)

Assal Rad, research director at National Iranian American Council Action, [tweeted](#) Monday that “the U.S. is still collectively punishing the people of Afghanistan.”

“For millions of Afghans facing starvation,” she added, “the war never ended.”

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Featured image: An Afghan man and children, suffering hardships from America's longest war, pose for a portrait in Kabul, Afghanistan, on March 19, 2021. [Source: theintercept.com]

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