UN Women Executive Director’s Message for International Women’s Day

“Today we join the people of the world in celebration of the progress made for women’s rights, women’s empowerment and gender equality. We also acknowledge that progress has been slow, uneven and in some cases women girls face new and more complex challenges. International Women's Day is therefore also a day to recommit ourselves to working harder for gender equality, together as women, men, youth, and leaders of nations, communities, religion and commerce.

If we act decisively with the knowledge that empowering women and girls and supporting their full participation, can help solve the greatest challenges of the 21st century, we will find lasting solutions to many of the problems we face in our world. Major challenges such as poverty, inequality, violence against women and girls and insecurity will be addressed substantially.

Women spend the majority of their income on the well-being of their children and family. Raising women’s labour force participation increases economic growth. By ending women’s poverty, we will sustainably and significantly reduce extreme poverty worldwide.

By keeping girls in school longer with quality education, we will empower young women to play their full role in society and build stronger families, communities and democracies.

By advancing equal opportunity and removing structural barriers to women’s economic empowerment, we will reduce inequality and spur inclusive economic growth.

By supporting women’s equal representation in leadership positions in peacemaking, in communities, in politics, in business and in religious institutions, we will build a more just, peaceful and secure world.

By working with men and boys, and doing it together, we will engage humanity in a task that is a responsibility for all.

As we celebrate International Women’s Day, we remember and celebrate the women, who led by women in trade unions on this day more than a century ago, called for better working conditions, peace and bread. Their call is still valid today.

Given slow and uneven progress, we continue to call for change. And we pay tribute to the countless women around the world who are making change every day as they go about their daily lives.”
UN Women commemorates 8 March- International Women’s Day

“EQUALITY FOR WOMEN IS PROGRESS FOR ALL”

UN Women joined the people of Afghanistan in celebrating International Women’s Day and the progress already made towards gender equality and women’s empowerment, calling upon the Government of Afghanistan and the international community to stand by their commitments and fulfill their promises in regard to women’s rights. This year’s theme, ‘Equality for Women is Progress for All,’ emphasized gender equality and the empowerment of women as keystones to a nation’s economic and social development. It also highlighted the vital role women play as agents of change.

To mark the Day, UN Women supported the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) in organizing events in the capital Kabul and in 11 provinces. UN Women implemented several activities to promote awareness on EVAW, mobilize communities, social leaders, and particularly engage men, boys and youth as actors for change.

“UN Women’s focus is to support an Afghan-led awareness raising process, highlighting both the progress made over the past decade as well as advocating for coordinated and sustained efforts designed to safeguard those gains and further empower women.” said Pamela F. Husain, UN Women Acting Country Representative. “Afghanistan is entering a transition period, and it is crucial to protect the right of all Afghans, and particularly women and girls, to enjoy freedom from violence, and equal access to political and social participation, education, work, recreation, and basic services”. Continued on page 4

Civil Society Exchange (CSE): Adding Volume to the Voice to Promote Women’s Participation in the 2014/15 Elections

The 2014 Presidential and Provincial Council Elections come at a critical time in the history of Afghanistan. Characterized by the drawdown of international military presence, these elections will set the tone for the country’s peace process, economic development, and most importantly, its attitude towards the rights of women.

Since late 2012, UN Women has been facilitating a dialogue amongst a number of Afghan Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) engaged in women’s participation in the elections. This advocacy focused “think tank” was created to identify a mechanism that would coordinate the information collection and advocacy efforts of the various and widespread CSOs and activists. Taking as its slogan “Adding Volume to the Voice”, the Civil Society Exchange (CSE) was established, with a core membership of 12 activists and CSO representatives, working voluntarily. A national Information Management Officer was recruited to support data collection and coordination for the CSE.

This initiative aimsto bring together civil society towards the common goal of addressing women’s rights in Afghanistan. Within the context of the elections, CSE will monitor issues and advocate for their resolution by the appropriate authorities. They issued their first press release and will continue to raise awareness throughout the 2014/15 elections in hopes to support a fairer electoral process and more transparent results.
Panel discusses youth’s role in ensuring social justice in Afghanistan

Social justice provides the foundation for a safe community, growing out of our sense that each person and each human being has value - this was the consensus view at a recent panel discussion on Afghan youth’s role in extending social justice within Afghan communities.

