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September 13, 2017

His Excellency President Ashraf Ghani  
Presidential Palace  
Kabul  
Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Your Excellency:

I am writing to you regarding an important issue of shared concern—the education of girls in Afghanistan. In October 2017, Human Rights Watch will publish a report on this topic. I am writing to you now to appraise you of the findings of the report, to request your government's responses to the findings, and, I very much hope, to continue a fruitful dialogue on this issue that we are grateful to have had the chance to begin during the report's preparation.

The report is based on 249 interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch researchers in 2016 in Kabul, Kandahar, Balkh and Nangarhar provinces. The majority of the interviewees were girls who had missed some or all of their education. We also interviewed parents, teachers, community leaders, NGO workers, experts, and national and provincial-level government officials.

We gratefully acknowledge the kind assistance we received from a number of Afghan government officials during our research for this report. We hope very much that you—and the members of your government—will view this report as a sincere effort to work with your government to strengthen the education system and to strengthen international support for the Afghan government's efforts to educate girls.

Our report highlights the important progress that the Afghan government—and its international partners—have achieved with regard to girls' education since 2001. Millions of girls have gone to school, and infrastructure and teacher recruitment and training have been dramatically improved. The government's support for community-based education has allowed it to flourish and ensure more girls can access

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education within their communities. It was clear from our research that within many families there is increasing confidence in the education system and an increasing desire to ensure that all of their children, including girls, study. The government, and donors, deserve real credit for these changes, which have changed many lives and strengthened the whole country.

Our report also documents serious remaining deficits in girls' education and a risk that the progress achieved is already eroding in some areas and could face further backsliding in the years ahead.

Below is a summary of key findings in our forthcoming report:

- **Low—and sometimes falling—participation of girls in education:** While the statistics regarding the number of girls who attend school are contested, according to even the most optimistic statistics, the proportion of Afghan girls who are in school has never gone much above 50 percent, and the proportion of girls attending school falls as girls get older. By age 12 to 15, two-thirds of girls are out of school. The proportion of students who are girls is falling in some provinces, including Kandahar and Paktia. As the overall security situation worsens, schools close, and donors disengage, there are signs that access to education for girls in at least some parts of Afghanistan is in decline.
- **Discrimination against girls in the education system:** Afghanistan's provision of education still discriminates against women by providing fewer schools accessible to girls, and by failing to take adequate measures to remedy the disparity in educational participation between girls and boys.
- **Lack of schools and poor infrastructure:** Forty-one percent of all schools in Afghanistan do not have buildings. Thirty percent of Afghan government schools lack safe drinking water, and 60 percent do not have toilets. Lack of buildings, water and toilets disproportionately affects girls. Many children live too far from the nearest school to be able to attend, which particularly affects girls.
- **Community-based education—effective but unsustainable—**The need to get girls into schools post-Taliban prompted the development of innovative models in Afghanistan, including community-based education (CBE) models that researchers have found significantly increase girls' educational achievement. While

Afghanistan has a large number of CBE programs, these programs are all run by NGOs and international organizations and are entirely donor-funded—meaning that these programs are not effectively integrated into the national education system and are not sustainable due to their dependence on donor funding. If the government aims to get all girls into school, and to end gender disparities in educational achievement, it should integrate CBE into the government’s education system.

- **Failure to implement constitutional provisions regarding compulsory education:** The Afghan government has not taken meaningful steps toward implementing national legislation that makes education compulsory. Although by law all children are required to complete class nine, the government has neither the capacity to provide this level of education to all children nor a system to ensure that all children attend school. Many children do not have any access to education, or, if they do have access to education, it does not extend through class nine. Even when education is accessible, it is entirely up to parents to decide whether to send their children to school or not—and many girls are still left at home. The government has failed to make clear to families that school is important for both girls and boys and to ensure that the education system accommodates all students. This contravenes Afghanistan’s international obligation to guarantee free and compulsory primary education and is contrary to its international development commitments under the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Donor disengagement and insecurity pose serious risks to girls’ education:** While the 2016 Brussels Conference was relatively successful, the scaling-back of donor funding and the desire by donors to play a less hands-on role—by, for example, rerouting aid through multilateral funds—is having a negative impact on girls’ education. Successful programs are losing money, and in many provinces services have been hard hit by the withdrawal of funds that departed with international troops. Rising insecurity is also having a deeply harmful impact on girls’ education; our report makes recommendations for measures the government and donors can take, even in the context of greater insecurity, to more effectively protect the ability of girls to study.

I will travel to Kabul for the launch of the report in October, and will be requesting meetings with your office and with the ministries copied on this letter. I look forward to discussing the report's findings and recommendations with officials from your office and from the relevant ministries, and to a fruitful discussion with your government about how Human Rights Watch can help implement our recommendations to better educate Afghan girls.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions. I can be reached at [gernthl@hrw.org](mailto:gernthl@hrw.org) and at +1-212-290-4700.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Liesl Gertholtz".

Liesl Gertholtz  
Women's Rights Director

Cc: Minister of Education  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Minister of Labour and Social Affairs  
Minister of Women's Affairs  
Minister of Finance  
Minister of Defence  
Minister of Interior Affairs  
Chair, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission