



## **Afghan Women's Movement from First Women's Council to Kabul Conference**

**17-18, July, 2010**

**Kabul Serena Hotel**

### **Conference Statement**

We, the delegates of the Afghan Women's Movement from First Women's Council to Kabul Conference, welcome the Afghan Government's efforts for an Afghan-led action plan for improved governance, economic and social development, and security. We acknowledge the progress in the area of women's rights in the last eight years, and appreciate the support of the international community and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in this regard. We believe that only a transparent, open, and inclusive participatory process of women and men can help the government in reaching its goal of creating an accountable and efficient structure in deliverance of good governance and development of a flourishing democracy.

The purpose of this conference is to bring a joint and collective voice of Afghan women that seems to be excluded from the grand Kabul Conference which is taking place on July 20, 2010. We, the women from different provinces, have come together to solidify our voices at the capital of the country. We call on the Afghan government and international interlocutors to address women's needs and concerns according to the priorities that were set by Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), Afghan Constitution (2004), National Action Plan for Women (NAPWA) at the center of the Kabul conference.

Women constitute half of the population of Afghanistan, yet women are underrepresented in all decision making bodies. The benchmark quota of at least 30% of women's participation should be respected at all decision making levels, strategies and efforts including the Kabul Conference. Their role in the deliverance of good governance, fighting corruption, and improving security across all clusters of the government ministries is absolutely necessary.

Considering women's unique experience of the war and deprivation, yet emerging as survivors, women's potential and experience should be capitalized in peace building efforts. According to recommendations made in 28 working committees in the National Consultative Peace Jirga, women should be a constituent part of all bodies outlined in the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Plan. Women's rights and achievements should not be compromised in any peace negotiations or accords.

The Government of Afghanistan's commitment to continue development of a National Security Strategy must be consistent with UN Security Council resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889. A National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security should be integrated as a core element of the national security policy.

Despite the marked progress of the past eight years in restoring women's rights in the legal and policy areas, Afghanistan, unfortunately, represents one of the lowest level of human indicators in Human Development and Gender Development Index of the world according

to United Nation Development Report (2010). Special attention should be given in prioritizing all gendered benchmarks in Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS). Social and cultural constraints should not be used as an excuse, rather they should be dealt with determination and innovative strategies where more women from remote and war affected areas can benefit from development interventions.

In order to achieve the involvement of women in development initiatives, special attention should be given to helping women access higher education and capacity building to develop small and medium sized enterprises. Family-friendly employment policies, flexible working hours, and improving work and education environments through the introduction of anti-sexual harassment policies can bring more women into the development sector.

The National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) with renewed commitment to the London Communiqué and Elimination of Violence against Women Law should be vigorously implemented and taken as a priority benchmark across all government clusters structuring, and national priorities programs. The role of the Ministry of Women's Affairs should be institutionalized as a policy advisor, monitoring and evaluating gender programming across all government ministries, and all clusters structuring instead of confining the ministry under one cluster.

We expect that the Kabul Conference will bring a stronger gender commitment and clear direction and priorities for the administration to implement the existing commitments to Afghan women, backed with increased resources and accountability of public officials. The exclusion of women in the London Conference and hesitation to include women in the Kabul Conference raises women's concerns regarding the Afghan government's political will to implement gender equality and women's empowerment, adding to the fear of losing the gains we have made in the past eight years.

We want to present our recommendations based on inclusive discussions in the two days of this conference by the participants coming from all over the country. The recommendations are presented to improve the gender perspective of the Afghan government's initiative presented at the Kabul Conference under the five key governance clusters:

### **Agriculture and Rural Development:**

There is a need for recognition and visibility of women's role and contribution to agriculture and rural development. One of the tools can be introduction of gender disaggregated data for measuring outputs. Women should have access to information technology and be involved in all stages of planning and monitoring of rural development strategies.

- The Master Plan of Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) should be actively implemented, integrating gender and increasing the participation of women into all agricultural projects, such as rural poultry development, dairy production, horticulture, seed production, food processing, and bee-keeping. The projects need to demonstrate women's contributions, recognize their diversity, strengthen their business skills, increase female staff, and integrate literacy and numeracy, among other things.
- In order to enhance women's participatory role in agriculture and rural

development, women should be equipped with modern agriculture technology and marketing skills. Furthermore, there is special attention needed to promote products produced by women.

- Micro loans should be made more available to women farmers.

