Dear Reader,

It’s with great pleasure that I introduce the sixth edition of Together with Afghan Women. In this issue you will find articles about the work of UN Women’s Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW) team in the field, stories from the exposure visits of our partners to Malaysia and Nepal, as well as the updates from our work with the Ministry of Rural Development and Rehabilitation and the Central Statistics Office.

This year, with significant transitional events taking place in the political and security arenas, it is essential to ensure women’s active participation in all levels of the government and peace negotiations. As UN Women, we will continue supporting the gender dialogue for Afghanistan’s strong stand on gender equality and women’s empowerment. It is a development and human rights imperative that the progress made during the past 12 years is not be lost.

In recent weeks several cases of violence against women and girls in Afghanistan were shared by the media sources; attacks that seem to be more frequent and more brutal. Violence against women and girls remains endemic, and is symptomatic of deeper issues such as poverty, lack of access to education, and conflict: issues that affect both women and men, but which can lead to social issues such as violence against women and girls.

We welcome the new Government and stand ready to support it in implementing its gender obligations, particularly in addressing the root causes of violence against women and girls; namely, poverty, exclusion from decision making, and limited access to secondary education and economic opportunities, while ensuring full implementation of the Government’s obligations and commitments under the EVAW Law, CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action, and other national and international conventions.

UN Women’s programme in Afghanistan strives to impact the lives of women and girls in a manner that allows them to reach their human potential, and promote communities that enable women to live with self-dignity and respect. We are committed to the long-term support of Afghan women and girls, and to ensuring that gender equality and the empowerment of women remain a priority in Afghanistan.

All the best,

Elzira K. Sagynbaeva
UN Women Afghanistan Country Representative
Cycling for Gender Equality, Women’s Bicycle Race in Bamyan

Fifteen women and girls took part in a cycling race aimed at creating awareness about women's rights and gender equality in central Bamyan province. Fifteen women pedaled a five-kilometer route from the Gymnasium Road in Bamyan city to the Ring Road, as a huge crowd of people, including local authorities, civil society members and women activists, watched and clapped to encourage the participants.

With support from UN Women, Shuhada Organization facilitated the race on 25 August 2014, as part of the SG UNiTE Campaign activities as well as to mark Orange Day. Zakia Mohammadi ultimately came first, Zuhra finished second, and Seema got third position. The three women were awarded cups and other prizes.

“The purpose of my participation in the race was not to be the first to reach to the finish line, but my intention was to show the women’s confidence and ability,” said Zakia Mohammadi, the winner of the race. “We have the strength to overcome challenges and create an environment where women and men equally enjoy their lives,” she further added.

However, riding bikes is still a challenge for many Afghan women and girls Afghanistan. Through years of work this is slowly changing.

“We have trained tens of women and girls on cycling. It’s not an easy job, but we are committed to back any initiatives that can support women’s sport,” said Mohammad Kabir Tophan, Head of Bamyan Sports Department.

Meanwhile, the viewers, who were mostly men and boys, encouraged the female cyclists. "Our message to other Afghan women is that they should be confident and try to have equal rights," said Ali Reza, a spectator.

Women’s sports are gaining popularity in Afghanistan and are being televised regularly, including cycling. As part of Olympic National Committee, Afghanistan has a National Women’s’ Cycling Team. If the team can train and compete regularly, it will receive increasingly more attention and create opportunities for other women to join sports.

“…It’s not an easy job, but we are committed to back any initiatives that can support women’s sport”

Mohammad Kabir Tophan, the Head of Bamyan Sports Department
Afghan Parliamentarians learn from Malaysia on EVAW Law

Recently several cases of violence have been reported by the media. This includes but not limited to the gang rape in Paghman district of Kabul province, and the early marriage of an 8 year-girl with a 12 year-boy in northern Balkh province.

The struggle to secure women’s rights in Afghanistan has been an embattled one. After years of campaigns, the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) Law was enacted by presidential decree in 2009 but has yet to gain parliamentary approval.

As requested by the Women’s Affairs, Human Rights and Civil Society Commission of the Lower and Upper Houses of the Afghan Parliament, UN Women facilitated a seven-day exposure visit for 12 members of the two Commissions to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The purpose of the visit, which took place in August, was to enhance the knowledge of the delegation about Shariah Law points of view and to further analyse them in order to find a basis for addressing contentious articles of the EVAW Law that were challenged by the conservative groups in Parliament when the amended version of the Law was presented to the plenary session in 2013.

