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## **AFGHANISTAN AID: DONORS TO PLEDGE BILLIONS IN BRUSSELS**

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International donors are meeting in Brussels to raise billions more dollars in aid for Afghanistan.

More than 70 countries are at the talks, hosted by the EU. They are expected to pledge \$3bn (£2.3bn; €2.6bn) a year in aid until 2020.

Afghanistan will be asked to do more to tackle corruption and to take back tens of thousands of failed asylum seekers.

The country faces a resurgent Taliban and remains reliant on foreign help, 15 years after the militants were ousted.

'We are helpless: Trapped by the Taliban in Kunduz

"We're buying four more years for Afghanistan," said EU special representative Franz-Michael Mellbin.

But with donor fatigue after years of war, officials do not expect to raise as much as at the last aid conference, in Tokyo in 2012, where \$4bn a year was pledged.

The EU is promising \$1.3bn annually and has signed a deal with the Afghan government for Kabul to take back Afghans who fail in their bid for asylum. Both sides deny the deal is a condition for new aid.

Afghans make up the second largest group of asylum seekers in Europe, after Syrians.

The BBC's Lyse Doucet in Brussels says recent Taliban advances on the battlefield will only harden the determination of many Afghans to seek a better life elsewhere.

Taliban attacks this week on the cities of Kunduz in the north and Lashkar Gah in the south have underlined how fragile the security and development gains of recent years remain, despite all the money spent.

Hasn't Afghanistan already had billions in aid?

The United States and other international donors have pumped about \$130bn into the country since 2002.

Efforts to rebuild after years of war began after US-led forces ousted the Taliban from power following the 9/11 attacks.

The figure is comparable to the Marshall Plan, a US initiative to rebuild a devastated Europe after World War Two, although the results have been much more limited.

Most of the money spent in Afghanistan has come from the US (about \$115bn) - and official figures show that more than half of that was spent on security.

Nato pulled out combat forces in 2014 and the Taliban are now resurgent in many areas, prompting fears that hard-won, costly gains are at risk.

What did the aid achieve?

Fifteen years after the Taliban were toppled, Afghanistan still cannot survive without significant international support.

Despite all the money that's been poured in, it remains one of the poorest countries on earth, with 80% of its budget financed by aid.

The optimism of the early post-Taliban years - when new schools and hospitals were being built and Afghan refugees were returning - has been replaced in some quarters by donor fatigue and more and more questions about where the money will end up.

Major contributors are now indicating they expect to see greater Afghan success in tackling problems such as corruption and the lucrative narcotics trade, as well as progress on asylum seekers.

A more prosperous Afghanistan could mean fewer refugees in Europe - but hopes the country could become self-reliant one day seem many years away.

How bad is the fighting?

It so serious that one of the main cities in the north, Kunduz, nearly fell to the militants again this week, a year after they briefly captured it in what was a major security embarrassment.

But Afghan forces say they are in control of the city centre, although clashes are still going on elsewhere in the city.

In the southern province of Helmand, the Taliban have captured the administrative headquarters of Khan Nishin district, and are massed outside the provincial capital, Lashkar Gah.

Government troops were reported to be resisting their advance there, and in parts of the central province of Uruzgan, where fighting has also broken out.

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