

# PRESS RELEASE

United Nations Development Programme

Afghanistan Country Office, Shah Mahmood Ghazi Watt, Kabul



## Power, Voice and Rights: A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia-Pacific

**Kabul, 11 April 2010**— While Asia and the Pacific can take pride in the region’s vibrant economic transformation in recent decades, this has not translated into progress on gender equality.

Discrimination and neglect are threatening women’s very survival in the Asia-Pacific region, where women suffer from some of the world’s lowest rates of political representation, employment and property ownership. Their lack of participation is also depressing economic growth.

Those were some of the findings of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-sponsored 2010 Asia-Pacific Human Development Report launched today in Kabul, Afghanistan.

“Afghanistan witnesses gender inequalities on the three areas targeted in the report – economic, political and legislative – due to many structural and social restrictions.” said UNDP Resident Representative and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General to Afghanistan, Robert Watkins in presenting the Report: *Power, Voice and Rights: A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific*. “this report presents an opportunity to reconsider Afghanistan’s economic and policy opportunities in terms of gender equality.”



“While lack of data remains a main challenge for representation of Afghanistan on the regional and global human development assessments, contribution from the UNDP Center for Policy and Human Development has been very valuable as, for the first time, Afghanistan is studied in the regional context from a human development gender-related lens.” Mr. Watkins added.

“In conflict settings and post-conflict countries, women’s roles are largely ignored. Women’s inclusion can bring better insights in studying conflicts and reconciliation potentials. Furthermore, post-conflict countries cannot achieve peace, reform and rehabilitation with the exclusion of women from peace agreements and post-conflict development,” said Mr. Watkins. “This Report is an opportunity for Afghanistan to draw lessons learnt from the regional context and address its local gender-related issues presented in the report.” he concluded.

The report focuses on three key areas—economic power, political decision-making and legal rights—to analyse what holds women back, and how policies and attitudes can be changed to

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UNDP is the UN’s global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life.

foster a climb toward gender equality. Asia, the Report asserts, is standing at a cross-road and by putting the right policies in place now, countries can achieve positive change.

South Asia often comes in second worst in the world gender equality measures, just above sub-Saharan Africa. For instance, almost half the adult women in South Asia are illiterate which is the world's worst performance. South Asian women can expect to die five years earlier than their men. And more women die in childbirth there—500 for every 100,000 live births—than any other part of the world except sub-Saharan Africa.



Asia-Pacific women hold only a handful of legislative seats, fewer than anywhere else in the world except in the Arab region. Women in Asia-Pacific rarely make it to elective office according to this Report.

The region is far behind where it could be on basic issues, such as protecting women from violence and upholding entitlements to property. Few countries have adopted or implemented laws prohibiting violence against women, despite widespread evidence of discrimination and assault.

Removing barriers to women's ownership of assets such as land; expanding paid employment; making migration safe and investing in high quality education and health are some of the main solutions recommended by this Report to address above mentioned problems.

The Report recommended reforming constitutions, training judicial law and enforcement personnel in gender-sensitive practices and progressively interpreting religious principles—which recognize the equal value of all human beings. Political quota to increase women's political participation, with sanctions for non-compliance, could be necessary. More women should also be enfranchised into party policies; and relied upon as brokers of peace in times of emergency.

**For more information and to access the 2010 Asia-Pacific Human Development Report please visit: <http://www2.undprcc.lk/ext/pvr/>**

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