

UN Direct Appeal to State Department: Save Afghanistan from ‘Mass Death’

by Marcia Merry Baker

Jan. 17—Director General of the United Nations António Guterres issued a call on Jan. 13 for international action to prevent “mass death” in Afghanistan. He called not only for mobilizing full-scale aid, but for the urgent re-establishment of the central bank, currency liquidity, and a financial system, or the country will cease to exist. He said that millions of Afghans are on the “verge of death,” warning:

Freezing temperatures and frozen assets are a lethal combination. Rules and conditions that prevent money from being used to save lives and the economy must be suspended in this emergency situation.

Guterres singled out the United States, saying that it has “a very important role to play because most of the financial system in the world operates in dollars,” and the U.S. is withholding most of the frozen Afghan foreign reserves.

He announced that a meeting (virtual) would be held on the following day with Secretary of State Antony Blinken; Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross; and Martin Griffiths, UN Undersecretary for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief. The Jan. 15 State Department read-out of that meeting was vague, but the urgency for action remains clear.

On Jan. 11 Griffiths issued an international funding appeal, on behalf of all UN humanitarian agencies and aid partners, for \$4.4 billion this year for Afghanistan. He said, “This is the largest ever appeal for a single country for humanitarian assistance and it

is three times the amount needed, and actually fund-raised, in 2021.”

Among the necessary measures cited in the appeal is the lifting of sanctions against Afghanistan, which prevent essential commercial functions, as well as emergency aid, and the unfreezing of the \$9.5 billion in financial assets belonging to the nation and people



WFP/Jon Dumont

More than half the population of Afghanistan, almost 23 million people, don't know where their next meal is coming from. Here, a family in Afghanistan.

of Afghanistan, and other measures allowing banking, currency, and exchange to function. Impoverishment has reached the stage of destitution, in which barely 5% of the entire population of 38 million have enough to eat, 23 million are in various degrees of extreme hunger, and of those, 8.9 million people are at the starvation point.

Among the limited fallback initiatives of the Taliban government, is the food-for-work program, in which a person who is still able, is offered 10 kg of

wheat for a set amount of work. This is unlivable. On Jan. 13, World Food Program Country Director for Afghanistan Mary-ellen McGroarty described the situation to AP as a “tsunami of hunger.”

Helga Zepp-LaRouche, President of the Schiller Institute, warns that action on Afghanistan is a “moral test” for humanity. The Schiller Institute convened on short notice an international webinar today, to spur action, titled, “Stop the Murder of Afghanistan.” Zepp-LaRouche [said](#) on Jan. 13, in her weekly webcast, that,

If you have any heart left in your body, then join this campaign. Because, I think if the West cannot mobilize to help to resolve the situation which we caused—I mean “we,” the West, NATO was there for 20 years—if we cannot solve that, the whole world will look at the West with complete contempt. So this is a last chance to reverse that, by joining hands now with all the neighbors, and including emphatically Russia and China, but the Europeans and the United States are called upon the most. Because if we can’t do that, then I think this will be the symbol of our demise. And we must not allow that to happen, but must take that as the turning point of history.

Even before the August 2021 exit of the United States and NATO from Afghanistan, the Schiller Institute was organizing for a development-plan approach to the nation, as presented in a July 31 Schiller Institute international [conference](#) on the theme, “Afghanistan: A Turning Point in History After the Failed Regime-Change Era.” During that same conference, the Southwest Asia Coordinator for the Schiller Institute, Hussein Askary, presented an overview development plan for Afghanistan and the entire region, titled, “Put Afghanistan on the Belt and Road to Peace.”

Now, however, five months have passed, without even sufficient stop-gap support measures to stabilize the nation. The crisis is existential. The report below summarizes the scale of the food and agriculture emergency. The Schiller Institute’s invitation to today’s seminar (see box, p. 27) is a call to action.

Nationwide Breakdown in Access to Food

In all 34 provinces of Afghanistan, including almost everyone in the 11 largest cities, the food crisis is at the point threatening the continued existence of



Jan Chipchase

Afghans rank first in the world in national calorie consumption from wheat, at over 50%. In 2021, Afghanistan’s wheat harvest dropped by nearly 25%.

