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UN SECURITY COUNCIL ARRIA-FORMULA MEETING
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Women and the Afghan Peace Process: Ensuring Women's Participation and Promoting their Rights

**Written statement submitted by the Permanent Mission of
Australia to the United Nations in New York**

Australia thanks the Permanent Missions of Afghanistan and the United Kingdom, as co-chairs of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan, as well as Germany and Indonesia, as Security Council co-penholders on Afghanistan, for the opportunity to outline Australia's support for the full and meaningful participation of women in the Afghan peace process. Australia wishes to amplify the voices of Afghan women during this UN Security Council discussion.

Australia hopes Afghanistan will very soon move towards intra-Afghan negotiations and a sustainable, inclusive political settlement to the decades-long conflict.

Australia regards women's rights and meaningful participation as critical for achieving durable peace in Afghanistan. The intra-Afghan negotiations will coincide with the 20th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which has intensified global focus on how the meaningful inclusion of women in these dialogues can transform the prospects for peace.

Women are powerful mediators, peacebuilders and leaders. They make important and unique contributions to durable peace. A focus on gender equality and the realisation of human rights will accelerate sustainable development, inclusive economic growth and community resilience.

Australia echoes the Afghan people's recognition of the importance of women's inclusion, as enshrined in such documents as the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned 15-point declaration produced by the April 2019 Consultative Loya Jirga on Peace, and the National Women's Consensus for Peace's Statement. We support Afghan women's meaningful participation in all dimensions of the peace process, including as active contributors to: leadership councils; negotiating teams; consultative shuras; and technical and advisory teams.

Australia warns that a non-inclusive Afghan peace process threatens not only the prospective for peace but also women's rights more broadly. In Afghanistan, the last 19 years have seen improvements in Afghan women's rights, including achieving constitutional and legal protections and increasing the numbers of girls in school.

Yet, Afghanistan is still consistently assessed as among the worst countries in the world to be a woman, with nine out of ten Afghan women having experienced intimate partner violence in the past year, among other human rights violations. Much work remains to uphold this half of the Afghan population's rights, and harness their potential, so that Afghanistan can thrive.

To preserve, maintain and build on the rights and aspirations of Afghan women, empowering women has been a focus of Australia's diplomatic, military and development cooperation with Afghanistan since 2001. Australia is actively supporting the mainstreaming of women's empowerment through Afghanistan's National Peace and Development Framework. We welcome

strengthened support for women's participation and rights at the next pledging conference in November 2020.

Our development cooperation supports national efforts to eliminate violence against women, by supporting women's shelters and increased access to justice, influencing community attitudes towards violence and advocating for the protection of women's rights. It also delivers girls' education in rural and remote areas of Afghanistan and targets the most critical humanitarian needs of women and girls.

To amplify the voices of Afghan women in the movement towards a peace settlement, Australia has supported key prominent women's activists to share their messages on the peace process with an international audience. To help overcome COVID-19 restrictions, Australia is also offering online support to Afghan women's rights supporters, enabling them to link up and draw support from the global WPS Agenda community. The recently launched PeaceFem App offers critical data and tools to women's rights advocates, peace mediation teams and Women, Peace and Security practitioners.

Australia continues to condemn in the strongest terms any act of terrorism, and especially those perpetrated against women and children, such as the May terrorist attack on a maternity clinic in Kabul.

Australia strongly encourages both the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban to heed Afghanistan's many diverse voices— particularly those of Afghan women — as part of the intra-Afghan negotiations. An inclusive process will not only benefit women, but also provide the basis for an enduring, sustainable peace for all Afghans.