***Position Paper for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization***

Living standards are amongst the lowest in the world. Afghanistan had been ravaged by war and poverty for decades. The harsh mountainous landscape makes matters worse, the majority of Afghans work is agriculture, but only 12% of the land is farmable. Therefore, many families face poverty and are unable to send their children to school. Other factors related to cultural barriers prevent many females of attaining a proper education. With one in seven children dying before the age of five, and landmines littering the land, Afghanistan is one of the most dangerous places to live, and years of conflict and war have destroyed many of its heritage sites. Although it has received years of international aid and there have been some positive and substantial changes, Afghanistan remains extremely poor and needs the help of the United Nations to preserve its heritage sites and create education safe and accessible for all.

1. **Governance Effects on Afghanistan Heritage Sites and Education**

In 1978 the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan, led by Taraki, Karmal, and Taha overthrew the government, and implemented a liberal and Marxist-Leninist agenda. This movement replaced religious and traditional laws, where men were obliged to cut their beards and women were not permitted to wear chadors. However, it revolutionized and reformed woman’s rights, banning forced marriages, giving state recognition of women’s right to vote, and introducing women into politics. Ratebzad wrote the famous New Kabul Times editorial which declared: “Privileges which women, by right, must have are equal education, job security, health services, and free time to rear a healthy generation for building the future of the country ... Educating and enlightening women is now the subject of close government attention”. At the same time, the PDPA imprisoned, tortured or murdered thousands of members of the traditional elite, the religious establishment, and the intelligentsia. This created a lot of hostility among the people against the government, which caused a civil war in the late 90’s, were the Taliban took over in the southern provinces of Afghanistan. The Taliban in 1996 with the military support by Pakistan and financial support by Saudi Arabia, which led the Taliban, who worked with Al-Qaeda soldiers, to seize Kabul. On 9th September 2001, Ahmad Shah Massoud was assassinated by two Arab suicide attackers inside Afghanistan. Two days later, on 11th September 2001, Al-Qaeda suicide bombers attacked the United States, which has led to constant struggle and tension between US and Afghanistan relation. As a result, many of these conflicts have caused destruction of many of our important historical sites, which are important in educating our future generations. Afghanistan is among one of the most unpredictable and turmoil countries regarding warfare, which affects our ability to provide suitable education during these times. Most frequent types of attack according to the UNICEF school security database is arson, where many of our school buildings, tents, and inventory are burned. Explosions in or near school buildings (including throwing grenades, mines, and rocket attacks) and direct attacks against students or education personnel are still quite common.

Currently the government is doing everything in its power to control conflicts and is working in partnership with the United States. It is trying to create its provinces safer for its citizens and gain the United States’ trust and confidence. It will continue to aspire and create Afghanistan safer, and prevent the destruction of national history and education facilities.

1. **Preservation of Afghanistan’s Heritage Sites**

Afghanistan is rich in ancient treasures and it was once a key stop on the legendary silk road. After over 30 years of conflicts, Afghanistan’s cultural heritage is in dire straits. Nonetheless, Afghanistan is currently working with a team of archeologists to try and put the country’s historical sites back on the map. Currently, the international team is using numerous satellite imaging to uncover lost heritage sights over vast geographical areas. Afghanistan’s location and the variety and abundance of its bountiful mines of gold, copper and precious stones make it the heart of archeological wonder. According to the French Archaeological Delegation of Afghanistan (DAFA) they have identified 1,286 heritage sites between the year 1922 and 1982, when they had to leave Afghanistan as a result of pressure exerted by Soviet Russia. However, according to Bendezu-Sarmiento, “Today, we’ve identified five times that”. Afghanistan is built on top of thousands of years of history and on enormous wealth that is waiting to be discovered. However, the problem which Afghanistan faces is that many houses and buildings are built on top of these lands which possess as a problem for archaeologists, as well the governments financial problems cannot accommodate and relocate some people to other areas of the country. In addition, the country faces a problem with many looters that steel and robe many of these sites, moreover many roads, mines, and oil drills have been built close or on top of these locations that destroy the archaeological sites beneath them. Today, Afghanistan is an open-air museum where companies and individuals from around the world come and take as much treasures as they can. As a result, many of Afghanistan’s heritage sites are at risk of surviving and we do not have the financial support to properly preserve and prevent the destruction of our cultural heritage.

1. **Education Sector Challenges and Interventions to Accomplish Education 2030**

The Republic of Afghanistan over the past ten years has witnessed considerable progress in terms of access to education. Enrolment has increased from just about 1 million children, mostly all males, in 2001 to over 9 million in 2013 of which 39% are female. All education-related indicators, including gender equality indicators, have demonstrated improvement since NRVA (National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment) 2007-2008. However, it has been seen that the pace of improvement has significantly slowed down. Despite major achievements in the last decade, education performance in Afghanistan is still among the poorest in the world, and current rates of improvement will fail to achieve the standards for the Millennium Development Goals for 2030.

Afghanistan is faced with many barriers to access education, which include insecurity, poverty, child labor, lack of schools in remote areas of the country, long walking distances to schools, and harassment of children on their way to schools. There are also many cultural barriers that prevent many females from attending school, as early arranged marriages, and the lack of necessary facilities to accommodate females. The primary reasons for males not attending proper education is that most families struggle financially, so many of these individuals are driven to contribute to their family’s income. Many of these important concerns increase with age. In addition, no more than five rural households live within two kilometers of a primary school. Overall net primary school attendance in rural areas is 54%, while in urban areas it is 78%, and usually financial status of the family determines the child’s attendance of school.

Afghanistan is presently the world’s second largest recipient of official development assistance (ODA) and in the past, is dependent on external donors that have maintained and developed its education sector. The expected reduction in external funding has caused a tremendous strain on the Afghan government, which is unable to maintain the funding it needs. Therefore, there has been almost no government involvement made since 2001, with the exception of outlining Education for All (EFA) goals for the region and National Education Strategic Plans (NESP), which have not yet been approved. Since the Oslo Education Summit held in July, there have been considerable progress made in finding opportunities to strengthen and develop teacher training, increase the number of qualified teachers, and assess if and how the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations might take on larger role in the education sector. In addition, organizations have communicated to the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan that efforts should focus on enhanced data collection and management systems, improving coordination, establishing mechanisms for competency-based hiring, and strengthening linkages and collaboration across the ministries. Since currently all data are estimated amounts which do not provide an accurate representation of the conditions in Afghanistan, as well certain southern provinces are not even taken into consideration when collecting data. Currently, most attention has been dedicated in securing several parts of Afghanistan, as well as engaging parents and communities in dialogue to generate support and resources to educate females.

Afghanistan strongly urges Member States to uphold to these outlines which were created, and asks for their National Education Strategic Plans to be revaluated for approval. Our vision is to transform lives through education, recognizing the important role of education as a main driver to strengthening our economy and conserving our culture. We are committed with a sense of urgency to a single, renewed education agenda that is holistic, ambitious and aspirational, leaving no one behind. We want to offer and create more schools that are not only accessible for both males and females, but also for the disabled. We want to create a safe environment for our children to attend school, by enforcing more rigid military and police control in preventing the destruction of our schools. We want to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and meet the Education 2030 Framework and Millennium Development Goals. However, this will not be achieved unless we are able to create stronger alliances regionally to prevent conflicts that destroy the education of future generations and financial support. Conflict-affected areas, as Afghanistan, desperately ask for your boards help to take many of these crises, violence and attacks on education institutions, natural disasters and pandemics with financial support, in order for us to reinforce our disrupted education, which we will aspire to meet and surpass the Education 2030 Framework and preserve our heritage sites.

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