



UN IN AFGHANISTAN CONDEMNS TALIBAN DECISION TO SUSPEND WOMEN FROM UNIVERSITIES AND CALLS FOR ITS IMMEDIATE REVERSAL

KABUL, 21 December 2022 - The UN family and the entire humanitarian community in Afghanistan share the outrage of millions of Afghans and the international community over the decision by the Taliban *de facto* authorities to close universities to female students across the country until further notice and calls on the *de facto* authorities to immediately revoke the decision.

The UN and its humanitarian partners also urge the *de facto* authorities to reopen girls' schools beyond the sixth grade and end all measures preventing women and girls from participating fully in daily public life.

Banning women from attending university is a continuation of the systematic policies of targeted discrimination put in place by the Taliban against women. Since 15 August 2021, the *de facto* authorities have barred girls from attending secondary school, restricted women and girls' freedom of movement, excluded women from most areas of the workforce and banned women from using parks, gyms and public bath houses. These restrictions culminate with the confinement of Afghan women and girls to the four walls of their homes.

Preventing half of the population from contributing meaningfully to society and the economy will have a devastating impact on the whole country. It will expose Afghanistan to further international isolation, economic hardship and suffering, impacting millions for years to come. The UN estimates that restricting women from working can result in an economic loss of up to \$1 billion – or up to five percent of the country's GDP. The ban of women from universities, including female teachers and professors, will contribute to additional economic losses.

Education is a basic human right. Excluding women and girls from secondary and tertiary education not only denies them this right, it denies Afghan society as a whole the benefit of the contributions that women and girls have to offer. It denies all of Afghanistan a future.

The steps taken by the *de facto* authorities to exclude women and girls from education, the workplace and other areas of life increase risks of forced and underage marriage, violence and abuse.

Continued discrimination against more than half the population of the country will stand in the way of Afghanistan achieving an inclusive society where everyone can live in dignity and enjoy equal opportunities.

The UN in Afghanistan and its humanitarian partners remind the Taliban that taking away the free will of women to choose their own fate, disempowering and excluding them systematically from all aspects of their public and political life is regressive and stands against universal human rights standards upon which peaceful and stable societies are based on. This decision will be a negative factor for Afghans abroad considering to return and force more to flee the country.

