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Russia Urges West to Engage With Taliban

By AFP

October 25, 2021



Russia's Special Presidential Representative for Afghanistan and Director of the Foreign Ministry's Second Asia Department Zamir Kabulov. **Sergei Bobylev / TASS**

Russia on Monday urged Western countries to engage with the Taliban and for the European Union to re-open its embassy in Afghanistan, warning that the country was at risk of descending further into drug trafficking and terrorism.

The call came after Moscow last week hosted members of the Islamist regime for international talks, and the Taliban agreed to work with Russia, China and Iran on regional security.

Speaking to reporters on Monday, the Russian presidential envoy to Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, said the European Union would be right to re-open its mission in the country.

"European partners should not have left Afghanistan," he said, adding it was "high time" for

European diplomats to return.

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He called on the West to engage with the Taliban to prevent Afghanistan from sliding into chaos and warned that attempts to cut aid would be "absolutely counter-productive."

In an effort to survive, Kabulov warned, people in Afghanistan could resort to drug trafficking, terrorism and arms smuggling, pointing to "huge amount of weapons" left behind by NATO troops.

"If the West wants this, then they are on the right track," he said.

Kabulov also reiterated Russia's calls to unlock funding for the country.

Billions of dollars in Afghan reserves have been frozen in the West to keep cash away from the Taliban after it captured Afghanistan in mid-August.

"This is absolutely outrageous," said Kabulov. "Who are they punishing: the Afghan authorities or people? The money should be returned to the Afghan people."

Afghanistan's economy is in a parlous state with international aid cut off, food prices rising and unemployment spiking.

Kabulov said Russia was preparing to send more humanitarian aid to Afghanistan "in the coming days" but did not provide further details.

The Taliban is a terrorist organization banned in Russia.

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