

# **Durbin Joins Murphy In Urging Biden Administration To Address Humanitarian Crisis In Afghanistan**

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) today joined U. S. Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT) and 10 other Senators in sending a letter urging Secretary of State Antony Blinken and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Administrator Samantha Power to press international donors at the United Nations pledging conference to fulfill the current \$3.8 billion funding gap for humanitarian aid for Afghanistan and to ensure that aid can reach the Afghan people in need.

“The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is deepening, with more than half the population - 23 million people - in need of assistance. In response, the UN has released an appeal to international donors for \$4.4 billion to meet the humanitarian needs in Afghanistan - the largest single country appeal in history. In advance of the high-level

pledging event for the country scheduled for March 31, we urge the administration to work closely with our international partners to generously commit and rapidly deliver funds that will help save lives in Afghanistan,” the Senators wrote.

The Senators continued, “As the economy craters, the suffering of the Afghan people deepens. Today, 95% of households in Afghanistan don’t have enough food to eat. By this summer, 97% of Afghans will be living below the poverty line—trying to survive on less than two dollars a day. With nine million people just one step away from famine, this humanitarian crisis could kill more Afghans than the past 20 years of war.”

“We understand that the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan is driving unprecedented levels of suffering of the Afghan people, and urge robust oversight to ensure that all assistance gets to the people of Afghanistan. Without the full participation of female humanitarian staff in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all humanitarian services, aid will not be delivered in a manner that upholds humanitarian principles, and will be unable to reach the most vulnerable Afghan women and girls in the hardest to reach areas. The Taliban must allow unhindered humanitarian access, safe conditions for humanitarians, independent provision of assistance to all vulnerable people, and freedom of movement for aid workers of all genders,” the Senators wrote.

The Senators concluded: “Amid crises in Yemen, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Syria, and elsewhere, the international community must not lose focus on Afghanistan. We encourage you to press key international donors to make up the current \$3.8 billion funding deficit for humanitarian programs and to expediently deliver such funds. These include countries in the region and members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, as well as likeminded partners who have generously supported Afghanistan in years past. Finally, we encourage you to work closely with our allies in the region to ease any restrictions on humanitarian access in Afghanistan to enable humanitarian partners to reach people in need.”

U.S. Senators Alex Padilla (D-CA), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Mark Warner (D-VA), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Edward Markey (D-MA), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), and Sherrod Brown (D-OH) also signed the letter.

In January, Durbin led a [letter](#) to the Biden Administration calling for the inclusion of funding for emergency international food aid in any upcoming supplemental requests to Congress. While the Biden Administration had recently provided an additional \$308 million in aid for humanitarian groups, the Senators noted in the letter that both the United Nations and World Food Programme (WFP) indicate far more is needed to prevent mass starvation in multiple countries, particularly in Afghanistan where a majority of the population is at severe risk.

Full text of the letter is available [here](#) and below:

March 31, 2022

Dear Secretary Blinken and Administrator Power,

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is deepening, with more than half the population - 23 million people - in need of assistance. In response, the UN has released an appeal to international donors for \$4.4 billion to meet the humanitarian needs in Afghanistan - the largest single-country appeal in history. In advance of the high-level pledging event for the country scheduled for March 31, we urge the administration to work closely with our international partners to generously commit and rapidly deliver funds that will help save lives in Afghanistan.

Even prior to the Taliban's takeover, Afghanistan's economy suffered from longstanding structural problems. The country was highly dependent on external aid, which financed 75% of public expenditures and were equal to about 40% of the country's GDP. The Taliban's takeover caused a pullback in foreign aid and strained the liquidity and solvency of Afghanistan's financial sector. The IMF estimates that the country's economy will contract up to 30% this year, and many of the senior officials and technical experts needed to provide sound economic management have fled the country. While humanitarian aid is critical to saving lives in the short-term, it cannot replace a functioning economy in Afghanistan. These underlying structural economic problems will take years to solve.

As the economy craters, the suffering of the Afghan people deepens. Today, 95% of households in Afghanistan don't have enough food to eat. By this summer, 97% of Afghans will be living below the poverty line—trying to survive on less than two dollars a day. With nine million people just one step away from famine, this humanitarian crisis could kill more Afghans than the past 20 years of war.

Robust international commitments to support humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan are more critical now than ever. Last year, Afghanistan faced a 40% loss of wheat production due to drought and economic deterioration related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past month, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has further raised the price of wheat in the global food market. The World Food Programme had previously depended on Russia and Ukraine for more than half of the wheat it provides to countries such as Afghanistan.

We understand that the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan is driving unprecedented levels of suffering of the Afghan people, and urge robust oversight to ensure that all assistance gets to the people of Afghanistan. Without the full participation of female humanitarian

staff in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all humanitarian services, aid will not be delivered in a manner that upholds humanitarian principles, and will be unable to reach the most vulnerable Afghan women and girls in the hardest to reach areas. The Taliban must allow unhindered humanitarian access, safe conditions for humanitarians, independent provision of assistance to all vulnerable people, and freedom of movement for aid workers of all genders.

In the immediate aftermath of the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, Congress passed a supplemental appropriations bill that included \$915 million in humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan. With that funding, Congress sent a strong signal that the United States must lead a robust response by the international community to the ongoing humanitarian crisis. We support the administration's initial 2022 contribution of more than \$308 million in humanitarian aid to Afghanistan on January 11<sup>th</sup>. At the upcoming pledging event on March 31<sup>st</sup>, we urge the administration to commit additional, substantial funding to the Afghanistan response as soon as possible to ensure vital assistance programs are not reduced or cancelled. A significant U.S. pledge is vital to encourage other countries to follow suit. Generous and timely investments, delivered to the right agencies on the front lines, are instrumental to saving lives and staving off famine in Afghanistan.

Amid crises in Yemen, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Syria, and elsewhere, the international community must not lose focus on Afghanistan. We encourage you to press key international donors to make up the current \$3.8 billion funding deficit for humanitarian programs and to expediently deliver such funds. These include countries in the region and members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, as well as likeminded partners who have generously supported Afghanistan in years past. Finally, we encourage you to work closely with our allies in the region to ease any restrictions on humanitarian access in Afghanistan to enable humanitarian partners to reach people in need.

Thank you for your urgent attention to this crisis, as the people of Afghanistan deserve our unwavering support.

Sincerely,