

**PRINCETON SPIA  
AFGHANISTAN POLICY LAB**



**Afghanistan Policy Lab (APL)  
Princeton School of Public and International Affairs**

**Recommendations for UN Member States and UN Leadership about UNAMA's  
Mandate Renewal**

**June 2026**

**Introduction**

On Thursday, May 14, 2026, the Afghanistan Policy Lab (APL) at Princeton School of Public and International Affairs convened a webinar titled **“UNAMA’s Mandate Renewal and Evaluating the Path Forward.”** The discussion was moderated by **Dr. Farishta Sakhi**, President of Global Resilience, a non-profit organization, with a keynote address by **Mr. Naseer Ahmad Faiq**, Chargé d’Affaires of Afghanistan’s Permanent Mission to the UN with expert panelists **Mr. Aref Dostyar**, Director of the Afghanistan Program for Peace and Development at the University of Notre Dame’s Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies; **Mr. Scott Worden**, former Director of Afghanistan and Central Asia Programs at the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP); and **Mr. Mushtaq Rahim**, peacebuilding and development practitioner and doctoral researcher at Johns Hopkins University.

The discussion was organized in response to the Security Council’s decision on 16 March 2026, via Resolution 2818, extending UNAMA’s mandate for only three months, until 17 June 2026.

While participants offered different perspectives, there was a broad consensus that UNAMA remains indispensable and that the mission should be renewed with a stronger political mandate, enhanced coordination, and clearer mechanisms for advancing human rights and inclusive governance.

**Findings from the Discussion**

**UNAMA Remains Essential:** Despite criticism of its effectiveness, participants agreed that UNAMA remains one of the few international mechanisms capable of maintaining attention on Afghanistan’s crisis, coordinating humanitarian assistance, documenting human rights violations, facilitating regional dialogue, and preserving engagement between Afghanistan and the international community. Several speakers warned that any weakening or termination of the mission would create a significant vacuum, reducing international awareness of the developments inside Afghanistan and further isolating the Afghan people.

**The Political Dimension of UNAMA Needs to be Strengthened:** A recurring theme throughout the discussion was that while UNAMA has continued to perform important humanitarian coordination and human rights reporting functions, it has made limited progress on its political mandate, particularly efforts related to political dialogue and inclusion. Participants noted that Afghanistan continues to face a political impasse characterized by the absence of an inclusive and legitimate political framework. Many questioned whether existing international engagement mechanisms, including the Doha Process, have sufficiently addressed the underlying political drivers of Afghanistan’s crisis or /advanced meaningful pathways toward inclusive governance.

**Human Rights and Women’s Rights Must Remain Central:** Speakers repeatedly emphasized that restrictions imposed on Afghan women and girls represent one of the most severe human rights crises in the world. Participants argued that any future engagement framework for Afghanistan that marginalizes human rights risks undermining both the credibility of the United Nations and prospects for sustainable peace. There was strong consensus that women’s rights, civic freedoms, and accountability for human rights abuses must remain a central pillar of UNAMA’s mandate and reporting responsibility.

**Structural Constraints Limit UNAMA’s Effectiveness:** Several speakers highlighted the difficult operating environment faced by UNAMA. Taliban restrictions on UN operations, shrinking civic space, and the need to maintain humanitarian access have constrained the mission’s ability to advance political objectives. Drawing on comparative experiences from other conflict settings, including Syria, participants suggested that separating humanitarian operations from political engagement could provide greater flexibility for both functions while reducing political pressure on humanitarian actors.

### **Key Recommendations**

Based on the discussion, the following recommendations emerged for consideration by the United Nations Security Council, UN leadership, and member states.

#### **1. Renew UNAMA’s Mandate for a Full One-Year Period**

The three-month extension has generated uncertainty for UNAMA staff, humanitarian partners, donors, and Afghan stakeholders regarding planning, staffing and program continuity. Participants strongly recommended a full one-year renewal to provide operational stability, sustain international engagement, and prevent further erosion of confidence in the mission. A longer mandate would also provide the necessary timeframe for implementing reforms and assessing progress against measurable objectives.

#### **2. Strengthen UNAMA’s Political Mandate**

The most consistent recommendation across speakers was the need to revitalize UNAMA’s political role. The renewed mandate should explicitly direct UNAMA to:

- Facilitate inclusive political dialogue among Afghan stakeholders.
- Support pathways toward an inclusive constitutional and political order.
- Expand engagement with women, youth, civil society, ethnic and religious communities, and non-Taliban political actors.
- Develop mechanisms for sustained intra-Afghan dialogue.

