Chapter Event: The International Community's Response to the Afghanistan Crisis

EVENT SUMMARY

Online via Zoom
Tuesday, October 5, 2021 | 10:00 AM- 11:30 AM

Moderator

Jeffrey Grieco | President and CEO, Afghan American Chamber of Commerce

Keynote Speaker

Henrietta Fore | Executive Director, UNICEF

Panelists

Jon Brause | Managing Director, World Food Programme Washington Liaison Office
Catherine Kannam | Senior Vice President, Chemonics
Nargis Nehan | Women's Empowerment Leader and Member, U.S-Afghan Women's Council

Event Description

With a new Afghanistan government announced, conflict continues to escalate while the livelihood of over 30 million civilians remain threatened. In fact, though the Taliban has been engaging in critical discussions over international assistance, they have continued to dispatch hunting parties that are abducting business, NGO, and women leaders. Currently, there are four calamities that are detrimentally impacting the Afghan economy and people. First, the private sector economy is slowly collapsing with the loss of supply chains and lack of access to transportation. Second, key indices of food insecurity are increasing due to drought and malnourishment while winter season approaches. Third, the Afghan central bank funds and donor funds have been frozen so that neither Afghan individual or corporate depositor can access their accounts. Fourth, only 10% to 15% of the population is fully vaccinated against COVID-19. As such, the purpose of this event is to discuss the challenges that international development and humanitarian organizations face in responding to this ongoing crisis.
Key Takeaways

1. **Conditions for Afghan Children and Families**
   
   **Henrietta Fore** (UNICEF) introduced the event by detailing the manners in which Afghan children have suffered disproportionately for decades. Presently, 10 million girls and boys depend on humanitarian assistance to survive while 1 million children face severe acute malnutrition. There also exists a significant lack of access to drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities which has led to the spread of measles, acute water diarrhea, and polio. Conditions for children are only expected to deteriorate in the coming months due to severe drought, water scarcity, the onset of winter, and the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, UNICEF’s priorities include serving children and young people, reaching families in need, and continuing a dialogue of advocacy with the Taliban. So far, the organization has deployed 57 mobile health teams, reached 150,000 people with primary healthcare services, and provided safe drinking water to 250,000 people.

2. **The Status of Afghan Women and Girls**
   
   **Nargis Nehan** (U.S.-Afghan Women’s Council) provided an in-depth outline regarding the situation of Afghan women and girls. Currently, they are not allowed to attend school or work, leaving many unable to pay for basic necessities. Additionally, they lack access to essential resources, including their bank accounts which remain indefinitely frozen. As more than 17% of media outlets have been shut down, many tragic events and human rights abuses are not being properly documented or exposed. However, at the same time, it is important to note that some encouraging news exists. For instance, women have begun raising their voices and protesting for their rights, despite being violently threatened by soldiers. Thus, in order to promote the status of Afghan women and girls, the international community must unite under one voice when approaching the Taliban. There is not only a need to put consistent pressure on the government, both in Kabul and Doha, but also channel support through the nongovernmental sector.

3. **International Development Organizations’ Role in Addressing the Crisis**
   
   **Catherine Kannam** (Chemonics) shared how Chemonics has been addressing the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. The organization has been diligently working to evacuate their Afghan staff and allies, but has encountered huge difficulties in facilitating safe passage. They have also been critically considering ways in which to build strong local partnerships with staff, private sector groups, local contractors, and subcontractors in order to design effective development programs. Currently, they are implementing a project to support the Afghan Ministry of Education in facilitating payrolls for teachers. Overall, it is crucial for Chemonics to gain clarity about programming that falls under humanitarian assistance. For instance, how are ways in which the organization can keep value chains moving and the private sector up and running while creating comprehensive solutions to the crisis.

4. **The World Food Programme’s Role in Addressing the Crisis**
   
   **Jon Brause** (World Food Programme Washington Liaison Office) explained the steps the World Food Programme has taken in addressing the humanitarian crisis. Their key objective is to be as transparent as possible when assessing needs in an effort to validate the host government and donor community regarding humanitarian consequences. In Afghanistan, 14 million people are experiencing food insecurity. Drought has brought about a 2.5 million ton wheat shortfall and the winter season will most likely shut down parts of the country. It is necessary to share this data with the Taliban so that effective programs can be launched which ensure free access to its beneficiaries. The organization is now running a humanitarian air service that is reaching 6 cities in the country while reinforcing programs that have over 400 local staff, 40 international staff, and 6 regional offices still operating. Some of their most important concerns is the safety of their female staff and how women can return to work safely in these conditions.