



Statement of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
At the 68th IAEA General Conference
delivered by

H.E. Ms. Manizha Bakhtari, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the
Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the IAEA

President,

Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me join previous speakers in congratulating you, Excellency, on your election as the President of the 68th Session of the IAEA General Conference. You have my assurance of our full support and cooperation. I would also like to extend my thanks to IAEA Director General Grossi for his leadership in navigating critical nuclear challenges in a complex and ever-evolving international landscape.

I also extend my deepest condolences to Austria in light of the devastating floods affecting the country, and I sincerely hope that everyone remains safe during this difficult time.

President,

Before the tragic events of August 2021, Afghanistan had worked closely with the IAEA in areas crucial to the country's development, including nuclear safety, food, agriculture, human health, nutrition and human capital development. These initiatives contributed significantly to the welfare of the people of Afghanistan and reinforced our common goal of the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Today, however, my country faces an uncertain future. The international community is well aware of the changes brought about by the Taliban takeover in August 2021, and as a result, we face significant challenges in increasing the Agency's assistance and effectively utilizing nuclear science and technology across diverse sectors.

Nevertheless, I speak today as a representative of the people of Afghanistan — people who, despite the political uncertainties, still hope for a future of peace, prosperity, and international cooperation. The bonds we built through the IAEA's technical cooperation programs in the past remain valuable, and I urge this body to keep in mind the needs of the people of Afghanistan, particularly in the areas of health and development, where nuclear technology can make a difference.

The Agency's initiatives, such as Zoonotic Disease Integrated Action (ZODIAC), *'Rays of Hope'*, *'Cancer Care for All'*, and Nuclear Technology for Controlling Plastic Pollution (NUTEC Plastic), are essential to enhancing well-being of people and addressing global challenges like climate change, pandemics, and food security. Afghanistan fully supports these initiatives and remains committed to ensuring that nuclear technology benefits the most vulnerable.

President,

The Taliban has further intensified its violations of human rights, particularly against women and girls.

In August, they issued new vice and virtue laws that have pushed Afghanistan deeper into extremism. These laws force women to fully cover their faces, ban them from speaking or singing in public, restrict their movement, prohibit solo travel without a male guardian, and forbid interactions with men who are not close

relatives. This marks a renewed, brutal assault on women's rights, amounting to nothing less than gender apartheid.

As Mr. Richard Bennett, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, stated at the 57th session of the Human Rights Council, a comprehensive survivor-centered and gender-responsive approach is urgently needed, proportionate to the gravity of the situation. I take this opportunity to call on IAEA Member States to support this approach and help end the cycle of impunity in Afghanistan.

In light of this, we strongly support the Agency's efforts to promote gender parity, especially through initiatives like the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship Programme and the more recent Lise Meitner Programme. Despite the current challenges in my country, the women of Afghanistan remain determined to contribute to fields such as nuclear science, where their involvement can foster peace, innovation, and progress.

We call on the IAEA and its Member States to support the participation of the women of Afghanistan in these Programmes, ensuring that they have the opportunity to pursue advanced studies and contribute to the peaceful use of nuclear technology.

President,

The Taliban's return has aggravated the security situation in Afghanistan, creating a fertile ground for terrorism and illicit narcotics trafficking. This growing instability poses significant risks to nuclear safety, security, and safeguards, and undermines international efforts towards nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

The absence of effective governance and rule of law accelerates the threat of radioactive pollution from uranium mining and production in the region, while increasing the smuggling and illicit trafficking of radioactive and nuclear materials — issues that transcend borders.

It is crucial that the international community and the region recognize that Afghanistan's security issues have far-reaching consequences and pose greater international threats than realized. Afghanistan is not just a domestic problem; it is an international one that demands urgent global attention.

President,

We would like to express our gratitude to the Agency for its continued support and cooperation and we call upon the IAEA and its Member States to remain a partner of the people of Afghanistan.

Thank you, President.