

AFGHANISTAN - ICVA ACTION AREAS FOR 2023

16 January 2023



A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION

The directive from the De Facto Authority (DFA) Minister of Economy on 24 December, banning Afghan women from working in national and international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) has had immediate impact on humanitarian operations, with many NGOs temporarily pausing activities in which women cannot participate. More than 70 percent of programmes in Afghanistan are implemented by NGOs. The directive comes days after another edict to prevent women from going to university. Since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, NGOs have faced a series of bureaucratic challenges to operating despite improved security in the country.

As the humanitarian system grapples with the ban and associated operational decisions, there is much attention on the immediate operational challenges as well as broader implications for humanitarian principles and rights-based approaches in Afghanistan and beyond.

ICVA Secretariat will take the following approach to support in this unfolding crisis:

1. Continued and Reinforced Support to ACBAR

ACBAR is the mixed NNGO-INGO forum in Afghanistan, with over 150 members, and is directly an ICVA member itself. Over many years ICVA has developed a strong cooperation and supportive relationship with ACBAR, including providing assistance with strategic planning and advocacy efforts. After August 2021, the ICVA team took a hands-on approach to helping ACBAR address differences and complexities within its membership.

The coming period will undoubtedly be a challenging one for ACBAR in supporting NGOs to engage with the UN and the authorities around how to continue operations and maintain humanitarian space.

- The ACBAR Secretariat is currently undergoing a change in leadership with a new Director expected to be onboard in early February. ICVA has been asked to support the transition and will continue to facilitate connection to the international system as needed.
- ICVA will support ACBAR with making connections to strengthen additional analysis and contingency planning around the situation.

2. Engagement of States and Donors

In this unique situation the role of humanitarian donors is enhanced, as the humanitarian response is significant and this sector is functionally an important point of international engagement with the De Facto Authorities. However, the political role of many States is in this case greatly reduced, particularly for the major Western actors. Other actors (regional and Islamic actors predominately) have played and will continue to play a role in engaging and influencing the Taliban leadership and ICVA will prioritize continued engagement with these actors where possible. Concretely, ICVA will focus on:

- Member States Briefings in Geneva (an initial briefing is in discussion for early February) to provide space for NGO engagement and reflection with representatives of donors and other state actors.
- Bilateral outreach to key influential actors, such as Qatar, Pakistan etc.
- Engagement with Japan and Switzerland in their role as members of the UN Security Council, as well as Japan's role as G7 Chair (ICVA will again co-lead the Civil7 Working Group on Humanitarian Assistance and Conflict in 2023) and Switzerland's role as a voice of influence around humanitarian principles.

3. Connecting and Convening around the IASC

The current situation has fully mobilized the IASC system at all levels in support of the response.

- ICVA will continue its role representing NGOs at the IASC Principles, the EDG and other relevant groups.
- ICVA will continue to convene exchanges between the ERC and ICVA member CEOs to inform collective engagement and strategies for the response.
- Support will be provided to NGO collective advocacy and broader positioning for the sector where relevant, including contributions to high-level statements and other processes.

4. Promote Dialogue around NGO Narratives, Connecting to the ICVA 2030 Strategy

ICVA will engage and support members around their positioning and public and private advocacy, by promoting international law and humanitarian principles and taking into consideration the complexity of the issue, the diversity of opinions of ICVA members and long-term implications for the broader humanitarian sector¹. Our [ICVA 2030 strategies](#)' 1st transformation is for ICVA to be a champion of principled humanitarian action, advocating for the respect and protection of humanitarian space and supporting the effective, appropriate translation of principles into practice.

The ICVA 2030 strategy was endorsed at the ICVA General Assembly in May 2021. In defining the success of the ICVA 2030, we set to have:

- Demonstrated ongoing pro-active advocacy for the respect of independent humanitarian action and the protection of the civic space required for independent action.
- Further increased influence and impact on humanitarian policy and practice within ICVA's focus areas and translation of humanitarian principles into action.

¹ ICVA ED interview with Geneva Solutions <https://genevasolutions.news/peace-humanitarian/ngos-deem-taliban-female-staff-ban-unacceptable-aid-group-head>



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