Dear Colleagues and Friends:

It is a great honor and distinct pleasure to be among the distinguished colleagues and honorable friends from different national and international organizations.

I also would like to express my sincere thanks and felicitations to Cordaid and the Global Network of Women Peace Builders on extending the invitation and providing the opportunity for us to participate in the 61st session of the United Nation Commission to share our view points over the Women’s Peace and Security and economic empowerment in Afghanistan. Thanks also to the Permanent Missions of Finland and Australia to the UN for co-sponsoring this meeting.

First of all let me give you a brief information about the organization which I represent. EQUALITY for Peace and Democracy (EPD) is a civil society organization dedicated to empowering women and youths at the community and policy levels in Afghanistan. EPD has been striving on building the capacities of women and youths to be the front face in presenting their needs in development, peace building and democratic processes of the country. EPD further aims at mass mobilization of women and youths to contribute in overcoming the challenges of instability that Afghanistan is facing.

Therefore, considering the above mentioned vision, EPD with generous financial support from The Embassy of Netherland under the Monitoring Women’s Peace and Security Project and technical assistance of Cordaid created the Provincial Women Networks in 15 provinces of Afghanistan which aims that monitoring,
research, and advocacy contribute to the creation of an enabling environment for women in support of Afghanistan’s commitments to the UNSCR 1325 agenda.

It is worth mentioning that the provincial women networks are currently fully functional in the following provinces at all zones of Afghanistan:

Kabul, Herat, Bamyan, Nagarhar, Kunduz, Kandahar, Laghman, Helmand, Uruzgan, Parwan, Balkh, Daikundi, Badakhshan, Paktia and Faryab.

Let me mention that since the establishment, the progress and effectiveness of the 15 networks from the perspective of members as well as the influential stakeholders, who support PWNs, in achieving the goals of UNSCR 1325 has been quite measurable. So far the PWNs have been quite successful and have actively contributed in conducting numerous trainings, provincial dialogues, capacity building workshops, screening the documentaries, social campaigns, public awareness campaigns, outreach sessions, lobbies and advocacies, data collection for barometer on women’s peace and security, provision of the scholarships for girls, holding demonstrations in response to violence against women, solving many violence cases, involvement in reintegration process, promoting, protection of women and etc.

Let me shortly quote few success stories of the PWNs as examples.

1: **Elimination of improper custom: In the current year, Paktia:** The PWN has been very successful in solving cases of conflict inflicted on women by the improper customs in Mirzaka district. With the support of community elders PWN decreased the huge amounts of bride price paid by grooms in many cases. PWN again started the same advocacy activities in Seyed Karam district. Initially, the PWN invited the elders of this district to awareness workshops and other programs and after raising awareness, they started discussing the issues of dowry and its consequences with them. As a result, PWN convinced the elders to support the network in advocacy against the dowry. The elders with participation of some of the network members held a Jirga and all of the Jirga members came up with a written agreement to ban high dowry. It was decided that in case of violation of the agreement the perpetuators would be fined. The agreement with the signatures and fingerprints is available. Furthermore, people welcomed this idea and now rate of dowry is lower in comparison to past.

2: **Creation of employment opportunities:** Numerous women have been employed in public and private sectors because of because of the advocacies incurred by PWNs
members. These include recruitment of women in education, healthcare, agriculture, handicraft and others. For instance, Kandahar agriculture department hired five Kandahar PWN members for the collection and packaging of saffron for a period of one year. Once they graduate, these women will teach and share information with dozens of other women who currently do not have permanent jobs and are either jobless or only work on temporary basis.

**Women’s financial independence:** One of the members of the PWN in Helmand province, who has experience in a special kind of handicraft development, was recruited as a teacher at a training center to share her skills and earn a salary as a trainer. As well, let me mention the only two activities carried out under this project by PWNs as samples.

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1: The PWN members conducted trainings for more than 2,000 men and boys in different districts on “In Her Shoes” Training Manual.

2: In the first round of data collection for barometer they have conducted around 3,000 interviews with women in center of the provinces and districts and all the data is available.

Some of the challenges that the PWNs and at all women faces in the provinces are as following:

Insecurity, Cultural restrictions, Interference of some of the government and non government entities, High rates of illiteracy among women, Limited coverage area, Limited PWN members, Low capacity , lack of access to information, social harassment, lack of financial sources and etc.

**Recommendations from PWNs and women from grass root level.**

- Support vocational trainings for women as these trainings can contribute to their economic independence and will also help reduce to a large extent the violence linked to lack of economic independence
• Invest in infrastructure to reduce poverty and increase the access of women to technology and information in terms of business. Developing economic opportunities for women at grass root level such as entrepreneurship, livelihood, and enabling business environment.

• Create business networks and linkages for women at provincial, national and international markets and develop mechanisms to advocate for women’s needs.

• Promote and support gender equality in the key commercial organizations, government and private sectors.

• The frequency of advocacy activities should be increased as the advocacy is the most effective way of solving women’s issues.

• Young and educated ones should be worked with more closely, also through schools and universities a large number of people could be sensitised on the objectives of UNSCR 1325.

Therefore, we believe that the provincial women networks for ensuring the women’s peace and security, economic empowerment of women and realization of the UNSCR 1325 at the grass root level is quite crucial and important. In fact, when women at the policy and grass root level feel secure and are economically empowered, economy grows and poverty is reduced. Poverty is one of the root causes of violent conflicts. As well, economic security is also one of the critical components of human security. Women’s economic empowerment also equates to women’s personal security and enhances their decision-making capacity. Therefore, the Afghan women at the grass root level strongly recommends that women’s peace and security and economic empowerment to be guaranteed. They ask the government as well as the UN and other multilateral institutions and the private sector to create a secure atmosphere where it ensures good employment and livelihood opportunities for women.