



Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations

STATEMENT

BY

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

ON AGENDA ITEM 56: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

**BEFORE THE THIRD COMMITTEE OF THE
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Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the Government of Afghanistan, I would like to fully align with the statement made by the distinguished representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Mr. Chairman,

The situation of women in Afghanistan began to attract the international community's attention when the barbaric regime of the Taliban, in power in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, implemented its discriminatory and totalitarian policies aimed at excluding women from the political, economical, social and cultural life of Afghanistan. Never in the world's modern history has a regime been more cruel, repressive and misogynistic than under the Taliban's rule. Based on a wrong interpretation of Islam, basic rights such as the right to free movement, to education, to work as well as to receive health care were denied to women for five long years. A whole generation of Afghan women has been deprived of the fundamentals of knowledge that would have allowed them to aspire to a better future.

The fall of the regime of the Taliban has contributed to liberating Afghan women from the oppression that they were subjected to and has allowed them to regain their position in Afghan society as equal citizens benefiting from the same rights and having the same duties as their male counterparts. Today, seven years after the beginning of the stabilization, reconstruction and development of the country, significant progress has been achieved in Afghanistan to restore women's equal participation in all aspects of life and reduce gender disparities.

Mr. Chairman,

The empowerment of Afghan women through the defense and promotion of their rights is a top priority in Afghanistan's political agenda. A strong policy framework has been established to allow the implementation of this vision. The Afghan constitution, the Afghanistan Compact, the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) and the Afghan Millennium Development Goals Report place gender equality as a core objective. Afghanistan has also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Children (CRC) as well as CRC's two Optional Protocols.

The efforts undertaken by the Government of Afghanistan to advance the status of Afghan women have not been limited to the enshrinement of policy documents. We have made significant progress in political, economic, social and human rights areas; allow me to share some of them with you.

Afghan women are participating more in the political arena. As a matter of fact, Afghan women represent 28% of the National Assembly and account for almost 26% of all civil



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servants. Moreover, Afghan women are no longer excluded from professional activities and play a significant role in Afghanistan's economic sector. For instance, they represent 30% of agricultural workers.

Afghan women's access to health care has improved through the development of the Basic Package of Health Services which includes emergency obstetric care. In addition, the number of health care workers has increased to 15,001 in 2007, of which 49.3% are women.

In the area of education, 40 % of the 6 million children enrolled in school are girls. In universities and other institutes of higher education, about twenty percent of 50,000 students are females. Recently, 58.8% of students enrolling in Teacher Training Institutions in Afghanistan were female.

Mr. Chairman,

The Government has also intensified its efforts to mainstream gender equality and implement the various commitments of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Each Ministry has established a unit to facilitate the monitoring of the implementation of the ten year Afghan National Action Plan for Women (NAPWA). Moreover a Gender Budgeting Unit has been established in the Ministry of Finance that focuses on policies and resource allocation to specific programmes for women.

Nevertheless the capacity of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) needs to be significantly enhanced to be able to coordinate this effort, to provide technical assistance and gender training to the various Ministries, and to monitor the overall implementation of NAPWA.

Mr. Chairman,

Despite the intensification of efforts provided by our Government and the progress achieved, the resurgence of extremist ideologies and activities of the Taliban as well as widespread poverty contribute to difficulties Afghan women face today. This reality brings back haunting memories of challenges to Afghan women's security, economic and social activities and human rights.

Although Afghan women's lack of access to health services is mainly caused by illiteracy, poverty, lack of roads or transportation, and a limited number of female health professionals, the deterioration of the security situation caused by the Taliban has contributed to further impeding women's access to health facilities. This constitutes an obstacle to reversing the serious statistic in which an Afghan woman dies every 30 minutes because of pregnancy related complications.

The access to education facilities of Afghan women, especially in rural areas, is limited by the lack of female teachers, the remote location of schools, and the bad roads and



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transportation. In addition, the terror campaign carried out by the Taliban has particularly affected girls' enrollment in schools and attendance in provinces located in the south and east of the country. Schools are burned and female teachers and girl students are attacked, threatened or intimidated by the Taliban. According to the Ministry of Education, girls represent less than 15% of the total enrollment in nine provinces in the east and the south of Afghanistan.

The Government of Afghanistan believes that the sustainable reconstruction and development of the country require full and equal participation of Afghan women in socio-economic activities of Afghanistan. However, women in Afghanistan are more unlikely than men to be engaged in economic activities when they are insecure.

Mr. Chairman,

Violence against women is an odious violation of human rights that needs to be tackled with intense efforts. The Government of Afghanistan criminalizes violence against women and is strongly committed to working to address this issue through new initiatives. The Ministry of Women's Affairs has teamed with UNIFEM to develop a comprehensive database of cases concerning violence against women in order to be able to better address reported cases.

Mr. Chairman,

Poverty remains the biggest obstacle in Afghanistan in achieving MDG3. We would like to stress the need for a full partnership and expanded cooperation with the international community in our mutual commitment to attain the MDGs and advance the status of women in the world. In that regard, we highlight the need for a considerable increase in the level of Official Development Assistance (ODA) for Least Developed Countries, particularly countries emerging from conflict, to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Finally Mr. Chairman,

The upcoming elections in Afghanistan are crucial to the future of the Afghan people for many reasons. Not only will we be cementing the achievements we have made in establishing a new democracy, but the people of Afghanistan will once again express their opposition to the perverse treatment of women and the barbaric injustice of the Taliban. However, the Taliban are continuing their intimidation campaign against the Afghan people, and if the international community does not rise to confront this challenge by the supporting the efforts of the democratic Government of Afghanistan, our achievements in the past seven years and all of the gains Afghan women have made will be in jeopardy.

Thank you for your attention.