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8 March 2012 - Collective Statement of the Afghanistan Women's 50% Campaign and 21 Groups

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We are concerned today that dark-mindedness, illiteracy and lack of awareness may once again push the people of Afghanistan, our women, men and children, over the precipice

Collective Statement of the Afghanistan Women's 50% Campaign and 21 Women's rights, Human rights , Civil society and media organisations and networks

for the 101st International Women's Day

We are concerned today that dark-mindedness, illiteracy and lack of awareness may once again push the people of Afghanistan, our women, men and children, over the precipice

8th March 2012 Kabul, Afghanistan

Ladies, gentlemen, elected representatives of the people of Afghanistan!

We intend to address you about our commitments, obligations and pledges. Eleven years ago when Afghanistan raised itself from the ruins remaining from the reign of Taleban, you, us and the international community pledged together to step on the path of freedom and equality for all. Tightening our belts and relying on the most meagre facilities, we did our best to promote humane causes and advance the society. We reopened are schools and achieved brilliant results in entrance examinations and universities. We accompanied and assisted you as civil servants and worked in non-governmental organisations. We were active in and left our impact on audio, visual and print media despite all the risks. We stepped on the difficult path of electing and getting elected; we accepted all the hardships and dangers, because we believed we were heading along the priceless path of equality and liberty. We women were actors of the various social stages and did our utmost to rebuild our country from the ruins of the past. Even though there have been and there are still shortcomings, women have benefited from a number of civil and political rights in recent years thanks to their own endeavours,. Nevertheless, they are still absent from micro and national decision-making processes.

In every country democracy and freedom is assessed by evaluating the conditions of women

Today, 11 years on, when we review our achievements, we are very pleased that we heeded to the country's call and behaved as the worthy children of this land. We have been loyal to our pledge. However, it is with regret that nowadays we hear different views and ideas from you. Today, women are not treated as actors with deserving roles in the administration of their society but as "minors" who are targeted by adverse positions under different pretexts and whose human rights are trampled upon. Considering them to be "secondary" to men, slashing their ears and noses and other limbs, stoning and imprisoning them, marrying them under-age and by force, closing the schools to girls and other similar acts as well as failing to engage women in peace-related issues are all interconnected. Both the international community and the government of Afghanistan are visibly appeasing the armed opposition groups by returning the society to the conditions of 11 years ago and trading away the human and civil rights of women. The only thing that is not important to them is their pledge to us and to themselves. They have forgotten that the liberation

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of women in Afghanistan was the most basic reason for their presence in this country.

Ladies, gentlemen, elected representatives of the people of Afghanistan!

Now that the international community is present in Afghanistan, it is our task is not to suffice to their experience in military and physical reconstruction matters but to benefit from their experiences regarding freedom, equality and democracy. The people worldwide have priceless experiences in these areas. You have all borne witness to the notable role and involvement of women in the ongoing revolutions in the Moslem states of the Middle East. How can we achieve such a status in an Islamic society? Is there any answer to this question other than: newer readings of religion to advance religion itself, as well as life conditions of men and women, free of some micro local customs and traditions? Even if we do not wish to consider the whole vast world and to view only the Moslem states, how can we close our eyes to the achievements of women in Turkey, Egypt, India, Bangladesh and even Pakistan, Iran, Qatar and others and once again repeat our same old experiences? How can we speak of democracy and freedom, when we close our eyes on half of our population and easily trade away their rights? Even if the opponents of women's participation in various spheres of life prevent women's presence by invoking cultural and ideological issues, this is not a reason to marginalise women and trade away their rights.

Afghanistan is a part of the international community. It has signed many international treaties and conventions including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). After a decade of continued company with the international community, after having voiced complaints and remorse for forgetting Afghanistan in previous decades, we must learn from their experiences in all fields and in particular in regard to women in order to solve the problems of the society. The government of Afghanistan has a duty to adopt a responsible approach to its obligations before humanity and in particular the people of Afghanistan and not allow half the population to be banished to oblivion once again. All the authorities and elected representatives of the people must adhere to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan as the highest legal instrument in this country and be respectful of all the achievements of the government and civil society of Afghanistan in the past 11 years.

We are concerned today that dark-mindedness, illiteracy and lack of awareness may once again push the people of Afghanistan, our women, men and children, over the precipice and force us to relive the bitter experiences of the past.

Afghanistan Women's 50% Campaign, Armanshahr Foundation/OPEN ASIA, Women's Political Participation, All Afghan Women Union, Transitional Justice Coordination Group (TJCG), Afghanistan Civil Society Forum (ACSF), Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), Afghanistan Human rights and Democracy Organisation (AHRDO), Radio Mojda, Cooperation Center for Afghanistan (CCO), Cooperation for Peace and Development (CPD), Fadayi Herawi Publishing House, Foundation for Culture and Civil Society (FCCS), , Human Rights Focus Organisation, Young Women for Change, 8 Sobh daily, Social Association of Afghan Justice-Seekers (SAAJS), Rawan on line, Foundation of Solidarity for Justice, People's Radio (Mardom), Negah Zan Network, Ertebat.

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