

## **Afghan Women's Summit for Democracy**

### **Statement of Solidarity**

**by**

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Madame Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Participants,  
Friends.

I am deeply honoured to have this opportunity to show solidarity with Afghan women at this Summit. I would like to thank Equality Now, the European Women's Lobby, V-Day, the Center for Strategic Initiatives of Women and the Feminist Majority which organized this Summit in collaboration with my Office and UNIFEM.

The women of Afghanistan are a symbol of resilience and strength. They have confronted deprivation and the worst kind of discrimination with perseverance and courage. Throughout years of war they have managed to support their children, families and communities. Today, these women are emerging in areas liberated from the Taliban and from exile abroad, determined to rebuild their communities and country. The United Nations and the whole international community are firmly behind Afghan women as they seek, with men, to democratize and reconstruct their society.

The commitment of the United Nations to the inclusion of women in decisions relating to peace and security and their participation in reconstruction was articulated by the Security Council in resolution 1325 on women, peace and security adopted on 31 October 2000. The Secretary-General and his Special Representative for Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi, have repeatedly expressed the United Nation's commitment to the advancement of Afghan women and to their full participation in peace-making and reconstruction. The full participation of Afghan women too in the ongoing negotiations and the peace process as a whole will prove to be a test case for the implementation of this resolution.

Peace and the enjoyment of human rights by all cannot be imposed by outsiders. Outsiders can help to bring former adversaries to the negotiation table and encourage agreements. True peace and equality, the crafting of bonds of trust and confidence, which hold families and communities together, cannot be created overnight. They must be built in accordance with international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, (CEDAW) and on democratic principles and with an understanding of social and cultural norms. This takes time and patience and the involvement of all sectors of society. Contributions of all those who lived through the violence - particularly, in this case, Afghan women

and girls - must be central to peace-building efforts. Without women's contributions, peace, and the stability it brings, will be fleeting.

Today, you the Afghan women present here, and the Afghan women in many countries of the world, are more engaged than ever before in finding priorities and solutions to your country's problems. You are building on your history of emancipation and the work of many individuals and groups. Afghan women made a major contribution in the 1963 constitutional drafting committee. The Afghan Constitution, adopted in 1964, but since disregarded, guarantees equality for women and men under the law. Afghans participated actively in the UN Commission on the Status of Women and were amongst the first to sign the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1980.

I urge you today to join forces and come together as one voice. I understand that there are differences among you, of language, of ethnic background, of education and training, that your experiences have shaped you depending on whether you came here directly from Afghanistan, from refugee camps or from exile in other countries. You may also have differences of opinion among you, and different approaches on how to best address the current situation to determine priorities and to contribute to the peace and reconstruction process, but I appeal to you to adopt a broad-based and inclusive approach in your discussions at this Summit. This two-day window of opportunity is open to you now. I call on you to use it.

I encourage you to find your own ways of bringing peace and justice to your country. Let me share with you an example of women in another conflict area. The Somali women established a "Sixth Clan" outside the warring factions, and participated as such in the peace and reconciliation conference in the summer of 2000. This Sixth Clan provided a framework for Somali women to establish a coalition group based on their common interests as women and mothers, rather than on narrow clan interests.

Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and East Timor also developed collaborative strategies. You may wish to contact them through local and international NGOs and through my Office and the Department for Peacekeeping Operations as they may provide valuable examples of good practices and lessons learned that can assist you in working with the United Nations in building peace in Afghanistan.

All of us, Afghan women, Governments, the donor and NGO communities and international organizations must work together to ensure that all Afghans, women and men, girls and boys, can enjoy their lives free from fear and want and in full human security. We must build trust and solidarity, strategic partnerships, and develop policies and programmes whether in girls' education, employment, democracy or rebuilding legal institutions which lead to the empowerment of Afghan women and to their rightful place in the leadership of their country. We, in the United Nations, stand ready to assist you. Over 250 international staff are already in Afghanistan and hundreds more will follow.

I wish you all well and am confident that the outcome of this Summit will be a productive contribution to the future of Afghanistan