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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Joint written statement* submitted by Women's Federation for World Peace International, Biovision Stiftung für ökologische Entwicklung, International Alliance of Women, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, Soroptimist International, Universal Peace Federation, Zonta International, non-governmental organizations in general consultative status, Graduate Women International (GWI), Mothers Legacy Project, National Alliance of Women's Organizations, UFER- Unis pour l'Équité et la Fin du Racisme/ UFER - United for Equity and Ending Racism, Widows Rights International, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

Written Statement to the UN Human Rights Council, and its Special Session on Afghanistan (August 24) - "Call for Immediate action to protect human rights and dignity in Afghanistan with special focus on women and girls."

Women's Federation for World Peace International, with its youth programme and its partners stand in solidarity with extreme concern for the people of Afghanistan at this time. However, we recognize that the UN Security Council and the Human Rights Council are facing their challenges as well. The world is watching and praying for wise governance from the UN and pivotal governments in response to the crisis in Afghanistan. While globally many are desperate to avert tragedy, very few will have a direct influence in these outcomes. We appeal to you to be steadfast in your demands and in strong consensus, a position that always demands sacrifices. We strongly appeal for the security of the women, youth and targeted persons in the immediate, and their right to contribute to a thriving and inclusive community in the long term. Decisions made today will affect the future stability and vitality of a sovereign and thriving Afghanistan, each mis-step could bring huge detours in the process. Women and youth have been the targets in the past, and their contribution to stability must be taken seriously.

It is critical to note that, now that the Taliban has seized power, they must consider the responsibilities and obligations that Afghanistan bears as a UN member nation. They will be forced to re-think the tribal paradigm if they plan to assume the governance they would inherit as a nation state. It is responsible for upholding UN conventions as well as other international accords like United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Child Rights Convention (CRC). We have seen how the Taliban has acted in the past, particularly in regard to the issues women faced in society, which is a significant source of concern for us at this moment.

Women play a crucial role as leaders in their communities, mothers in their families, and vital members of their societies and nation. Women have an important role for the stabilization of any society. We commend the UN bodies for their recognition that a bright future for Afghanistan rides on an inclusive and representative government. However, for women to be part of such a body, their rights and dignity as women and as major players in the society must be upheld today.

Youth are the hope for the future. If young girls and boys are not protected, there will be no one to inherit and build a thriving and innovative Afghanistan tomorrow. Young people hold within the vitality, creativity and hope of a better future as well as a memory of today's reality and the decisions we make. Therefore, it is important to involve young people in governance and decision-making through an institutionalized intergenerational approach.

At the moment, out of the 3.7 million children in Afghanistan who are out-of-school, 60% of them are girls. The main reason for this is because traditional norms and practices regarding girls' and women's roles in society cause uncertainty and hesitation, resulting in low girls' admission into schools. We can see that people are anticipating grave setbacks: universities have closed or restricted the participation for women. Our concern is that women and girls will be denied an education that will enable them to be productive members of society, hindering their autonomy, and violating their basic freedom and rights.

The universal access to quality education is central to ensure women's social-economic autonomy, prosperity and social protection — especially in conflict-affected societies. Giving young women and girls a voice not only because they deserve to be heard, but to enable a brighter future for Afghanistan.

The rapid collapse of the Afghan state and the inadequate withdrawal of security force assistance (SFA) providers from the region has raised critical questions on the efficiency and overall impacts of this cooperation model at the international level, in particular for the human rights, security and prosperity of women, girls, and other vulnerable individuals.

One's gender leads to different experiences of violence and conflict. Although the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, embedded in the UNSCR 1325 (2000), holds the prevention pillar at its core, efforts towards the prevention of armed conflict and de-escalation of militarized responses to insecurity still demand a greater, more coherent and well-articulated international coordination within the agenda. Both in conflict-affected and post-conflict settings, high proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) targets women at its forefront, as it escalates the intensity and lethality of gender-based violence.