## **Human Resource Development**

- To address critical shortage of women participation in the labor market, special efforts should be made to train women in marketable skills. The Afghanistan Government needs to invest significantly in women's vocational training to ensure sustainable industrial development.
- Introducing an anti-sexual harassment code of conduct, family-friendly employment policies such as flexible work hours and child care facilities should be implemented across the civil service and private sector to balance women's family responsibilities with their career needs.
- To promote girls involvement in higher education, cultural diversity and sensitivity should be taken into consideration at the policy and planning level. A Sexual Harassment Policy/ Code of Conduct is urgently required to safeguard women and girls' enrollment; women are still grossly under-represented in institutions of higher education and vocational training.
- We additionally recommend building universities exclusively for women and women-only dormitories and special scholarship packages for women. Furthermore, we recommend special preparatory tuition for girls at the high school level to prepare them for the university entrance examination.
- Women should be provided with training and should be given the opportunity of placement in mid and higher level management positions. All training programs should have clear gendered indicators to measure the output and impact of the training on women.

## **Economic and Infrastructure Development**

- Serious steps to be taken to implement the labor's law in order to ensure the safety of rights of all employees. This especially includes preventing any type of child labor, which is one of the threats resulting from these major economic development projects/programmes.
- Environmental safety must be taken into account before designing or planning any project.
- Raising awareness of the community, especially women, about major economic initiatives and programmes across the country. This includes consultation with the women, youth and men in communities while the government is planning projects or programmes.
- There must be inclusion of women and girls in all vocational training courses, higher education facilities, and provision of scholarships.
- All projects must be well assessed to ensure the needs of women, children and youth are included. In all monitoring and evaluation of the projects during the implementation and after the completion, women and youth must be included to ensure transparency.
- The government should facilitate an increasingly enabled environment for women entrepreneurs to be able to access finance, and have the security to operate.

- The regulatory framework should be gender-sensitive to ensure that there is room for women to be actively involved in the economic development of the country.

### **Security:**

- The phased growth and expansion of the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police must be accompanied by efforts to ensure the security forces have the respect and protection of women as one of their main priorities. This can be enhanced through the recruitment of more women at top and other levels of all security sectors, investment in Family Response Units, and training for the security forces and the justice sector on the Elimination of Violence against Women Law.
- The Government of Afghanistan's commitment to continue development of a National Security Strategy must be consistent with the UN Security Council resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889. A National Action Plan on Women's peace and security should be integrated as a core element of the national security policy, and a quota of not less than 30% of women's representation in all peace and security deliberations must be accomplished.
- We strongly recommend the inclusion of women in developing the National Peace and Reintegration Program. The proposed Peace and Reintegration Trust Fund to finance the Afghan-led Peace and Reintegration Program should transparently ensure that a proportion of the financial incentives to communities to support reintegration are used to support women's empowerment and development, and the protection of their human rights through rigorous monitoring and redress.

### **Governance**

- In Afghanistan, marginalized women are disenfranchised through the exclusion of access to information. Access to sources for networking and information exchange can contribute to community development and participation in the political process. Women have been largely excluded due to the cultural, religious and social constraints on their freedom of mobility and the segregation of sexes in public life.
- Women must be actively involved in all anti-corruption efforts to ensure that the specific forms of corruption that afflict them are addressed.
- As a matter of procedure, all laws and policies should be subjected to gender assessment before they are adopted, and the capacity of the Parliament for a such purpose should be strengthened. The government should set up a mechanism to undertake a gender assessment of all legislative proposals, and such a mechanism should function in close consultation with MOWA and gender advocates.
- In the implementation of the Sub-national Governance Policy, the accountability and mechanism for ensuring gender responsiveness of sub-national governance should be established. It is recommended that local councils on gender equality be formed within high level bodies that make policies or decisions and coordinate actions on sub-national development. Likewise, there is a need to assess the effectiveness of national programs in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality.
- The quota or affirmative policies in the Constitution have shown very positive results. We urge the government to expand the implementation of quota and other affirmative action policies to promote the participation of women in all aspects of life. Gender budgeting should be integral part of all government national budget.

- Experience has shown that many ministries have not been able to spend their whole development budget according to a Ministry of Finance report. The proposed budget of 50-80% of the development aid diversion to government should be dealt with different alternative plan where women's civil society organizations and private sector should be involved in implementation along the government sector.
- To ensure transparency and end corruption, instead of opening a new committee a human resource system of staff appraisal should be started in each ministry.
- Instead of investing in informal justice system where most of women's rights are curtailed, the Afghan government should invest on strengthening the formal justice system by establishing more family courts and training female judges.
- Government should take serious measures to implement transitional justice action plan effectively in close coordination with women organization, the AIHRC and civil society.

In order to follow these recommendations and implement government's gender equity plan, it is highly important that women's organizations should have direct resource allocation and support from Government and the international donor community.

**Organized by:**

