



GENEVA CONFERENCE ON
AFGHANISTAN

27 - 28 November 2018

**Geneva Conference on Afghanistan
Side Event - Agenda**

Pathway to Progress: Professional Training for Afghan Women

Time: 9.30 to 11.00

Venue: Council Chamber

Keynote Speaker:

- **H.E. Mrs. Rula (Bibi Gul) Ghani,**
First Lady of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Moderator: Shabana Rasikh

Panelists:

- Mr. Martin Jaeger, State Secretary, Federal Republic of Germany
- Baroness Fiona Hodgson, Chair of Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security, UK
- Ms. Muqaddesa Yourish, IARCSC Commissioner- Demand in the public sector
- Ms. Shireen Rahmani, COO Roshan- Demand for Professional Training in the Private Sector
- Ms. Nadeema Sahar, Head of TVETA – Existing Structure and vision for technical vocational training
- Ms. Jean Gough, UNICEF Regional Director for South Asia, Access to Girl's Education

Conclusion: Marjan Mateen, Advisor to the First Lady of Afghanistan

Background:

The constitution of Afghanistan guarantees equal rights for women. Realizing these rights requires that women are afforded the ability to play an equal role in economic, social, and political life. The National Unity Government (NUG) has committed to this cause, recognizing that institutionalizing the equal rights of women is a vital step towards sustainable stabilization and development in Afghanistan. Over the last four years significant progress has been made. Literacy rates of women in Afghanistan are up to 17 per cent, and there are more women holding positions of power than at any other time in history. 28 percent of the seats in parliament are held by women, four ministries and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and deputy of High Peace Council are led by women, and four women have been appointed as ambassadors.

However, there is still a lot of work to do. Time and time again we are reminded of how fragile and reversible these gains are. Women and girls in Afghanistan continue to face persistent discrimination, violence, street harassment, forced and child marriage, limited access to justice, and severe restrictions

on working and studying outside the home - especially in decision-making positions. Expanding the role of women in the workplace is critical to enhancing women's economic contributions and changing public perceptions of women. More women in productive sectors will have a significant impact on expanding the economic resources of the country, while also increasing women's economic empowerment. Women's participation in the labour force has been rising steadily since 2001, reaching 19 per cent in 2016. While more Afghans agree that women should be allowed to work outside home, they face barriers from harassment, discrimination, and violence; to lack of experience, skills, and education.

Some sectors of the economy are more accessible to women than others. The areas with the highest potential to absorb women's labor power are in small businesses and agriculture, where women already make up a substantial portion of the workforce, though often unpaid. The NUG has made significant progress in recognizing and enhancing the role of women in these sectors, including through the Women's Economic Empowerment National Priority Program, which is expanding women's access to economic resources.

However, improving women's access to less traditional sectors is just as important. Women's empowerment is not just about access to any income opportunities, but access to all opportunities, in all sectors of society, as equal citizens, especially in 'non-traditional' fields. Female leaders and businesswomen bring balance to communications, provide different perspectives and bring valuable skills and talents which benefit all.

Tapping into the energy, ingenuity and talents of the nation's women will also stimulate the economy. Through professional development of women and their inclusion in more sectors of the economy it is possible to create more dynamic, responsive, and egalitarian institutions and businesses which contribute to the nation's goals, see women bringing the benefits of work back home, and pave the way for a more prosperous future. Professional development to build cadres of women in sectors from information technology, cyber security, engineering, finance and commerce to education, health and civil society and political leadership is critical to the development of an equal society, and will allow women to contribute as real agents, beyond the limitations of current gender norms.

As Afghanistan moves towards self-reliance, it will be critical to ensure that aspiring women will have access to the professional development and training opportunities necessary in order to develop the next generation of Afghan women and increase their employability in both public and private sector.

Objectives:

The objective of the session is to:

- Discuss the importance of and challenges to expanding access to professional development for women, in both the public and private sector;
- Review how national policies contribute to women's empowerment in non-traditional sectors;
- Review existing mechanisms and types of vocational training and the needs for future; and
- Impediments to girl's education and needed interventions.