Afghanistan as a nation. Hunger has entered the phase of the threat of mass death. It was known in August 2021, that if 75% of the Afghan national budget was from foreign funds for various purposes, and this was stopped cold, along with foreign seizure of assets, without replacement funding sources, the population would be plunged into worsening horror.

On Dec. 19, Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan said, in his keynote address to the special session on Afghanistan of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, meeting in Islamabad:

A country in this situation, after the 15th of August, if the foreign aid dries up, if the foreign reserves get frozen, if the banking system freezes, any country is going to collapse, let alone Afghanistan, which has suffered for the past 40 years.

As of mid-summer 2021, the food supply profile of Afghanistan remained in the mode of import-dependence and chronic insufficiency, as it had been for many years. Even before the arrival of COVID-19, the UN’s food aid agencies were ranking Afghanistan as among the top 10 of the world’s hunger “hot spots.” The pattern had been that, while 80% of the population was involved in agriculture, directly or indirectly, the national production of staples—wheat, rice, potatoes, oils, sugar—was still insufficient, and imports were essential. Food came in through both commercial import flows and from food aid in the form of commodities.

Adding to this was “food assistance” in the form of cash vouchers, provided by the international aid agencies, for the poor to buy food in the markets, where markets were functioning.

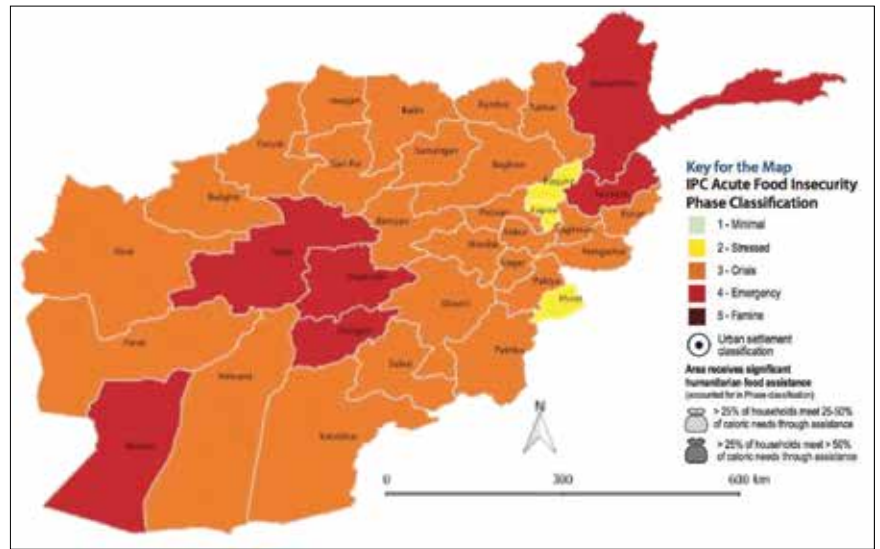
All this has broken down. There is no credit for “normal” commercial food import flows. There is no work and no means for people to buy food. Markets are not functioning. Money is not in circulation. At the same time, the prospects for domestic production are grim.

A snapshot picture of the output level of grain in Afghanistan shows that total cereals production (all types) was 5.425 million metric tons (mmt) on average over the past five years. In 2020, this increased to 6.252 mmt, but in 2021, the harvests fell nearly 24% to 4.77 mmt. This reflects drought—associated with La Niña, a cyclical weather pattern, and the impact of COVID-19, but also, the lack of water management infrastructure, mechanization, quality-inputs, and all other aspects of high-yield, modern agriculture.

The production of wheat—the principal staple—was in the range of 4.504 mmt, as an average of the past five years. Then after coming in at 5.185 mmt in 2020, the wheat harvest fell nearly 25% in 2021. The other grains, of which rice is important, followed the same pattern, including corn and barley. The prospects for 2022 are grim.

