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**Human Rights Council**  
12<sup>th</sup> Session

**Agenda Item 6 : Universal Periodic Review**

**Statement by : International Institute of Peace**

**Mr. President,**

I would like to use this opportunity to acquaint this gathering with the reality that, the women of Afghanistan are forced to endure.

The years of Taliban control of Afghanistan saw scores of reports by the UN and other international agencies which highlighted and condemned the human rights violations of women in Afghanistan. The Taliban, in their adherence to a warped version of Islam, violated women's rights subjecting our sisters to mass abductions and forced prostitution. The barbaric treatment that we endured is documented in the testimony of women who survived the horrors of Taliban rule.

Women were rounded up in trucks and taken from the regions of Mazar-e-Sharif, Pol-e-Khomri and Shamali to the Talibani strongholds, where they were forced into prostitution. Many of them were killed and maimed while trying to escape. Women from the Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif and Shamali regions provided graphic accounts of forced marriages to Taliban militiamen. When families refused, they took the women away by force. Many families were forced to send their daughters away to avoid such a fate.

After coming to power, the Taliban barred women from attending schools or working outside the home. Women could only appear in public hidden in head-to-toe robes. The regime denied women access to education, health and employment. Under the Taliban, abduction of women, rape, infliction of the punishment of stoning, lashing and other forms of inhuman punishment became commonplace.

Afghanistan had witnessed a spring before the arrival of the Taliban. Women had come to occupy positions of respect. They were teachers, judges, lawyers, doctors, and nurses. The Taliban confined them to their homes; took away their livelihoods turning many destitute; and deprived them of basic dignity and security. Thousands of women were brutally attacked or even killed for venturing out without having covered themselves in the way ordered by the Taliban. Women had no access to education. Schools for girls were burnt down. Women were deprived of their right to medical care. They were sent away from hospitals or denied treatment because male doctors were not allowed to treat female patients. Childbirth became an ordeal and most delivered babies at home without expert assistance.

There is nothing in Islam that can ever justify what the Taliban did to us. The blame, Mr. President, lies in those who took on the responsibility of grooming and indoctrinating the Taliban and providing them the weapons and manpower to conquer Afghanistan. I can only point a finger at Pakistan-- in anger and sorrow that a neighbour that could have made our lives glorious instead decided to unleash the Taliban on us.

Today, the Taliban are again ascendant. And the women of Afghanistan are afraid. That champion of democracy and human rights, the United States of America, continues to arm and aid Pakistan- a country that continues to provide sanctuary to the Taliban and looks forward to the day when the western forces will leave Afghanistan and their proxy Taliban will again control Kabul.

Mr. President, ask any thinking woman of Afghanistan-what is a "moderate" Taliban. She will stare in wonderment for she knows no animal by that description. She only knows the Taliban as her oppressors. And the women of Afghanistan, wonder how the free world can even contemplate allowing our country to be once again placed at the disposal of this murderous band. This time, all those who argue for negotiations and a deal with the Taliban, must be prepared to bear the responsibility for the oppression that will be unleashed on the women of Afghanistan if the nightmarish scenario of Taliban dominated rule, becomes a reality.

**Thank you, Mr. President,**

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12<sup>th</sup> Session

**Agenda Item 6 : Universal Periodic Review**

**Statement by : Commission to Study the Organization of Peace**

**Mr. President,**

**Afghanistan: Women under Taliban**

Afghanistan has been torn by war and violence for decades. When the Taliban were overthrown we women heaved a sigh of relief that perhaps the time had come for us to enjoy normal lives. But alarm bells have begun ringing again as we hear of efforts to establish a new polity in Afghanistan that would allow representation to " moderate" Taliban. The recent elections; the western countries repeated comments that the Taliban have to be negotiated with; and the deliberate wooing of known gender oppressors by the candidates, including the President, suggest that our future would remain bleak.

Mr. President, the Taliban are the Taliban and nothing else. Definitional nuances do not change their character. September 27, 1996 was perhaps the darkest day in the history of Afghanistan. That was the day when the Taliban, a seized control of the capital city of Kabul. That was the day when gender discrimination of the worst kind was imposed in Afghanistan. That was the day when the women of Afghanistan were deprived of their basic human rights. That was the day when a system of gender apartheid was imposed in Afghanistan, forcing the women to abide by the medieval age purdah system.

Quite clearly, women were the prime target of Taliban's sadistic agenda and they suffered immensely under the weight of Taliban's barbaric edicts. Under Islam, women are allowed to work, to earn and control their own money, and to participate in public life. However, the Taliban, claiming to be followers of a pure, fundamentalist Islamic ideology, reduced women to the status of slaves in their own country, their own land, and their own homes. What the Taliban did to the women of Afghanistan has no basis in Islam.

Prior to the Taliban's arrival, women in Afghanistan were educated and employed. 50% of the students and 60% of the teachers at Kabul University were women. 70% of school teachers, 50% of civilian government workers, and 40% of doctors in Kabul were women. Under the Taliban, women were stripped of their voice, mobility, and dignity. They were prohibited from attending schools and universities; prohibited from venturing outside their homes; and forced to wear the burqa, a voluminous garment which completely shrouds the body under thick layers of fabric, leaving only a small mesh opening through which to breathe and see. Women not wearing a burqa

were beaten up in public, and even stoned, for not being properly dressed. Under the Taliban, women were not allowed to step outside the confines of their home unless accompanied by a close male relative. Many of them were stoned to death for traveling with a man who was not a relative. Homes with women were supposed to have their windows painted opaque to hide the women from view.

The ban on women working threw tens of thousands of families into penury and destitution, since many of the working women were war widows and were the sole source of support for their families. Because women could not be treated by male doctors, their access to health care was severely limited. Women and girls died of curable ailments because male doctors were not allowed to treat them. A small number of female medical staffers were allowed to work, but were continually harassed. There were instances when women were shot at for leaving their homes without a male escort to receive medical care.

After the Taliban were ousted things improved and many girls and women returned to educational institutions and their workplaces. In big cities, including Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif, women could be seen going in the streets without their burqa, and without male relatives. This is what the international community is now asking us to lose—our right to live as free, self respecting women. For the deprivation of our rights will be the first consequence if indeed, nations that swear by democracy and human rights, actually allow the Taliban any semblance of power in Kabul.

Mr. President, I implore those assembled here—tell your leaders not to make the mistake of thinking that there are different shades of Taliban. They are one entity—brutal, bloodthirsty, extremist and the enemies of women's independence and rights. Do not allow them to destroy the women of Afghanistan forever.

**Thank you**