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PRESS RELEASE

Peace is impossible when half the population is excluded from negotiations, say Afghanistan's women activists

A day ahead of the London Conference, women's groups make strong recommendations for reconstruction and development

London, 27 January 2010: In the lead-up to the 28 January London Conference on Afghanistan hosted by the UK Government, Afghan women human rights defenders today released strong, specific recommendations on security, development and governance priorities for their country. These recommendations provide the *only* concrete input from *consultation* with Afghan women into the key decisions affecting the future of their country that will be set in the London by international actors. Deeply concerned about the exclusion of Afghan women's perspectives from the dialogue surrounding for the London Conference, the statement issued today by the women activists comes as a result of broad-based consultations with Afghan women civil society leaders at the Dubai Women's Dialogue and London Dialogue over the last week, involving the Afghan Women's Network and supported by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and Institute for Inclusive Security.

"As the global community knows, nowhere are women's human rights more at stake than in Afghanistan. Therefore it is of grave concern that women's voices and perspectives are largely missing from this London conference on Afghanistan's future. The international community should stand behind the women of Afghanistan and elevate their voices, not barter away their rights in the name of short-term peace and stabilization" said Wazma Frogh, women's rights activist from Afghanistan.

Women's participation in and perspectives on security solutions for Afghanistan are of particular relevance given the way that their rights and freedoms have been a focus of some of the conflict in the country. "Besides the high levels of violence experienced by ordinary women and girls, there has been a very high rate of deadly attacks on women human rights defenders and women in prominent public roles. This makes the determination of the women who have travelled to London to share their concerns and proposals all the more inspiring, and the international community needs to hear what they have to say" said Anne Marie Goetz, Chief Advisor, Governance Peace and Security for UNIFEM.

The status of Afghan women continues to be one of the worst in the world with 87 percent of them facing domestic abuse every day. They are also systematically neglected as key partners for conflict resolution, peacebuilding and recovery: "Afghan women have the most to gain from peace and the most to lose from any form of reconciliation compromising women's human rights. There cannot be national security without women's security, there can be no peace when women's lives are fraught with violence, when our children can't go to schools, when we cannot step on the streets for fear of acid attacks," said Mary Akrami, Director of the Afghan Women Skills Development Centre.

Pointedly reminding international donors and the national government that women's participation is critical for sustainable peace, and that women can spearhead efforts to moderate

extremism, the advocates demanded that women be included in all security and development processes, including any negotiations and reconciliation programmes involving warlords, the Taliban, and other insurgents. “Women are the single, greatest under-utilized resource in efforts to return stability and prosperity to Afghanistan. Peace building efforts cannot be fully effective when they ignore the expertise, insights, and ideas of half the population,” according to Carla Koppell’s, Director, The Institute for Inclusive Security. Adds Orzala Ashraf, independent women’s rights activist, “Short term deals with insurgents will not deliver long-term stability if there aren’t guarantees of women’s rights. In the end women’s well-being is the test of real security and stabilization.”

From the London Conference, the advocates hope to see a clear plan that will provide greater clarity of direction and priorities for the new Afghan administration as well as the inclusion of gender concerns, and a renewed commitment to implement existing commitments to Afghan women. Their specific recommendations include:

- **Ensuring women’s representation in peace processes.** Consistent with constitutional guarantees for women’s representation, women must comprise at least 25% of any peace process including any proposed upcoming peace jirgas. They must be represented in any national and local security policy making forums, such as the Afghan President’s National Security Council.
- **Guaranteeing that reconciliation protects women’s rights.** The government and international community must secure and monitor women’s rights in all reconciliation initiatives so that the status of women is not bargained away in any short-term effort to achieve stability.
- **Implementing gender-responsive security policy.** All efforts to enhance security in Afghanistan must better serve women.

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***UNIFEM** is the women's fund at the United Nations. It provides financial and technical assistance to innovative programmes and strategies to foster women's empowerment and gender equality. Placing the advancement of women's human rights at the centre of all of its efforts, UNIFEM focuses its activities on reducing feminized poverty; ending violence against women; reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS among women and girls; and achieving gender equality in democratic governance in times of peace as well as war. www.unifem.org.*

*For over a decade the Washington, DC based **Institute for Inclusive Security** has used research, training, and advocacy to promote the inclusion of all stakeholders, particularly women, in peace processes. We work with a global network of over 1,000 women leaders from more than 40 conflict regions. Our research gives policymakers new strategies to drive inclusion by examining tangible contributions of women peace builders. Our training provides leaders the skills and knowledge to direct local, national, and international peace-building. Our advocacy to high-level policymakers promotes change that makes peace processes more broad-based and sustainable. www.huntalternatives.org.*