

WOMEN'S FORUM ON AFGHANISTAN

Recommendations for Distribution of Humanitarian Aid

Women are well placed to lead transformational changes, which are needed for the effective delivery of humanitarian aid in Afghanistan. The challenges posed by Taliban control over the country are not the only challenges to be addressed. There is a long and well-known history of corruption over the past twenty years, and it is critical for the international community to do things differently. In the rush to address a multi-dimensional crisis including the prospect of mass starvation it is easy to repeat the patterns of the past, but doing so will result in a far less effective outcome. Women are best placed to know and understand the needs of families and communities. Empowering women in the process of humanitarian aid delivery could well result in better aid distribution and more accountability. It would also create much needed pressure on the Taliban to recognize the need for and contribution of women and women's organizations to the future of Afghanistan. This is the responsibility of donor countries and United Nations and international organizations.

The recommendations below have been formulated by a group of Afghan women leaders over the course of the past few months for the Women's Forum on Afghanistan. We believe implementation of these recommendations can make a real difference, and we urge all donors to incorporate them in funding decisions:

- The inclusion of women-led organizations to implement aid distribution and other projects through a transparent selection process for implementing partners, rather than the continued use of established distribution networks that largely exclude women's organization and lack sufficient accountability. As ACBAR plays a coordination role in humanitarian aid distribution and has been charged with managing the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund, ACBAR should take concrete and immediate steps to ensure the inclusion of women-led organizations in its governing body and should facilitate the membership of women-led organizations in ACBAR by waiving fees and removing other barriers to membership. UN agencies and other humanitarian aid donors should also explore other avenues of humanitarian aid distribution through coordination entities that are led by women and specifically focused on women-led organizations.
- More transparency in the process of identification of aid recipients to ensure that aid is delivered strategically and based on actual need rather than through insider networks of decision-making and distribution that exclude women, taint the legitimacy of the process, and are less effective in getting aid to its intended recipients; create monitoring mechanisms that include Afghan women to provide ongoing information and advice to donors on the effectiveness of aid delivery.
- Ensure that humanitarian aid is distributed independently of government ministries or other entities controlled by the Taliban and ensure that aid and funding for aid is not diverted to or by the Taliban or any ministries from its intended destination through deduction of a percentage or other forms of corruption; recent incidents indicate that distribution of aid is partisan and influenced by the Taliban, which undermines the neutrality and integrity of the process.
- The recruitment of Afghan women as humanitarian aid workers and more women in representational positions of UN agencies and INGOs to deal directly with the Taliban and facilitate direct discussions between Taliban and Afghan women leaders, and public

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- endorsement by UN agencies and INGOS of the inclusion of women at all levels of decision-making;
- The establishment of advisory boards comprised of women leaders who are in Afghanistan and those who are in exile to include their views in the planning, designing and distribution of humanitarian aid.
 - The creation of a mechanism to pay teachers, health workers, and other civil servants directly rather than through ministries controlled by the Taliban, with a monitoring component to ensure that funds are being delivered to those who are actually working; the creation of a database and the use of technology to the extent possible to register employees and track payment of salaries. Measures should be taken to ensure that these payments are not in any way compliant with Taliban's gender exclusionary policies and rather create incentives for women's inclusion and access – for example: prioritize paying salaries in provinces where schools are open for both girls and boys; ensure healthcare facilities and reproductive health services are accessible to women and there is not a Mahram requirement to access clinics; press for inclusion and recruitment of women as well as men in civil service.

The Women's Forum on Afghanistan is a new initiative created by Afghan and global women leaders to work for the well-being and human rights of the Afghan people, and inclusive solutions to the social, economic, and political challenges the country is currently facing.

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