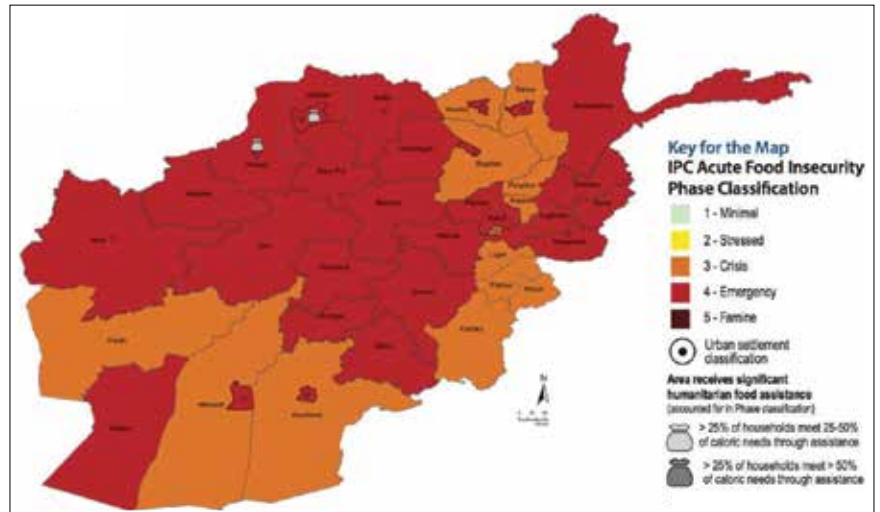
Even with fortuitously good harvests, the food gap not only has persisted but has grown. The main sources of commercial wheat imports are Kazakhstan and Pakistan. The five-year average volume of cereals imports (all kinds) has been in the range of 2.9 million tons. What is required now is a volume in the range of at least 3.4 million tons of cereals imports, in a steady flow. A chronic shortage of milling capacity in Afghanistan has meant that more expensive flour has had to be imported, rather than unmilled grain.

Afghanistan: Projected Acute Food Insecurity: November 2019-March 2020



FAO

Afghanistan: Projected Acute Food Insecurity: November 2021-March 2022



FAO

Breakdown Worsens, Aid Becomes A Matter of Life or Death

Since August 2021, everyone watched as the situation went from bad to worse, given the problems with the lowered 2021 harvests, lack of money, inflation in world food and fuel prices and in farm input prices, and so on. The UN World Food Program (WFP), working with a reported 75 other agencies—UN, national, and private—stepped up action, crossing a line from merely providing supplementary-level aid, to working

to save an entire nation from starving to death. “Success” in this endeavor can only be stop-gap however, pending action by leading powers to back the re-establishment of a sovereign economy.

In numbers, the WFP reports that an estimated 98% of Afghans are not consuming enough food. This is a 17% increase just since August. In Kabul, WFP Country Director Mary-Ellen McGroarty said in December:

We urgently need \$220 million a month in 2022 to assist 23 million Afghans.

This is more than half the population. She reports that 15 million people were provided sustaining aid in 2021.

Afghanistan is facing an avalanche of hunger and destitution, the likes of which I have never seen in my twenty-plus years with the UN World Food Program.

In late August, an air bridge was set up by David Beasley, Executive Director of the WFP, and Prime Minister Imran Khan, for flying in food, based in Islamabad as the hub. The WFP now has a second hub in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, from which the first aid flight took off on Nov. 7.

