

Afghan Women's Network
Recommendations for the Afghan Government &
The International Community
For the Paris Conference on Aid Effectiveness to Afghanistan

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Contact: Sheila Samimi
+93 (0)700297547

As the government of Afghanistan, international donors, UN officials, and other high-level actors gather at the upcoming Paris conference to renew commitments to the rebuilding of Afghanistan, AWN calls attention to the continuing and urgent need to strengthen women's rights and ensure women's empowerment in Afghanistan.

Born out of the United Nations (UN) Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, the Afghan Women's Network (AWN) represents 72 Afghan women's NGOs and 300 individual members from throughout Afghanistan and Pakistan.

As witnessed by the AWN member NGOs who work directly with women, and as validated in many reports and studies, it is clear that Afghan women are deprived of their basic human rights and are not considered as equal members of society. Taking into account some of the abusive treatment to which they are subject, Afghan women are hardly treated as human beings in our society.

Afghan women's ability to enjoy their human rights is impeded by insecurity from nearly continuous war, by cultural and customary constraints, and by the poor economic condition of the country. It is heartbreaking to see that in the 21st century various forms of brutality and violence against women are still widely practiced in Afghan society and that only 30 percent of Afghan girls have access to education and schooling. Women lack livelihood supports, and income generating activities for women are scarce.

In order for Afghan woman and girls to exercise their rights, greater investment in educating Afghan women and girls is immediately needed. With education, girls and women will be economically empowered. Once these two problems are tackled—education and livelihoods—the level of violence practiced against Afghan women will be remarkably reduced. Such is the lesson to be learned from the lives of the majority of educated women from throughout the world. By investing in education and economic empowerment, and by eliminating violence against women, we will save the girl children in Afghanistan from experiencing the miseries their mothers have endured for decades.

In keeping your commitment to Afghan women's and girls' human rights, we make the following urgent recommendations:

We urge the government of Afghanistan to fulfill its national and international mandate for women's empowerment and gender equality in practical and concrete measures. To this end, the equality principle of the Afghanistan Constitution should be practiced in all governmental efforts to improve the lives of Afghans. The government must ensure women's participation in the cabinet, judiciary and legislative branches of the government on the constitutional basis of equality between women and men. For example, only a single woman sits in the President's cabinet as the Minister of Women's Affairs.

We urge the international community of donors to continue its commitment to enhancing the lives of women and girls in Afghanistan by prioritizing sustainable and long-term support for women-led and women-focused initiatives and ensuring that the Afghan context and social, cultural and religious

characteristics are recognized and integrated in any and all women empowerment interventions. In all projects, the voices of Afghans must be heard and the Afghan people must be given leadership roles in deciding their needs and priorities as a means of increasing Afghan ownership and sustainable results.

We urge the Afghan government, its international allies, and the donor community to recognize and integrate the concerns of women and women's participation in the peace processes of the country. Women constitute half of the population, and they have half of the solutions for a sustainable peace. As a party to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, the government of Afghanistan and its allies should put the words of this resolution into action for the women of Afghanistan by guaranteeing women's human rights and ensuring women's leadership and participation in conflict management, conflict resolution and peace-building efforts at the local, national, and international levels.