The current situation is dire. The Taliban has made strategic promises, but the streets are thick with fear and uncertainty. An environment of fear is not conducive to the mental, emotional and even physical health and growth of the women, children, men, and families.

With all this in mind, we strongly urge the following:

1. **Prioritising Humanitarian Aid:** The crisis is humanitarian beyond political currently, which needs to be prioritised. We request and insist the councils and UN Bodies to stress upon member states, especially the neighbours of Afghanistan, to extend their maximum support for humanitarian aid. We also ask the international community to stress the Taliban to keep the borders and administration open for international humanitarian aid to reach the population of Afghanistan.
2. **Facilitating quality education for all:** Taliban flags and rules are being forced on educational institutions, creating an atmosphere of fear, trauma and mistrust which can lead to radicalisation of children and youth. We urge all the member states to constantly insist on the basic right of quality education for all in Afghanistan. This includes protection of educators and institutional properties. We recommend the international community to support the access to education through NGOs including financial resources.
3. **Hold the Taliban accountable to their promises:** The Taliban have been pursuant to be recognized and treated with legitimacy domestically and internationally. This has led them to make promises on implementing an inclusive government, equal recognition for women, education and protection for women and girls. As several member states have taken the stance of recognising the Taliban government depending on their conduct, we insist on the international community to hold the Taliban accountable to their promises. We also urge the international community to use all diplomatic measures to hold the Taliban accountable to all the human rights treaties and conventions that Afghanistan is a part of.

4. Monitoring and Protection: Call for substantial actions that will ensure the monitoring and protection of women, youth and targeted persons. We urge UN Bodies and agencies such as UN Women, UNHCR, UNSC, UNHRC, UNODC, WHO and UN Peacebuilding Commission to coordinate the planning and implementation of Human Rights Monitoring Mechanisms in Afghanistan.

5. Early Warning Women's Mechanism: It would be of central importance to establish an early warning mechanism and network of women in Afghanistan and across neighbouring states to ensure the prevention of armed violence and strengthen the communication of women in conflict-affected areas. Therefore, we call member-states to strengthen the agency of women and local communities in the planning and implementation of relief and recovery efforts to date, building on local practices and knowledge of conflict resolution.

6. Constructive cooperation and diplomacy for the purpose of capacity-building: We recommend the international community to support the new regime in terms of capacity-building for governance, ensuring the implementation of governance mechanisms that take into account the trajectory, agency and demands of Afghan people at the forefront. Member states in close cooperation with similar cultural and religious context with that of Afghanistan such as member states of the League of Arab States; the host of Afghan peace reconciliation - Qatar; rapidly developing Islamic countries such Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, etc. are potential nations to extend their support.

7. Increase participation of youth and women: Include and empower women and youth in Afghanistan, both in immediate on-the-ground stabilization efforts, in the negotiations to come, and for legitimacy with the population in the long-term. If young girls and boys are not protected, there will be no one to inherit and to build a thriving and innovative Afghanistan tomorrow. We ask the international community to safeguard the rights of the population of Afghanistan, especially women and youth, to be free to exercise their right in peaceful demonstration.

8. The media: It is of central importance to ensure transparent communication and fear-free reporting of developments on the ground, facilitating open and safe communication with the international community. The role of the media is highly critical for the future of a peaceful Afghanistan, for both the government and civil society actors.

9. Social Protection in Rural Areas: We urge the international community and regional member states to implement effective monitoring and early warning mechanisms to protect all human rights, especially education, in rural areas and all of the 34 Afghan provinces besides Kabul. Moreover, it is key to design, implement and monitor arms control and disarmament strategies in rural and semi-urban areas, where armed violence is often the main cause of mass violation of human rights.

Women Peace Pioneer Initiative 1325

World Federation for Mental Health

Women's United Nations Report Network, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

1 <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/education>

2 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/conflict-prevention-and-resolution>

3 See UNIDIR. 2020. Gender Perspectives in Arms Control and Disarmament: Views From Africa.

<https://unidir.org/publication/gender-perspectives-arms-control-and-disarmament-views-africa>