

Statement of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan

The Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan express deep concern regarding the increasing erosion of respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls in Afghanistan by the Taliban, including through continued restrictions that limit access to education for women and girls.

The members call on the Taliban to immediately reverse the effective ban on girls' secondary education in Afghanistan, which has been in place for over one year. Members are deeply disturbed by developments where local community demands lead to the reopening of some girls' secondary schools, only to see them forcibly shut down by the Taliban once again. They underscore that the decision by the Taliban to exclude girls from schools does not reflect the wishes and demands of the majority of the Afghan people and that it makes Afghanistan the only country in the world that bans girls' secondary education.

The members of the Group reaffirm the right to education for all Afghans, including girls, and call on the Taliban to respect the right to education and adhere to their commitments to reopen schools for all female students across the country without further delay. They note the importance of education of all people to economic stability and reiterate that exclusion from education prevents women and girls from contributing to Afghanistan's future economic growth and prosperity. Furthermore, they emphasize findings by the World Economic Forum that banning women from working in the government and formal sectors will cause Afghanistan's GDP to contract by a minimum of \$600 million in the immediate term and restrictions on women's private sector employment could lead to a \$1.5 billion loss of output by 2024.

The members of the Group note the heightened risks associated with disruption of access to education, particularly for girls, making them more vulnerable to child labour and child, early, and forced marriages, as well as to their future economic opportunities, and the long-term consequences this has for durable peace, security and development.

The members of the Group request the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to continue to closely monitor and report on the situation, and request the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to continue to engage with all relevant Afghan political actors and stakeholders, including relevant authorities, on this issue, in accordance with the mandate of UNAMA.

This statement is endorsed by the following members of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan: United Kingdom, Qatar, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, Chad, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Slovenia, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, United States