UN Women organized and facilitated the discussion that took place in Kabul on 26 February, 2014, as part of the SG UNiTE Campaign activities as well as to mark World Day of Social Justice. More than one hundred representatives drawn from youth and civil society organizations gathered for an open discussion, to help the process of ensuring social justice by developing respect for one another.

“As you discuss these key principles, ask yourself what is your vision? What kind of Afghanistan do you want to have in your future, and what will you do to reach that vision?” UN Women’s Acting Country Representative Pamela F. Husain asked the participants. “Your voices are important and they are strong. You must make the future you want,” she added.

The gathering noted that it is fundamentally agreed that the essence of social justice is based on the values of fairness, equality, respect for diversity, access to social protection, and the application of human rights in all spheres of life. Afghan youth believe that the dream for a prosperous Afghanistan can be transformed into reality by establishing social justice’s underlying principle for peaceful and pleasant coexistence within communities.

“Social justice is ensuring equality among all. We have to accept the reality that women and men are equal and both should be provided with equal opportunities.” said Totakhail, a young male Afghan activist.

The panel, which included representatives from the Attorney General’s Office and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), called upon the Government of Afghanistan to advance social justice and eliminate obstacles people face because of gender, age and disability.

The AIHRC insisted that social justice in Afghanistan needs to be protected and improved. “Lack of rule of law and the culture of impunity are immense problems that widely affect social justice. Youth can play an important role as change agents to overcome these challenges,” said Suraya Sobhrang, AIHRC Commissioner and panel member.

Pressing the immense significance of social justice, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 20 February as World Day of Social Justice in 2007, inviting Member States to devote the day to promoting national activities in accordance with the objectives and goals of the World Summit for Social Development. The World Day of Social Justice is observed to support efforts in poverty eradication, the promotion of full employment and decent work, gender equity and access to social well-being and justice for all.
UN Women Commemorates... Continued from page 2

There has been substantial progress in the past decade by Afghanistan. The Government ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the Constitution enshrines equal rights for women and men; the National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan was launched; and in 2009 the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) Law was adopted.

As Afghanistan enters a new era of self-reliance, it is imperative that all Afghans are aware of their rights and obligations in order to be constructive and active contributors to the nation’s development. Ongoing efforts to ensure that legal reforms promote access to justice and protect women’s rights have brought closer partnership between civil society, Parliament and the President’s Office, as was seen in the efforts regarding Article 26 of the Criminal Procedure Code, which contained controversial language undermining women’s rights. UN Women praises the President’s support for improved language, and views the strong lobbying campaign by Afghan civil society and partners as a positive sign that the women’s rights movement is gathering increased strength and support.

UN Women remains committed to supporting the Government of Afghanistan in meeting its national and international obligations and commitments impacting women and girls, and in particular towards ensuring that women have equal opportunities to participate in political and peace processes as well as in economic activities and other spheres of community and public life, free of violence.

Civil Society Exchange...Continued from page 2

“IT’s a big step towards ensuring women’s participation in the upcoming elections. Women need to know about their power and we are working through CSE to motivate women to extensively participate in this national process as voters and candidates.” said RoshanSiraan, a prominent Afghan women’s rights activist.

It is hoped that the CSE will continue its work throughout the elections and beyond, as a mechanism for coordinated advocacy that ensures that women’s voices nationwide are heard.

UN Women’s Executive Director 8 March Message... Continued from page 1

Nearly 20 years after the Beijing Women’s Conference, and 15 years after the Millennium Summit, we look back with pride at the achievements that have been made. More women are working. More girls are in school. Less women die in pregnancy and childbirth. And more women are in leadership positions.

But no country in the world has achieved equality between women and men and girls and boys, and violations of the rights of women and girls are an outrage. So let us build on the lessons learned and the knowledge that equality for women is progress for all and make greater and bolder progress as we work to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and chart a new post-2015 development agenda.

We can no longer afford to hold back half the world’s population. The 21st century has to be different for every woman and girl in the world. She must know that to be born a girl is not the start of a life of hardship and disadvantage. Together we must make sure that:

She is Safe and Secure from gender-based violence.

She has human rights that are respected, including reproductive rights.

She is empowered economically and in every way through education, equal opportunity, participation and leadership.

This is the she imperative that I call on you to commit to.

Let us all cross the line and stand on the right side of history.

Today and every day UN Women will stand strong for women’s rights, women’s empowerment and gender equality.

Equality for women is progress for all.”