



## Statement

by

**H.E. Dr. Hussun Banu Ghazanfar**

**Acting Minister of Women's Affairs of Afghanistan**

**at the 55<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

Honorable representatives of Members States of the United Nations, fellow Ministers and Heads of national machineries, Ambassadors, esteemed Civil Society Partners, and Advocates of women's empowerment and gender equality, it is an honor and privilege for my country to be represented in this assembly of distinguished delegates working for women's advancement and gender equality.

Afghanistan is in the threshold of a new beginning. A few months ago, we held a Consultative Peace Jirga in which 1,600 leaders including members of Parliament, political parties, religious scholars, tribal councils, civil society and business community gathered to discuss our framework of sustainable peace. This event registered 25 percent participation of women, which was unprecedented in a field where they had been traditionally invisible and marginalized. Recognizing that peace cannot be achieved through military measures alone, our government, with the support of the international community, have considered a new strategy to win anti government elements within a framework of reconciliation and reintegration, supported by economic, social and political measures that provides an option to moderate militants to return to the fold of democratic life. We have established a High Peace Council where women comprise 12 percent of the total members, an increase of nearly 100 percent from previous records of women's participation in peace processes. A gender strategy, policy and action plan are also being developed within the national peace and reintegration program to ensure qualitative and quantitative representation of women in this program which ranks top in the priorities of my government.

Under a highly volatile political environment and constant security threats posed by de-stabilization efforts of anti-government elements, we succeeded in holding two national elections where women actively participated as candidates, election staff, poll watchers and electorates. Two women ran for Presidency, and 10 percent of all candidates for the provincial council elections were women. This is not an impressive figure, but it represents a 20 percent increase from the data of the previous election. Likewise, females comprised nearly 40 percent of all registered voters. In the recently concluded Parliamentary elections, there were 407 female candidates, representing a 4 percent increase from the record of 2005. In our new Parliament, women comprise 27.7% in the House of Representatives and 27.5% of the Senate, making Afghanistan the 30<sup>th</sup> in the world with the highest number of women in the Parliament.<sup>1</sup>

On the whole, the status of Afghan women has gone a long way from the years of the Taliban. Afghan women are now equal with men under the law. Likewise, gender based discrimination

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the Women in National Parliaments article of the Inter Parliamentary Union, ranking 147 countries on the representation of women in their Parliaments as of 31 December 2010.



and violence against women have been outlawed by afghan government. Women have returned to public life, and we have a comprehensive ten-year plan of action to systematically advance women's status. We have steady advancements in education and service delivery provisions and we continue to honor and implement our commitments to international agreements, conventions and treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Millennium Development Goals(MDGs) and UN resolution 1325.

However, the poor state of our economic, political and security situation continues to negate the enjoyment of development gains by many of our people, women and men alike. We continue to be second at the bottom with the lowest Human Development Index in the world and our per capita income is the lowest in the South Asian Region. Poverty affects 36 percent of our population and has limited peoples' access to health and social services, leading to poor education, low nutrition levels and shorter life expectancy. Forty percent of our population is unemployed and more than half are vulnerable to poverty, while 37 percent is in borderline of food insecurity and hunger.

Friends and colleagues, Afghan government is profoundly grateful to the support that the international community generously gives to our country, especially to the advancement of Afghan women. We face multiple battles with anti government elements, poverty, social fragmentation across ethnic lines, illiteracy, maternal and infant deaths, and many more.

Our people may be lacking in technical skills that we need to deal with these problems, but we are a strong nation. Having survived nearly three decades of conflict, we have the inner strength, courage, determination and tenacity that equals the challenges we face with continuing support of International communities.

In closing, I would like to congratulate the UN Women and its first Executive Director Madam Michele Bachelet, as well as the countries who are members of the Board. A stronger UN Women means a stronger support to the countries of the world.

I wish you all more power and greater success in this enormous challenge of making life a little bit better for the women of the world!,

Thank you