



Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations

Statement

by

H. E. Dr. Husn Banu Ghazanfar, Minister of Women's Affairs

at

the 56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Delivered by

Mrs. Asila Wardak

Director of Human Rights and International Women's Affairs

2nd March 2012

Honorable representatives of Members States of the United Nations, fellow Ministers, Heads of national machineries, esteemed Civil Society Partners, and Advocates of women's empowerment and gender equality and distinguished delegates working for women's advancement and gender equality, Assalam Alaikum wa Rahmatullah e wa Barakatu.

As in previous years, I place great importance in participating in this very important session, however, due to an unprecedented engagement; I am not able to participate in today's session. My country's representative will presents my speech to you.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my greetings and best wishes to all of you and express my Governments strong support to the priority theme of this 56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women on the focus on economic empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges. I am sure that the discussions, decisions and the agreements of the session will impact the status of women in our country.

Dear participants,

My Government is working hand in hand with other UN agencies, international agencies, and foreign missions in Afghanistan to support the empowerment of women and girls. Women's empowerment and gender equality have always been central to the peace and reconstruction agenda of Afghanistan. However, the battle to empower rural women's economically and the full realization of their rights in my country is far from won. The situation remains challenging and we look to the international community for new ideas and experiences to inspire and lead us into a brighter future for women. We seek your support in addressing the multi-faceted issues that our sisters, especially those living in rural areas, confront on a daily basis. A significant percentage of the Afghan population lives in rural areas, 9.2 of whom are women. In addition, 85 percent of the total Afghan population depends solely on agriculture, primarily undertaken by rural Afghan women who through decades of crisis, have continued to play a pivotal role, not only in providing food for their families, but also in supporting an agriculture based economy.

My dear friends,

Since the onset of the interim government in Afghanistan, through its policies and programs has promoted peace and reconstruction efforts in the country; the government has succeeded in institutionalizing a robust policy framework for gender equality.

We institutionalized a strong policy framework for gender equality by restoring women's rights and declaring in our Constitution that women are equal with men and any gender based discrimination will be punished under the law. Likewise, we (i) ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women; (ii) adopted six critical gender targets on health, education, employment, political participation and access to justice under the Afghanistan Millennium Development

Goals; (iii) adopted gender equality as a cross cutting concern of our national strategy; and (iv) mainstreamed gender into our sub-national governance policy to ensure that gender is highlighted in provincial development plans and into the overall work of sub national government, right down to the village level. Moreover, we adopted a ten-year plan of action for the women of Afghanistan which now serves as the government's main vehicle for implementing its commitments to women. The adoption of the NAPWA provided a common framework for government, the international community and all sectors of society to work around six priority areas of concern that are crucial to the improvement of women's status in the country, namely: (1) Security, (2) Legal Protection and Human Rights, (3) Leadership and Political Participation, (4) Economy, Work and Poverty, (5) Health, and (6) Education. Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) as a lead ministry for the advancement of Afghan women is implementing a three-year, phased-reform and re-structuring process to ensure that positions in the ministry are held by qualified staff members. MOWA also mainstreamed gender into the government's priority programs that were adopted in the July 20 Kabul Conference, particularly in the programs of the Human Resource and Development Cluster. It also mobilized support for the approval of a US\$ 29.7 million program proposal whose primary focus is the development of government capacities to accelerate the implementation of NAPWA.

Respected participants of the session,

To achieve long-term stability and prosperity in Afghanistan, it is important that the successes of the past decade in political, social and economic affairs should be matched with poverty reduction and sustainable job creation. Hence, the government has taken a number of initiatives to empower rural women through policies, strategies and institutional bodies as follows majorly through the Ministry of Rural Reconstruction and Development (MRRD) The National Solidarity Program (NSP) achieved widespread involvement of women in rural Afghanistan's community decision-making apparatus. The program aims to promote equal representation of women in NSP's Community Development Councils (CDCs) which have been established across 34 provinces. Through these organs, rural women are assisted to participate meaningfully in effective management of local resources alongside men, as well benefit from CDC decisions.

The National Area Based Development Program (NABDP): The main goal of this program is to empower citizens to participate in development planning, support economic development and job creation that will ultimately benefit both women and men in rural villages. It is estimated that 30 % women will benefit from this program.

The National Rural Access Program (NRAP): will enhance human security and promote equitable economic growth by ensuring year round access to basic services and facilities in rural Afghanistan. More than 30% women, will also benefit from this program.

The Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Irrigation Program (Ru-WatSIP) provides potable/safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, sustainable water usage and environmental health protection supplies to enhance environmental health at village level.

The Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Program (AREDP) was designed in 2008 to improve the living standards through self-employment for rural populations. The program provides support to small business cooperatives in 34 provinces of the country where 35% of the program beneficiaries are women.

The Microfinance Investment Support Facility in Afghanistan (MISFA), was set up to promote livelihoods and economic growth. Through this program, the Government is expanding access to quality financial services especially for rural women and the poor.

Social support programs: MOWA in partnership with the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MOLSAMD) has cooperated in the drafting of a law that will strengthen State support to women who lack caretakers, are orphans, elderly, or are handicapped.

However, the overall peace and reconstruction, which is a pre-requisite for achievements in removing all challenges which remain as obstacles for women's empowerment. The hard won gains of our country have not been ensured, but still our achievements for the national development and improvement of women's status in the country have been numerous.

Yet we still face challenges in the economic empowerment of rural women. In Afghanistan women are busy in economic activities for more hours than their male counterparts and receiving smaller wage. In the rural areas the wages are even less where most of the people still earn living through agricultural activities and products, but, they are not alone anymore in their incredible sufferings. Our State has developed and approved policies and regulations for the improvement of women's status, had taken responsibility over the improvement of their situation. We have better knowledge, skills and alliances, and we are determined to move forward.

Conclusion

It is evident that Afghanistan has indeed made some bold steps towards investing in the well-being of women. However, we still have a long way to go in unleashing their full potential in both the paid and unpaid domains. We appeal to the international community to extend further support to our Government as it works to on this worthy endeavor of lifting our people, especially rural women, from extreme poverty into self-sufficiency and economic growth.

In closing, I would like to wish you all great success in this enormous challenge of making life better for the women of the world! With these actions and many more, we will continue to work for women's empowerment and gender equality, in solidarity with the women's movement globally.

I thank you for your attention.