



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Response to H.E. Dilbar Nazari, Minister of Women's Affairs of Afghanistan**

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
May 21, 2015

The United States is honored to welcome Her Excellency Dilbar Nazari, Minister of Women's Affairs of Afghanistan, to the Permanent Council. Thank you for your report and for the hard work you and your government are doing in Afghanistan. I appreciated in particular the specific steps you laid out.

Since 2002, women and girls in Afghanistan have achieved significant progress. More girls are attending school, life expectancy for women has risen, and maternal and child mortality rates have declined. These achievements are significant, but they are still tenuous. The United States is firmly committed to cementing these achievements and continuing to work with the Afghan government and international community to form the foundation for future progress.

President Ghani has been clear in his support for women as equal citizens and full partners, as demonstrated by his declaration that all girls must have access to basic health care and education, through his dedication to reaching a parity of women and men graduating from high schools and colleges, and by his plans for an all-women's university. These types of efforts, which help to ensure that the rights of women and girls are protected at all levels and that they are engaged across all sectors, are vital for Afghanistan's economy and for the long-term stability of the country. To help solidify the educational progress made in Afghanistan, President Obama announced in March an \$18 million USAID scholarship fund to support women attending universities throughout Afghanistan. The United States also intends to increase the number of Fulbright fellowships available to Afghan students by 50 percent.

Gender-based violence remains endemic and is a serious concern in Afghanistan. While civil society groups and Afghan women leaders courageously continue to advocate for gender equality, men and boys must also be meaningful partners in defending their human rights as well as preventing and responding to gender-based violence. Men will have to raise their voices – to defend their daughters' access to education, to hold authorities accountable to implement laws protecting their sisters' rights, and to stop the cycle of domestic and sexual violence.

We are pleased to hear about Afghanistan's plan to officially launch a National Action Plan on implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security. We know the positive impact that women have in supporting peace and stability, which is why we have continued to encourage the Afghan government to nominate strong, independent and qualified women to leadership positions in key governing institutions, including the Supreme Court, as well as cabinet positions, governorships, and senior posts within the security forces. While they continue to face tremendous obstacles, Afghan women have played a key role in

the justice and security sectors as they serve in the army and the police, and work as judges and prosecutors. Among them is Captain Nilofar Rahmani, Afghanistan's first woman pilot, who was named one of 2015's International Women of Courage by Secretary Kerry. As the OSCE supports initiatives focused on border security and transnational threats with Afghanistan – including the important work at the Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe – we strongly believe that including a gender perspective in these engagements strengthens opportunities for security and stability. Any potential for peace will be subverted if women's voices are silenced or marginalized.

Women are also essential to our efforts to counter radicalization and violent extremism that leads to terrorism. In particular, women – often mothers – are the first to recognize and address risky behavior that may lead to violent radicalization. As such, we welcome Afghanistan's continued participation in OSCE events that seek to empower women to thwart this rising threat.

In closing, I would like to quote Secretary Kerry, who said recently: “The United States stands with the women of Afghanistan today. We will stand with you tomorrow and we will stand with you for years to come, not simply because you merit our support, but because without women's participation and talent, Afghanistan will not be able to build the future that its citizens urgently desire and deserve.”

Minister Nazari, we thank you for all you do every day to ensure that women's participation and talent are a central part of the Afghanistan of today and of the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.