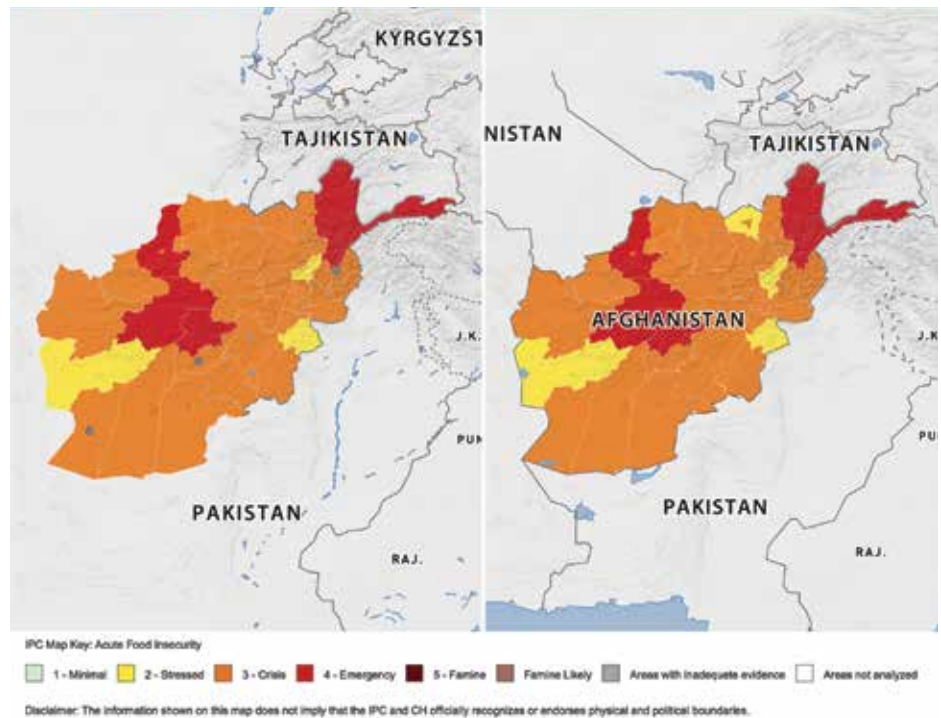
This was followed by the offer from Uzbekistan to have its border city of Termez serve as a hub for humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, in coordination with the Organization for Islamic Cooperation. The OIC accepted this offer at its special session on the Afghanistan emergency in Islamabad in December.

The WFP operates the transportation logistics for all other UN agencies, e.g., for WHO, UNICEF, UNHCR, and so on. This WFP operation is called UNHAS—the UN Humanitarian Air Service.

The nine depot cities for the UNHAS in Afghanistan are Fayzabad, Kabul, Kandahar, Kunduz, Herat, Jalalabad, Mazar-i-Sharif, Bamyana, and Maymana.

Afghanistan Acute Food Insecurity, 2021

Current: March 2021-May 2021, Projected: June 2021-November 2021



FAO

UNHAS operates storage facilities, fleets of trucks for distribution, and so on.

For food in particular, there are 40 warehouses set up around the country, according to the WFP’s Dec. 21 year-end report. The overall food storage capacity has been increased by 40%, to 88,000 tons, since August. The WFP reports that it was able to pre-position food last fall “in strategic locations across the northeast and central highlands of the country, where heavy winter snows can cut off communities from assistance.”

Overall, the WFP reports that in 2021 it dispatched more than 200,000 metric tons of food in Afghanistan in 2021.

The food aid commodities shipped directly into Afghanistan are grain products, and also fortified, specially processed products for children and the seriously malnourished. These are called RUTF—ready-to-use therapeutic food. One example is HEB—high energy biscuits. These are dense, fortified food bars that provide calories and nutrients with no preparation.

Another such RUTF product in widespread use is Plumpy’Nut. It is an individually wrapped packet of paste made of peanuts that can be eaten directly by children, with no preparation, and without medical su-

pervision.

There are 1.6 million children, and pregnant and breastfeeding women receiving nutrition treatment and malnourishment prevention foods, according to the WFP at year-end. Another program for the young provides school meals, take-home rations, and cash transfers for 1 million children across the country.

In addition to food, the WFP reports that the UNHAS has overall flown 2,497 flights in 2021 in Afghanistan, serving 13,577 passengers from 153 humanitarian organizations.

The WFP stresses repeatedly that the Taliban is working in close coordination with all of this activity, to provide security, logistics work, and other support.

Internationally, the WFP operates six major “response depots” as hubs for storage and logistics. They are in Italy, Spain, Ghana, Malaysia, the UAE, and Panama. These are key in the supply chains for food, medicine, emergency shelter, agricultural supplies, and even for staff.

