Afghanistan Country Statement

**Key Messages**
- instability and violence is increasing, especially in the south
- extremism is promoted in schools and mosques more than ever before

**Key Recommendations**
- do not support peace talks that lack proper women’s participation
- fund programs that increase women’s political and income – generating possibilities

At the onset of the foreign troop withdrawal and reduced international aid, the Taliban have been expanding their control to the relatively peaceful northern regions. Instability and violence is on the rise, especially in our southern regions that border Pakistan. We ask the UN and the EU to assist us in building a stronger and more inclusive government, a more capable and well-equipped army, and to continue to support the promotion of rule of law.

In addition to the Taliban threat, extremism is being promoted in our schools, madrassas, and mosques like never before. Around 68 percent of our population is 25-years-old or less, and around 400,000 youth enter the labor market every year—but only a few succeed in finding jobs. These unemployed youth are highly susceptible to recruitment into extremist groups. We have implemented projects that train young men and women in skills such as journalism, photography, music, financial accounting, and sports as a way to increase their employability, but these interventions are limited in scope and reach. We ask the U.S. government, the UN, and the EU to support longer-term programs that train and educate our at-risk youth, help increase their employment prospects, and engage them in activities such as sports and art to promote peaceful coexistence.

As one of the ways to fight terrorism, our government has initiated talks with the Taliban. We, the Afghan women, do support negotiations with the Taliban but are not willing to compromise our hard-earned basic freedoms. A few women have been able to participate in these negotiations, but with limited influence. More women with louder voices need to be included at the Peace Council. We want the U.S. government, the UN, and the EU to NOT support any peace talks that lack proper Afghan women’s participation.

During the last decade, with international support, Afghan women have made significant achievements in the political realm. However, our parliament recently voted to reduce the quota for female parliamentarians (from 25 to 20%) and even down to zero at the district and village level; we need international support to increase women’s political participation. We want the UN and the EU to fund projects that increase the participation of women in parliament and in decision-making positions in the government.

We have a difficult time promoting women’s empowerment and freedom when women are not economically empowered. Therefore, our last but most critical request from the international community is to please support programs that provide long-term technical education as well as sustainable and profitable income-generation opportunities for women.

*Please direct questions and comments to [info@icanpeacework.org](mailto:info@icanpeacework.org)*.