CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement by Ms. Tamana Zaryab Paryani
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President, Excellencies,

Thank you for the opportunity to brief you today.

In the name of humanity, freedom, justice and equality.

My name is Tamana Zaryab Paryani. Some of you may recognize me. I am the woman in the video from 2022[1] — the one trembling with fear, crying for help from inside a bedroom while Taliban forces surrounded her home in the middle of the night. I am the woman who thought she might not survive that night.

I was with my three sisters when Taliban forces stormed into our home. They came to silence me for my activism for human rights, as they have silenced others. But that night, from my small apartment in Kabul, despite my fear, I chose to document their crimes. That video helped save my life. Had I not had access to the internet, had I not held my phone in my hand, I might not be here today. Others have not been as lucky.

I was imprisoned and tortured by the Taliban. When I was detained, we could hear the screams of prisoners silenced by gunfire. We saw the bodies of dead prisoners left to decay.

These memories will never leave me. They show what the Taliban is willing to do to those who defy them.

My struggle against violence and inequality has come at a great cost. My family has suffered. My friends have suffered. I have suffered. Yet I continue to speak out because remaining silent is not an option.

Especially for women in Afghanistan, speaking out is not easy. It means challenging systems designed to silence you. It means risking your freedom, your safety, and sometimes your life.

Today marks five years and 73 days since women in Afghanistan have lived under a system of gender apartheid. I experienced it personally, including during my imprisonment. Millions of other women and girls in Afghanistan continue to experience it every single day. Afghanistan is the only country on the planet where girls are systematically denied education[2] and where women are excluded from nearly every aspect of public life.[3] Women are banned from universities[4] and most jobs.[5] They cannot move freely and are banned from parks, gyms and countless public spaces.[6] They are denied the basic freedoms that many people around the world take for granted.

We have never stopped resisting the Taliban. We organized months of street protests under the Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan.[7] In 2023, we went on hunger strike in Germany, demanding that the world recognize the Taliban's gender apartheid as an international crime.[8] We were joined by activists around the globe.

And yet, neither the urgency of this crisis nor our activism has moved you. The international community has failed us.

We hear statements. We hear expressions of concern. But the women of Afghanistan need action, not words.

Every day that passes, another generation of women and girls loses opportunities, dreams and futures.

This is not only Afghanistan's crisis. Violations do not stop at borders. They spread when they are tolerated. They grow when they are ignored. That is why what is happening in Afghanistan should concern every nation represented here today.

If you are a parent, stand up for the future of your daughters. If you are a brother, stand firm beside your sisters. And if none of these roles define you, then stand up for our common humanity. Because none of us can claim ignorance. None of us can say we did not know.

During my imprisonment, I witnessed the true face of misogyny. I saw what happens when violence and discrimination are allowed to become systems of power. And I know this: If the world fails to act in Afghanistan, others will learn they too can get away with such crimes.

Today, as we reflect on the state of women's rights globally, the situation I have described in Afghanistan tells the story of what happens when every principle that the Women, Peace and Security agenda stands for is ignored: when women are forced out of public life, when their rights are routinely violated, and when there are no mechanisms to hold violators accountable. We see other examples in the Occupied Palestinian Territory,[9] Sudan,[10] Myanmar[11] and too many others, where women pay the price for wars they did not start and decisions in which they had no voice.

Today, I have **three messages** to the Security Council that can both impact the lives of women in Afghanistan, and move gender equality forward globally:

1. **Center gender justice and women's rights throughout this Council's work**, including on Afghanistan. The targeting of women and marginalized groups should be treated as a warning, and a threat to international peace and security. Do not normalize these violations, or actors, like the Taliban, who commit them. An alarming number of countries have handed over embassies to the Taliban[12] or given them diplomatic recognition.[13] Others are seeking the Taliban's help in deporting people to Afghanistan.[14] So, it bears repeating: Women's rights must be the number one priority in any engagement with the Taliban. When that does not happen, you are failing us and you are failing all women everywhere.

2. **Hold violators of women's rights, like the Taliban, accountable.** Codify gender apartheid as a crime against humanity.[15] Support the case at the International Court of Justice for violations of CEDAW.[16] Support efforts to arrest Taliban leaders for gender persecution.[17] These actions could help prevent this type of systematic oppression of women from happening elsewhere.

3. **Demand women's participation in all discussions about their own future.** Over the years, this Council has heard powerful statements from many women leaders from Afghanistan.[18] Yet, too often, the international community has chosen to listen to the men with guns, rather than the women who are fighting for the rights of their communities. If we truly hope to end cycles of conflict, women's full participation — in peacemaking, in accountability efforts, in humanitarian delivery — holds the key to a just and equal Afghanistan.

To those of you who believe you have no power to change the situation of women in Afghanistan, I ask you to remember my story. The Taliban have shot at me and my fellow protestors. We have been whipped, gassed and beaten. And we have picked ourselves up and come back the next day to protest the Taliban's cruel policies.

That is because we know that rights are won through struggle. We know that we are the resistance to repression. Freedom is never granted; it is won. And we will not stop until we win justice and equality for all women.

Thank you.

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