Nations Send Food

Nations that have sent food aid commodities to Afghanistan since last August include China, Russia, Uzbekistan, Iran, and Pakistan. India has a shipment pending. Iran has sent multiple shipments of rice, oil, and other food items. Uzbekistan representatives and officials from Kabul met for a ceremony in September at the Afghan border town of Hairaton, to mark the food aid shipment, which also included medicines, clothing, footwear, and other essentials.

India pledged 50,000 tons of wheat in October, but the shipment is still on hold. In November, Pakistan agreed that it could be shipped overland across its territory, but only in Afghan trucks, not Indian vehicles. It was then reported that further “modalities” were being worked on. In late December, the names of the Afghan drivers and truck contractors were provided to Pakistan. On Jan. 8, the government of Iran issued a statement of willingness to help ship the Indian wheat to Afghanistan through Iran, because of the delay in



WFP/Marco Di Lauro

Mothers and children at a nutrition clinic run by the WFP and UNICEF near a camp for internally displaced persons on the outskirts of Herat, September 29, 2021.

getting the donation shipped across Pakistan. Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian offered “measures and cooperation by Iran to transfer this aid in the form of wheat, medicine” to Afghanistan. The food would go through Iran’s Chabahar port. India has otherwise air-shipped medicine and vaccines to Afghanistan.

In November, Russia started air shipments of food and medical aid directly to Kabul, coordinated by the Russian Defense Ministry. China’s first air shipments of food started in September. In late October, a commercial air shipment of Afghanistan pine nut exports went from Kabul to Shanghai, indicative of what can be commercial flows of the valuable agricultural specialties of Afghanistan. Traditionally, these include pine nuts, cashews and other nuts, dried fruits, and saffron.

Other nations have contributed to food aid via the World Food Program or partner aid agencies. On Jan. 11, the Biden Administration pledged \$308 million for USAID. The United Kingdom activated a Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) appeal for food and other aid to Afghanistan in December, referring to the DEC group of 15 major agencies, e.g., the British Red Cross and Oxfam. The Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) agree Dec. 19 to create a humanitarian trust fund for Afghanistan. There are other initiatives, which, altogether, point to the necessity for concerted action, led by the major powers, working together.

Hyperinflation

Food commodities price inflation is extreme. From the period of the last week in June 2021, through the last week of October, wheat prices in Afghanistan went up 24%; wheat flour, up 31%; cooking oil, up 26%; sugar, 20%; and fuel 33%. This is reported by the WFP Market Monitor.

Inflation in the prices of farm inputs is likewise extreme in Afghanistan. Between June/July and October/November 2021, seed prices rose 43%, and urea fertilizer, 120%, according to the UN FAO in December.

Internationally, the FAO World Food Price Index for 2021 (released Jan. 6, 2022) shot up overall by 28% over 2020.

Destructuring of Agriculture: Famine Ahead

Farm households are hit hard by the same factors hitting all others. Many farmers have abandoned or sold off their land, taking their families to town, in hopes of jobs which do not exist. Thousands of displaced farm families are now destitute. This is happening everywhere. For example, farmers have left their properties in Ghor, and are now displaced in Herat.

During the month of October, which is the planting season for winter wheat and barley (planted in the fall, harvested the following June), many fields were not sown, for multiple reasons, including the 2021 dry weather, impoverishment, lack of seeds, etc. There is still an opportunity to plant spring wheat, but this depends on having the inputs and functioning farm workers and equipment, and also depends on fighting COVID-19.

The weather prospects for 2022 are also unfavorable, since La Niña, causing last year's dry conditions, is expected to continue.

The UN FAO—partnering with the WFP—distributed “wheat cultivation packages” in October and November in 31 out of 34 provinces. The FAO targeted 1.3 million people to reach in the rural areas in this program, offering training as well as improved, higher-yield seeds.

Another program focused on livestock, with measures for animal feed, de-worming, and other services to attempt to keep 8.4 million head of sheep and goats fed and productive, for at least household dairy production. The FAO also does as many cash-for-work programs as possible.

At present, the estimate is for the 2022 grains output to be much lower than the five-year average, without serious, timely intervention. The planting season for spring wheat starts in March. Corn and rice are

sown starting in May.

