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STATEMENT

BY

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At the General Debate of the Third Committee

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NEW YORK
Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, allow me to thank the Secretary General for his comprehensive report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which is a helpful prelude to this important debate.

Today’s debate is particularly relevant to my country, Afghanistan. Just 12 years ago, women in Afghanistan were prohibited from going to school, they were confined to their homes, and they were not allowed a voice in the public sphere. Yet since 2001, the government has been fully committed to enabling women to regain their historic roles as proactive citizens in Afghan society.

Mr. Chairman,

We have made tremendous progress since the collapse of the Taliban. In 2001, 5000 girls were enrolled in school in Afghanistan. Now around 3 million girls are enrolled in schools across the country. Since 2001, the number of female lecturers in Afghanistan’s universities has increased by 15 percent; the number of female teachers in schools has increased 31 percent; and women’s presence in different levels of government offices has increased up to 25%. Equality of men and women is enshrined in our constitution, and the advancement of women is marked as the responsibility of the state. Afghanistan is in the top 30 countries of the world with the highest representation of women in the Parliament. These developments towards greater empowerment of women are among our proudest achievements of the past 12 years.

Mr. Chairman,

My government is committed to gender equality and the empowerment of all Afghan women. Their role and participation in the country’s development and political institutions is essential to Afghanistan’s future. Our national policies exemplify this commitment: gender is a central component of Afghanistan’s National Development Strategy (ANDS), which affirms equality in all aspects for women. The ANDS includes specific benchmarks for advancing gender equality including increased participation of women in state and non-state activities and the provision of legal privileges for women.

The National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan (NAPWA) is the main vehicle for government implementation of gender commitments in the ANDS, the Constitution, the MDGs, the Afghanistan compact and other national and international policy instruments on women. Through my country’s transformation decade (2015-2024), NAPWA will pursue a number of ambitious objectives including promoting women’s participation in government entities, reducing illiteracy, ensuring equal pay for equal work, lowering maternal mortality, and providing greater economic opportunities to women.

In addition, Afghanistan is pursuing the vigorous implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 to ensure that women are meaningfully represented in peace, security, and conflict resolution efforts. In this regard, women continue to play a role in Afghan peace talks,
including through participation in the High Peace Council. Women are also among the ranks of security and police forces in the country.

I gratefully note the International Community’s tremendous support of women’s empowerment in Afghanistan, and of our plans towards women’s advancement. This support has been consistent over the past twelve years, and is clearly demonstrated by the outcome document of the Tokyo Conference of July 2012, bilateral and multilateral agreements, and support through various programs and donor agencies.

Mr. Chairman,

The challenges we face in our endeavours towards the advancement of women in country are towering. Numerous realities of our country prevent women from realizing full equality including poverty, low levels of education, and unfamiliarity with related laws in remote and rural areas. Most significantly, women are amongst the most vulnerable as a result of three decades of war and insecurity.

We note with profound regret the killings and brutality against many women and girls including women activists, NGO workers, police officers and even a member of the Senate. Anti-government elements target these brave women who are working towards the betterment of my country. Let me emphasize that violence against women is an intolerable breach of human rights, and our government condemns it absolutely. For this reason, peace and reconciliation is crucial for Afghan women and girls to further consolidate achievements made for their rights over the past several years.

Mr. Chairman,

In the lead up to elections, women are playing important roles in the political life of the country, in parliament, in civil society, and in the upcoming elections. Last week an Independent Election Commission spokesman noted that 237 women had submitted their names for provincial elections. There are currently 8 female vice presidential candidates and one presidential candidate.

In closing, I want to emphasize how far my country has come since the dark days of the 1990s, and how many rights we’ve won for women since. We must see our progress in this perspective. We thank the international community for their continued support of our efforts for the women of our country and their rights. For our part, we remain fundamentally committed to the advancement of women’s rights, and we will work to ensure the full empowerment of women.

Thank you.