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**COUNTRY:** The Swiss Confederation

**COMMITTEE:** UN Women

**AGENDA ITEM:** Protecting the Rights of Women in Afghanistan

Women in Afghanistan are denied their fundamental rights such as right to education, to work, and their freedom of movement merely due to discrimination. Since the Taliban regime overtook the country in August 2021, Afghanistan's record on women's rights has been noticeably one of, if not the worst, worldwide. (1) Women have been wholly excluded from public office and judiciary. Currently, the women and young girls in Afghanistan are obligated to obey a strict dress code and are not given the permission to travel more than 75 km on their own, without a male relative, which has ostracized women and girls from public life. (2) The Taliban have also denied them post-primary education and restricted their employment to health care and primary education. Prior to the rise of the Taliban, women in Afghanistan were protected under law and increasingly afforded rights in Afghan society. Women in Afghanistan received the right to vote in the 1920s; and as early as the 1960s, the Afghan constitution provided for equality for women. (3) Therefore, it can be inferred that the takeover of the Taliban regime has erased years’ worth of progress for the rights of women in Afghanistan, in a blink of an eye. Throughout the country, women report feeling invisible, isolated, suffocated, living in prison-like conditions. Many are unable to have their basic needs met without access to employment or aid, including access to medical healthcare and psychological support. (2) We, as the Swiss Confederation, strongly believe that no human being should be denied their fundamental rights or be excluded out of society in accordance with their gender, race, ethnicity, or religious beliefs. We strongly urge an immediate and collaborative action to be taken in order to protect the rights of the women in Afghanistan.

Several organizations play pivotal roles in advocating for and supporting women's rights in Afghanistan. UN Women has been working in Afghanistan since 2002 in monitoring the implementation and enforcement of policies and programs that protect and promote the rights of women. All of UN Women's programs are directed towards strengthening national women's machineries through financial and technical support. (4) UN Women has been working alongside United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) which issues reports on women's rights and the elimination of violence against women in order to provide an unfiltered and thorough review of the situation in Afghanistan. Another organization that has been consistently helping the women in Afghanistan is International Rescue Committee which has, in recent years, become one of the leaders in women's protection and empowerment in the country. (7) Moreover, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International actively lobby for the protection of women's rights by amplifying their voices on the global stage and providing on-ground support and resources. (6) While through the help of global, respected and well-known organizations such as UN women, the issue at hand receives the financial and lawful support it requires, non-governmental organizations play a significant role in bringing the issue to the eyes of the public. However, permanent, and effective solutions are necessary due to the rapid evolvement of the issue and its dire effects.

Switzerland has demonstrated a persistent commitment to supporting the rights of women in Afghanistan through numerous channels. In a recent meeting with the Taliban, Switzerland has raised concerns about human rights in Afghanistan, including about girls' education. The meeting was regarding the efforts of the Taliban on boosting outreach efforts as they seek to persuade foreign powers to officially recognize them. Switzerland joined other humanitarian groups in the talks that touched on aid needs, security concerns and health care. (8) Switzerland has also been working alongside the United Nations in order to reverse the ban on women working with UN. "Excluding women from work violates their human rights. Excluding women from working at UNAMA in Afghanistan hinders life-saving humanitarian work. Switzerland urges the Taliban to reverse their decision and respect these rights," the Foreign Ministry has stated. (9)

The issue of protecting women's rights in Afghanistan is one that needs urgent attention and action and should be the topic of global concern. We believe that the most important change that can be made is targeting education in the country. Educational initiatives -directed towards both genders- can serve as a catalyst for societal change, promoting gender equality and challenging discriminatory attitudes. Implementing comprehensive educational programs promoting inclusivity and gender sensitivity from an early age is vital. Education can be used as a tool to empower women from a young age. Furthermore, economic empowerment can be considered fundemental for advancing women's rights. By breaking down economic barriers and promoting women's participation in various sectors, opportunities for women in the workforce should be created. Women should be provided access to financial resources, business training, and mentorship in order to fill in the gaps that historical gender discrimination has created for women in the workplace. We, as the Swiss Confederation, strongly believe that the issue at hand should be dealt with the utmost caution and a global cooperation and initiative is immensely necessary for the sustainability of the protection of women's rights in Afghanistan.

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