Dear Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Ambassadors

Re: Afghan Women Leaders Outside Afghanistan

In recent months, your government has repeatedly stated its continuing commitment to uphold women’s rights in Afghanistan. Your government have since the fall of the Taliban in 2001 been a trusted partner to civil society in Afghanistan.

Yet, since 15th August 2021 - one of the darkest days in Afghanistan’s history - and the collapse of the legitimate government of Afghanistan, the frequently changing policies of many states regarding Afghan asylum seekers, visa issuance and economic hurdles have seriously impacted the meaningful engagement of many Afghan women leaders outside of Afghanistan on the issues regarding Afghanistan.

As Afghan Women Leaders Outside Afghanistan (AWLOA), we face numerous difficulties in our daily lives as we witness firsthand the uncertainties of the future of our nation, and especially the future of Afghan women.

We look to your government to show continued leadership in ensuring that the Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security are adhered to and concrete support is given to women’s civil society to ensure its implementation.

To that end, we request the urgent support of your government in the following:

Many Afghan women leaders, including all of the co-signatories of this letter, had to leave Afghanistan for security reasons and are currently seeking refuge or asylum in your states. We now find ourselves effectively outside Afghanistan. Yet we are the fortunate ones: a large number of women defenders remain stuck in Afghanistan or neighbouring countries without economic resources, whilst others await in third countries the issuance of their visas.

Different legal regimes being apply according to the receiving country. Additionally, many of us were unable to flee with all relevant documentation. Some of us travelled on diplomatic passports which enable travel to a third country and we are now in a situation of having to decide to claim asylum. If we do so, we will find ourselves in the same situation of those women already engaged in the asylum process i.e. unable to work, unable to travel, and having to undertake long hours of language courses. The reality is that many of the refugee and asylum-seeking rules and conditions have only served to further hinder and restrain the work of women leaders outside Afghanistan.

Yet, this must be the time for Afghan women leaders outside Afghanistan to work proactively on different levels to advocate for the voices of Afghan people at the international fora where the future of our country is being discussed. We wish to be the bridge for the voices of Afghan people, specifically of women, and gather the attention of the international community to respond to the needs of the people. Additionally, many
women leaders desire to return to Afghanistan as soon as our families are safely settled and need visas enabling us to leave Afghanistan should our security be further compromised.

A solution to this situation would be to facilitate a form of diplomatic asylum for women who have been actively engaged in peace negotiations, governance, or exercised recognized roles as activists. The aim would be to enable financial support to enable them to continue their work, (as if they had entered into an asylum process) whilst granting them the right to travel so as to participate in all processes pertaining to Afghanistan.

Specific elements of this approach include the following six steps:

1. Issuance of special travel documents for Afghan women leaders to be able to work and engage effectively in advocacy meetings, conferences, gatherings to promote the needs of Afghans, specifically Afghan women.
2. Issuance of visas to those women leaders who remain stuck in neighbouring and regional visas, living amongst hostile and fearful environments towards asylum seekers.
3. Provision of reasonable financial support for at least 8-12 months to Afghan women leaders, recognizing that we have no recourse to our frozen bank accounts in Afghanistan.
4. Provision of psycho-social support for women leaders outside Afghanistan.
5. Support to facilitating opportunities for Afghan women outside Afghanistan to share, exchange, and meet in real life to re-energize and strategize on the way ahead.
6. Issuance of visas and transportation to those women leaders who remain in the country and who wish to leave because of the security situation.

We are hereby asking all States that have committed to upholding women’s rights to adopt the above approach. This would enable a cadre of women leaders to continue to link with their constituencies inside Afghanistan, hopefully facilitate their return to Afghanistan with an option to leave should circumstances prove it necessary. Such approach would be an enormous contribution to upholding women’s rights, ensure continuity of women’s participation at home and internationally, and be a very practical way of realizing the demands of the various Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security.

Signed by:

- Aasia Khurami, women’s rights activist, in Germany
- Adelah Bahram Nizami, leader of the National Republican Party of Afghanistan, in Turkey
- Adela Azizi, women’s rights activist from Herat province, in Sweden
- Aqila Noori, Noor Education and Capacity Development Organization, in Germany
- Eman, WILPF-Afghanistan, in Norway
- Fereshta Jamshidi, women’s rights activist, in Greece
- Hadia Ahamdazi, refugee counsellor, in USA
- Hamida Ramazani, former Advocacy Officer of Cordaid, in The Netherlands
- Hareer Hashim, WILPF-Afghanistan, in Norway
• Homa Alizoy, former High Court advocate responsible for Family Court and Head of Juvenile court and Head of Kabul Criminal Court of Appeal, in Greece
• Humira Saqib, journalist, in Canada
• Jamila Afghani, President, WILPF-Afghanistan, in Norway
• Liluma Ahmadi, former Parliamentarian from Parwan province, in Turkey
• Mafuza Folad head of Justice for All Organization in Greece
• Mumtaz, women’s rights activist from Ghazni, in Pakistan
• Najma Kakar, women’s rights activist, in Norway
• Nargis Shayan, Head of Cultural Empowerment Organization for Afghans, in Pakistan
• Nazifa Jalali, women activist from Zabul Province, in Norway
• Nooria Safi, head of Women Capacity Building and Development Organization, in Albania
• Palwasha Kakar women’s rights activist, in Norway
• Parina Jahid, Deputy Director of Noor Education and Capacity Development Organization, in USA
• Qamar Niazi, former Vice Governor of Helmand province, in Sweden
• Rukhsar Mehrzad, former advocacy office of Care International in Kabul, in USA
• Robina Hamdard, women’s rights activist, in Albania
• Sadiqa, former head of Zabul Directorate of Women Affairs, in Norway
• Shabana Ahmdzai, women’s rights activist, in Finland
• Shallah Farid Law, faculty professor, in Albania
• Wahida Salam, Head of Women’s shelter Dannar Afghanistan for Women Empowerment Organization, in USA
• Yalda Jahanbeen, women’s rights activist, in Abu Dhabi
• Zahra Jalal, women’s rights activist from Khost, in Albania
• Zakia Mahmoodi, Islamic scholar from Ghazni province, in Sweden
• Zainab Alizoi, Judge, in Greece
• Zarghoona Baloch, Baloch Association Deputy, in Albania