During their visit, the Afghan MPs held meetings with several governmental and non-governmental actors to know how this country lobbied for women’s rights-related laws and worked with religious groups.

“This visit was a live example from a Muslim country. The meetings and discussions with Malaysian scholars helped us to learn more about what they have done for EVAW. It strengthened our spirit to fight for this Law in Afghanistan,” said Ms. Sidiqa Balkhi, the Head of Women’s Affairs, Human Rights and Civil Society Commission of Senate. Continued on page 4

An Exposure Visit on UNSCR 1325 NAP

With the technical and financial support of UN Women, a delegation of 16 representatives from Afghanistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), and members of the UN Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325 National Action Plan (NAP) Technical Working Group participated in an exposure visit to Kathmandu, Nepal, in August.

The aim of the six-day visit was to expose the delegates to the best practices from the Nepal UNSCR 1325 NAP development and implementation phases, to gain ideas from these practices and apply them in Afghanistan’s context.

The MoFA representatives met with different governmental and non-governmental stakeholders who had been involved in Nepal’s SCR 1325 NAP development and implementation processes. The main topics included the development and implementation of NAP in Afghanistan, and the challenges in regard to its implementation plan. “The exposure was very comprehensive and informative,” said Ms. Frozan Nawabi, Deputy Director, Human Rights and Women’s International Affairs Directorate of MoFA. “What has been learned in this visit will help us a lot to draft our implementation, monitoring and evaluation plans,” she further added. Continued on page 4
UN Women Supports Strong Partnership with National Partners

In July 2014, a Letter of Agreement (LoA) was agreed between the UN Women Afghanistan Country Office and the Afghan Central Statistics Organization (CSO). The LoA was signed by Pamela F. Husain, UN Women Deputy Country Representative (then OIC), and Eng. Shir Mohammad Jamizada, Director-General of the CSO.

Based on the signed LoA, UN Women will provide financial and technical support to CSO for the establishment of a taskforce to coordinate regular data collection on the Situation Analysis of Women, strengthen the CSO gender unit, ensuring CSO technical support to Ministry of Women’s Affairs and other government ministries in regard to gender statistic and researches, conduct regular surveys on women in decision making, update and publish sex disaggregated statistical handbooks, develop joint work plan with other government institutions for gender statistics collection, research, reporting, and conduct gender statistics capacity assessment of government institutions.

Meanwhile, in August 2014, UN Women signed a new LoA with the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD).

Based on the signed LoA, UN Women will provide financial and technical support to MRRD to advocate for gender integration, gather data on the impact of gender interventions to improve evidence based policy development and planning, and develop the Afghanistan Institute of Rural Development’s (AIRD) institutional capacity on gender and research.

UN Women thanks the Governments of Sweden and Italy for their renewed generous funding in support of UN Women’s Afghanistan Country Office programme

Afghan Parliamentarians learn… Continued from page 3

Despite the fact that the EVAW Law is not passed by Parliament, judicial and law enforcement authorities are implementing the law, although challenges persist in enforcing it. UN Women has on several occasions called on the Government of Afghanistan to meet its commitments on gender equality, women’s empowerment and the full implementation of the EVAW Law. UN Women works to support the Afghan authorities to fully respect and promote Afghanistan’s domestic and international obligations and legal norms in the field of women’s human rights.

Exposure Visit on UNSCR… Continued from page 3

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security was unanimously adopted by Security Council members on October 2000. It is a tool for accountability that obliges the Afghan Government, UN agencies and the international community in Afghanistan to protect women and girls, ensure their participation in peace processes, and promote their fundamental human rights.

Inclusion of women in all peace, security and reconciliation processes is a key priority for UN Women in Afghanistan. In November 2013, ACO signed a Letter of Agreement with MoFA to assist the Ministry in developing Afghanistan’s NAP on Women, Peace and Security. In partnership with the Government of Afghanistan, UN Women conducted a series of trainings on UN SCR 1325 in six major universities in Kabul, Balkh, Nangarhar, Herat, Kandahar and Bamyan provinces.