

Letter to Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan

21 November 2001

Dear Mr. Brahimi:

This letter is being sent to you as a matter of great urgency on behalf of the Working Group on Women, Peace and Security.

At a press conference yesterday, it was confirmed that a meeting of various Afghan groups and other interested players is set for next week in Germany. On hearing the news, the Security Council President Ambassador Patricia Durrant of Jamaica was quoted as saying that this was "an indispensable first step towards the establishment of a broad-based representative government in Afghanistan." She added that the members of the Security Council encouraged all parties to participate in this meeting "in good faith and without preconditions."

We urge in the strongest terms that women be represented at this most important meeting of "various Afghan groups and other interested players" in Germany. To leave women out of any stages in the rebuilding of this devastated country is to cripple that development irrevocably. Women represent 60% of the population of Afghanistan. In the decade before the 1990's, women represented 70% of the teachers, 40% of the doctors, 15% of the legislation and 50% of the government workers. Women were engineers and scientists, media professionals, community leaders and small business owners and the full involvement of women in the total development and life of Afghanistan was obvious. In recent years, women have helped to sustain their community by providing essential health care, education, relief and other humanitarian services in refugee camps and in Afghanistan.

In October 2000, the United Nations Security Council went on record as recognizing the essential role played by women in all aspects of a nation's development. In adopting unanimously a resolution on women, peace and security, the Security Council stressed in no uncertain terms "the importance of (women's) equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution."

In SC Resolution 1325, the Security Council "Urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict." It calls on all actors involved, when negotiating and implementing peace agreements, "to adopt a gender perspective, including, inter alia: a) The special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement and for rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction; and b) Measures that support local women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution, and that involve women in all implementation mechanisms of the peace agreements."

Experienced and highly capable women are available to work for the disarmament of their country and the formation of a democratic government. In fact, leaders in the Afghan women's movement have made these two things, i.e. disarmament and a democratic government, essential goals if they are to be part of any negotiations. They have spoken passionately of the need for regional representation by people who played no role in the armed conflict and harsh rule that have devastated their country over the past 20 years. Women of Afghanistan want peace, security, justice and a sustainable development that is only

possible if a democratic government is at the core. Yesterday, in Kabul, women demonstrated for human rights, demanding peace for the country, education for their children and power for themselves.

We have attached to this letter a list of Afghan women's groups for your action. Precedence for the involvement of women at all stages in the prevention and resolution of conflict and in peace-building has been established in Northern Ireland, Somalia and Burundi. We demand nothing less than this for Afghanistan. To deny the participation of women is to go against everything that women of the world fought for and won in SC Resolution 1325.

Mr. Brahimi, the eyes of the world are now upon you. This is the moment for the United Nations to take its stand on behalf of peace, democracy, human rights and the full participation of women at every level of negotiations towards that end.

Yours sincerely,

Christelle Matou
Coordinator, NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security