MARKING 'GLOBAL OPEN DAY,' UN OFFICIALS CALL FOR GREATER ROLE OF AFGHAN WOMEN IN PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

KABUL, 26 October 2016 – The empowerment and protection of women are essential to strategies countering violent extremism, said senior UN officials today after meeting with Afghan civil society representatives in Kabul.

Today's meeting marked the 2016 'Global Open Day on Women, Peace and Security' with women representing a cross-section of Afghan civil society working on peace and security issues. Two UN officials – the Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan, Pernille Kardel, and the Country Representative for the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), Elzira Sagynbaeva – recognized the essential role women play in fostering a peaceful and tolerant society, including preventing members of their families or communities from becoming violent extremists.

"In Afghanistan, ideologies imposing a discriminatory belief systems continue to deprive women and girls of basic human rights such as freedom of movement and access to education and health," said Ms. Kardel, who also expressed serious concerns over executions of women and corporal punishments imposed by Anti-Government Elements. Messages of intolerance – political, religious or social – foster discrimination, exclusion and violence, and are incompatible with universal human rights norms protected by the laws of Afghanistan, she added.

Beyond the confined perception of women as victims of extremist ideologies, women play a crucial role in combatting violent extremism. Appreciating the resilience and efforts of women leaders striving for peace and equality in Afghanistan, Ms. Sagynbaeva highlighted the need to recognize women's transformative leadership, and create spaces for women's active participation at all levels of decision making. "Women are the biggest untapped resource in the search for sustainable peace in Afghanistan," she said. "Women's empowerment and gender equality are essential drivers of development, reconciliation and stand as a bulwark against the radicalization of youth."

At today's gathering, civil society representatives highlighted local community initiatives whereby women use their influence in their communities, schools, workplaces and homes to challenge extreme ideologies that radicalize, recruit or incite violence. For example, several women recounted instances of exerting pressure on male family members not to join the ranks of insurgency. Discussions also highlighted instances where women adhere to or encourage others on the path of radicalization – sometimes motivated by poverty or exclusion.

"I encourage the Afghan government to develop and implement human rights-based gender-sensitive policy responses that address the underlying drivers of violent extremism," said Ms. Kardel. "We need to recognize, build and expand on women's ongoing experiences in prevention and mitigation," added Ms. Sagynbaeva. Policy actions need to be supported by ensuring equal representation of women in the field of conflict prevention, through coherent

investments in policy and programming for women and girls, and by enabling an environment for women's participation in the prevention and resolution of conflicts."

Civil society participants urged the United Nations, government officials and donors for greater support in addressing the root causes of extremism such as corruption and poverty. Acknowledging women's persuasive power, participants also requested a greater emphasis on strengthening women's religious literacy and knowledge to equip them to challenge radical ideologies with powerful narratives on tolerance, non-violence and the peaceful values of religion.

Launched in 2010, Open Days events aim to support dialogue between UN senior leadership and women's organizations across the world on the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and its subsequent seven UN Resolutions. These instruments engender women's leadership and meaningful participation in political and security transitions, including peacebuilding. In addition to the national Open Day event in Kabul, UNAMA is conducting similar consultations on violent extremism across the country, including in Herat, Bamyan, Kandahar, Badakshan, Nangarhar and Gardez provinces.

Pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 2242 (2015) and the recently-adopted Secretary-General's Plan of Action on Preventing Violent Extremism, Ms Kardel and Ms Sagynbaeva reiterated the commitment of the United Nations to support efforts by Afghan institutions and civil society to empower women to prevent and respond to violent extremism.

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For more information, please contact:

UN Women: ellie.vanbaaren@unwomen.org
UNAMA: spokesperson-UNAMA@un.org