



AFGHAN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION REFUGEE & IMMIGRANT SERVICES

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Toronto– Ontario

Greetings:

Let me start by saying that on March 8th and every day of my life, I stand in solidarity with the women of Afghanistan and all women from all corners of the world in their struggle for their human rights, for their truth and justice.

The theme for this year's International Women's Day is "Embrace Equity". Somewhere along the way, we realized equality would be at a distance for now! Equal pay, equal representation in the legislatures, equal seats on the governing boards, equal access to vaccines during the pandemic crisis, equal rights to ownership of land, health and education, and equal participation in science and technological fields will not be realized unless we (meaning the world) commit to the realities required by principles of equity. We (the world) must Embrace Equity first. We need to foster beliefs, values, and strategies to fully acknowledge the roadmap and develop the navigation tools essential to understanding and implementing equity which will then position us to achieve equality.

Well, I would like to pause and reflect on my homeland and attest that many of these significant days of commemorations don't positively affect the life of Afghan women and girls. Under the current circumstances, they neither experience equity nor would they flavour equality. Since the Taliban have taken over Afghanistan, the breathing room for women has shrunk by the hour. Their right to work was revoked, and then they were confined to their homes with no ability for free movement unless accompanied by a male relative. These practices were followed by forced marriages of very young girls, even giving them up due to extreme poverty. There is no shortage of counts of thousands of women being persecuted, lashed in public and even murdered.

Patriarchy and misogyny have taken the country back by decades and put women in a bind of dark ages. Teachers, doctors, academics, musicians, athletes, shop owners and journalists have been forced out of the public eye since that frightening August of 2021. The world by most measures has stood idle while our people struggled to ensure the safety of their children and families only to pay with imprisonment, persecution or even their lives. Tens of thousands of broken hearts and lost lives have remained!

Just a few months ago female university students were banned from attending post-secondary institutions. Gender inequality in Afghanistan is a devastating injustice and the most excruciating challenge and reality for women. But our sisters remain defiant. They are resisting these cruel impositions by organizing street protests and other forms of campaigns knowing the grave punitive consequences the Taliban would inflict upon them. Although women are being denied their voice, their needs, and their rights, they are still uniting under the most brutal circumstances to attain their human rights.

What are we in the diaspora expected to do while witnessing this situation? I believe we need to reach our allies, our friends, and our fellow Canadians to stand by Afghan women and girls, to be their voice, their messengers, and their supporters. We ask the Canadian government on IWD and at every opportunity to expeditiously continue providing safe passages to Afghans targeted by the Taliban, particularly the at-risk women and girls.

In recent years the world has been a turbulent place. The atrocities identified against indigenous people in Canada, and the conflicts and wars driven by greed and expansionism have immensely been disruptive. Ordinary people's lives have been severely interrupted. Negotiations and peace treaties have been signed and overlooked. We know for a fact that in wars and times of conflict children and women bear the most destructive impact. The recent wars and oppressions imposed on Ukraine, Syria, Yemen, Palestine, and conflicts in Afghanistan, and other parts of Africa, and Latin America and the resistance movement in Iran have resulted in pain, displacement, separation, and severe trauma within families and communities.

As people who are committed to peace, justice, equality and embracing equity, let us join forces with a common voice of solidarity in support of women and girls affected by social unrest, conflict and war and work alongside those who can be with us and on behalf of those who cannot.

Excluding women from education, leadership positions, parity, and other gender-based constructs no longer go unnoticed. Young women and men are engaged in new and inclusive strategies in their pursuits which are aimed at uniting people across borders and around common goals.

Celebrating IWD becomes more acutely meaningful when we see our convictions produce concrete impacts on respecting women's rights as human rights across the globe. Let's consider this as an imminent task and engage in our collective work.

Happy International Women's Day!

Adeena Niazi, Executive Director

Afghan Women's Organization Refugee & Immigrant Services