Potatoes are an important staple, and with focused support, can have a significant impact against hunger. With over 50% of the national crop coming from the single province of Bamyan, a mobilization here will matter greatly. Water is always a limiting factor. There are projects for dams and irrigation which have been waiting to go for years.

Farming capacity lost to production of opium poppy is a continued loss to the food supply, besides being a world scourge fostered by the London/Wall Street financial system for its profit and control. It is reported that in 2021 the land area that grew poppy decreased by 20% compared to 2020, falling to an estimated 177,000 hectares. However, the yield in 2021 was still 8% higher than in 2020. It is estimated to be 6,800 tons. The prices offered to farmers remain relatively high, presenting an incentive amidst the otherwise unlivable circumstances.

The availability of supplies for the scale of food aid required in Afghanistan and other points of need, cannot be taken for granted amidst COVID-19, the hyperinflationary breakdown, and the green assault on farmers in many of the world's most productive agricultural regions. For example, it is projected that the world wheat harvest will be down 10 mmt for 2021, over last year, while world population is projected to rise by 55 million. Wheat products figure importantly in food aid.

Sounding the Alarm

Given the scale of this humanitarian crisis, the near total black-out of coverage of the Afghanistan situation by the Western media is a crime. When it is covered, for example, by Jeff Bezos' *Washington Post* on Jan. 7 (“As Afghanistan's Harsh Winter Sets In, Many Are Forced to Choose Between Food and Warmth”), there is a total blackout of what can be done to end the crisis.

On Jan. 7, Afghanistan Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Ghani Baradar made a video appeal to the world community for help:

In various places right now, people do not have food, accommodation, warm clothes or money.... The world has to support [the] Afghan people without any political bias and carry out their humanitarian obligations.... We call for the international community, NGOs and all the countries not to forget our poor people.

Baradar reiterated that the Taliban will gladly work to distribute any aid provided.



Stop the Murder of Afghanistan!

Invitation to the international Schiller Institute Online webinar, Jan. 17, 2022

by Dennis Speed

As the year 2022 opens, let us, all over the world, turn our thoughts not only to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., but to his mission: the establishment of a “Beloved Community” of all mankind. We must come to realize that the greatest disease threatening humanity is “depraved indifference,” shown most spectacularly in the deliberate starvation right now, of millions in Afghanistan, “in the name of human rights.” Moreover, if you let such an injustice happen to others, the same injustice will sooner or later happen to you.

Nineteen people just died in a horrific fire in the Bronx, New York. There were over two dozen previously reported code violations at that building. Among the dead were nine children. But hundreds of thousands of children are about to starve to death in Afghanistan. The cause of the deaths of innocent children in Afghanistan, and in the Bronx, is the same: The cause is a depraved indifference as to whether or not they either would, or should survive.

Once, nations aspired to prosperity for all citizens; it was called “the General Welfare, for ourselves and our posterity.” Now, because we refuse to stop Wall Street and the City of London’s futile but violent attempts to continue their bankrupt system, mass

death beckons, daily, throughout the trans-Atlantic world. We are told that, regrettably, mass death will be “normal”; it will be “endemic” in the form of pandemics, or war, or “extreme events.” If that be so, that must be a direct result of our depraved indifference, because we could have treated the sickest in the world first, but instead chose not to do so, and still continue to choose not to do so.

We say “No!” to this pact with despair, and death.



White House

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

There is a plan, called “Operation Ibn Sina,” designed by the Schiller Institute, to resolve the injustice underway in Afghanistan, and by that means, create a united worldwide effort to roll back the glaring injustices in health care and other areas. Releasing Afghanistan’s \$9 billion in funds is only the beginning.

You have the power to implement Operation Ibn Sina, by joining us, and rejecting depraved indifference. The way to defeat injustice is to create justice in the world, now. In that way, perhaps, the unjust deaths of those who have died by fire in the Bronx, by famine in Afghanistan, and by the folly of doomed imperial ambitions all over the world, can be the inspiration for the creation of the “Beloved Community” that humanity truly requires and deserves.