

London Conference on Afghanistan – Women’s Rights thematic session.
Speech by Arezo Qanih, Deputy Director, Empowerment Centre for Women

We have come a long way on women and girl’s rights with lots of achievements, but we need to go further because Afghan women are strong and can help lead a country where everyone will enjoy their lives with full respect.

Afghan women and girls have received promises from the international community and new Unity Government. This gives us hope that despite our challenges, we will continue to work and make the path of development easier for the next generation.

You will all know Afghan women, girls and young people who have achieved a huge amount, some who are surviving their fate and others who have not. All women and girls have the right to add to our country and all have the ability to do so.

There are key areas that the Government of Afghanistan and International Community must support to ensure women and girls are empowered and can fully and meaningfully input into the future of our country:

- 1- Firstly on the legislative and justice framework.
 - We urge the Government of Afghanistan and international partners to support the women’s access to justice and the full implementation of the Elimination of Violence Against Women Law. It should remain an independent law and not be merged with any other code or law.
 - The establishment of 8 prosecution offices in 8 provinces is significant but is not enough, we need these offices across Afghanistan.
 - Key articles in the Constitution must be safeguarded when the Loya Jirga reviews the Constitution so that articles that guarantee gender equality, freedom of expression and political participation are maintained.
 - The draft Family Law should be sent to Parliament for approval without any amendments to the current draft. This must be supported by all of you here.
 - This all requires the active support and funding from the International Community.

- 2- Secondly on women’s inclusion
 - We urge the unity government to ensure women’s participation in all levels of government with full authority.
 - You must also support women’s active, full and meaningful participation in the peace process because women’s inclusion is essential to sustainable peace in our country.
 - Gender budgeting is needed to support women’s inclusion. We, Afghan Women, recommend a gender budget for each Government ministry to support this.

- Furthermore, to ensure women are protected and can participate, more shelters should be funded to support survivors of violence who find it difficult to access lifesaving services.
- 3- Thirdly, women's economic development, Education and Health need to be at the heart of unity government's agenda.
- Afghan Women have started to move from traditional business initiatives to new and innovative ones. These should be supported to enable women to take part in Afghanistan's economic development and support Afghanistan reach its full potential.
 - Whilst enrolment of girls in schools has increased, by the end of the school year many girls drop out due to security, lack of female teachers and early marriage. The International Community and Afghan Government should continue to support girls' primary and secondary education. Their education is essential to Afghanistan being a peaceful, secure country where all citizens can claim their rights.
4. Youth and children are the key to Afghanistan's future.
- Attention needs to be paid to both.
 - The Government and International Community should support a new policy on youth inclusion, a child protection law and programmes to address the high levels of unemployment among youth.

Let's work together for the women, girls and youth of Afghanistan.