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## **ACBAR calls on the IEA for non-discrimination against women and girls and to uphold their right to education**

Women and girls constitute approximately 50 percent of the population of Afghanistan. Barriers to their participation and access to education is not aligned with Islamic teachings and fundamental human rights principles, adversely impacting nearly half the population of the country.

The first commandment by Allah (SWT) to the Holy Prophet, Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), began with the word *Iqra*, which means to *recite* or *read*, to initiate the process of acquiring knowledge as His Messenger. Historically, the advent of Islam brought with it strong commitments and laws to uphold the honour, dignity and status of women, in a society where female children were buried alive and women and girls were subjected to inhumane treatment. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) laid the foundations of showing mercy towards women, and granted them essential rights in the society, including the right to seek knowledge. In 7th century, he declared that the pursuit of knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim – male and female. During his life, the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) made special arrangements for the education of women on numerous occasions, and discouraged discriminatory practices that prevented women from exercising the rights granted to them by Allah (SWT). One of the most influential scholars of Islam was the Holy Prophet's (P.B.U.H) respected wife Hazrat Aisha Bint Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with her). After his demise, men and women would travel from far corners of the world to learn from her, as she continued to spread his message and served the Muslim community for 44 years after his death.

The recognition of women's participation in academia has been encouraged and practiced throughout the majority of Islamic history. For instance, the University of Al-Qarawiyyin -the oldest existing university in the world-was founded by a woman, Fatima al-Fihri, in Morocco, in 857-859 as a mosque, later developing it as one of the most prominent spiritual and educational centers of the world.

We appreciate that the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan (IEA) have stated on various occasions that they are committed to all rights of women, in the light of religion and culture. The right to education has also been granted to women and girls through international instruments ratified by Afghanistan that holds states to be the prime duty-bearers for the provision of the right to education to all its citizens.

In a statement issued by the Ministry of Education on 18 September, 2021, regarding re-opening of schools, girls were excluded from returning to schools and only boys and male teachers were allowed to attend educational institutions. If women and girls continue to face restrictions to access education, decades of progress will be lost.

With limited time remaining in the academic year, urgent action is needed to address the delay in re-opening of schools, to make provisions and ensure equitable access to education for women and girls, to not only sustain the progress but also prevent the reversal of monumental gains of previous years. Female teachers have been a significant pillar of the education sector in Afghanistan, and non-resumption of their duties is a pressing concern with educational institutes already suffering from a dearth of trained workforce.

ACBAR pleads for non-discrimination against women and girls to access education, and for the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan (IEA) to abide by their legal obligations to all Afghans, regardless of their gender. We request the IEA to provide equal and inclusive learning opportunities to both men and women. With nearly 64 percent of the population of Afghanistan under the age of 25, the educated youth can play a critical role in post-conflict rebuilding of Afghanistan – a country ravaged by decades of war. The NGO community reiterates that it stands firm in its resolve to continue serving the communities through a collective effort with all stakeholders in this difficult time.

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