Participants stressed that humanitarian stabilization alone cannot resolve Afghanistan’s crisis without progress toward political inclusion and legitimacy.

#### **3. Appoint Strong Political Leadership**

Several speakers argued that the effectiveness of UNAMA depends as much on leadership as on mandate language. The UN Secretary-General should prioritize the appointment of a politically credible Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) with demonstrated knowledge of Afghanistan and regional dynamics. In addition, participants urged serious consideration of the Independent Assessment’s recommendation to appoint a Special Envoy for Afghanistan to strengthen political coordination and coherence among international stakeholders.

#### **4. Preserve Human Rights as a Core Pillar of the Mandate**

Participants expressed strong opposition to proposals that would narrow UNAMA’s mandate to humanitarian coordination alone. The renewed mandate should continue to:

- Monitor and report on human rights violations.
- Document restrictions on women and girls.
- Support accountability mechanisms for human rights violations.
- Maintain regular reporting to the Security Council on human rights developments.

Participants emphasized that technical engagement with the Taliban should not come at the expense of human rights principles.

#### **5. Separate Humanitarian and Political Functions**

A major recommendation emerging from the discussion was the need to separate the work of UNAMA’s humanitarian and political functions. Participants proposed exploring institutional arrangements that would:

- Protect humanitarian operations from political retaliation.

- Enable political engagement to proceed more assertively.
- Create clearer distinctions between humanitarian coordination and political diplomacy.

Drawing lessons from other conflict settings, speakers argued that a more distinct separation of responsibilities could improve effectiveness in both areas.

## 6. Expand Engagement Beyond the Taliban

Participants consistently stressed that international engagement should not be limited to the de facto authorities. The Security Council should encourage UNAMA to systematically engage with:

- Afghan women leaders.
- Youth and emerging leaders.
- Civil society organizations.
- Diaspora communities.
- Religious and ethnic representatives.
- Technical experts.

Where direct engagement inside Afghanistan is constrained, alternative mechanisms, including regional platforms and consultations coordinated through UN headquarters, should be explored.

## 7. Link Technical Engagement to Political and Human Rights Progress

Participants expressed concern that current international engagement increasingly focuses on technical issues such as trade, counter-narcotics, and economic cooperation without corresponding progress on political inclusion and human rights. Future engagement should be guided by a principle of issue linkage, ensuring that progress in technical cooperation does not substitute for progress in political reform, women’s rights, and inclusive governance.

## 8. Maintain International Attention on Afghanistan

Participants warned that Afghanistan risks being overshadowed by other global crises despite continued humanitarian needs, security concerns, and widespread human rights violations. The Security Council, donor governments, and regional actors should reaffirm their commitment to sustained engagement with Afghanistan and resist efforts that could normalize exclusion, repression, or the systematic denial of fundamental rights. Additionally, there is a need to monitor the ongoing security situation in Afghanistan, including the potential threat of terrorism.

## Conclusion

The webinar participants expressed broad agreement that UNAMA remains an indispensable instrument of international engagement in Afghanistan. While participants acknowledged the mission’s limitations and operational constraints, they overwhelmingly supported a stronger mandate. Speakers advocated for a stronger, more politically empowered, and strategically focused UNAMA. The central message emerging from the discussion was clear: Afghanistan’s crisis cannot be addressed through humanitarian assistance alone. Sustainable peace and stability require a renewed international commitment to political inclusion, human rights, and the aspirations of the Afghan people. As the Security Council considers the future of UNAMA, participants urged member states to seize this opportunity not merely to renew a mandate, but to strengthen the international community’s capacity to support a peaceful, inclusive, and rights-respecting future for Afghanistan.

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1. The discussion was also informed by findings from a recent report, **“Afghan Perspectives on the Future of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA),”** produced through the Afghanistan Dialogue and Visioning Process (DVP) at the University of Notre Dame. The study drew on consultations with Afghan stakeholders inside Afghanistan and across the diaspora, including women, youth, civil society leaders, religious figures, private sector representatives, victims’ groups, and political actors.  
[https://curate.nd.edu/articles/report/Afghan\\_Perspectives\\_on\\_the\\_Future\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_Nations\\_Assistance\\_Mission\\_in\\_Afghanistan\\_UNAMA\\_/32273625?file=64536198](https://curate.nd.edu/articles/report/Afghan_Perspectives_on_the_Future_of_the_United_Nations_Assistance_Mission_in_Afghanistan_UNAMA_/32273625?file=64536198)
  2. For additional information, please find the link to the webinar:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1WHtUsrkQs&t=4494s>