

Statement by Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Afghanistan

Women's participation in aid delivery must continue

28 December 2022

The decision by Afghanistan's *de facto* authorities to ban women from working in humanitarian non-governmental organizations is a major blow for vulnerable communities, for women, for children, and for the entire country.

Female staff are key to every aspect of the humanitarian response in Afghanistan. They are teachers, nutrition experts, team leaders, community health workers, vaccinators, nurses, doctors, and heads of organizations. They have access to populations that their male colleagues cannot reach and are critical to safeguarding the communities we serve. They save lives. Their professional expertise is indispensable. Their participation in aid delivery is not negotiable and must continue.

Banning women from humanitarian work has immediate life-threatening consequences for all Afghans. Already, some time-critical programmes have had to stop temporarily due to lack of female staff. This comes at a time when more than 28 million people in Afghanistan, including millions of women and children, require assistance to survive as the country grapples with the risk of famine conditions, economic decline, entrenched poverty and a brutal winter.

While humanitarian organizations continue to engage the *de facto* authorities, we cannot ignore the operational constraints now facing us as a humanitarian community. We will endeavour to continue lifesaving, time-critical activities unless impeded while we better assess the scope, parameters and consequences of this directive for the people we serve. But we foresee that many activities will need to be paused as we cannot deliver principled humanitarian assistance without female aid workers.

We remain resolute in our commitment to deliver independent, principled, lifesaving assistance to all the women, men and children who need it.

We urge the *de facto* authorities to reconsider and reverse this directive, and all directives banning women from schools, universities and public life. No country can afford to exclude half of its population from contributing to society.

Signatories

- Mr. Martin Griffiths, Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs (**OCHA**)
- Mr. Qu Dongyu, Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization (**FAO**)
- Ms. Shahin Ashraf, Chair, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (**ICVA**) Board, (Islamic Relief)
- Mr. Ignacio Packer, Executive Director, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (**ICVA**)
- Ms. Miriam Sapiro, President and Chief Executive Officer, **InterAction**
- Ms. Tjada D'Oyen McKenna, Chief Executive Officer, **Mercy Corps**
- Ms. Janti Soerpinto, President and Chief Executive Officer, **Save the Children US**
- Mr. António Vitorino, Director General, International Organization for Migration (**IOM**)
- Mr. Volker Turk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (**OHCHR**)
- Mr. Andrew Morley, President and Chief Executive Officer, **World Vision International**
- Ms. Sofia Sprechmann Sineiro, Secretary-General, **CARE International**
- Ms. Paula Gaviria Betancur, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (**UN SR on HR of IDPs**)
- Mr. Achim Steiner, Administrator, United Nations Development Programme (**UNDP**)
- Dr. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund (**UNFPA**)
- Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director, United Nations Human Settlement Programme (**UN-Habitat**)
- Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (**UNHCR**)
- Ms. Catherine Russell, Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund (**UNICEF**)
- Ms. Sima Bahous, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director (**UN Women**)
- Mr. David Beasley, Executive Director, World Food Programme (**WFP**)
- Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization (**WHO**)