



Peace and Women in Business
By Afghanistan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry
(AWCCI)

Since 2002 as women regained their freedom they entered various spheres of public life as they did before 1995. Girls started attending schools and universities, women started going to work in the government and none government offices. More importantly a number of women very courageously invested and emerged as business owners. Not only created jobs for themselves but also for others.

Today, there are over 1500 formal businesses in the country owned and led by women in almost all 34 provinces. These businesses have invested over \$80 million and have created over 70,000 jobs for both men and women. Today, Afghan women are not only running handicraft and traditional businesses but are getting in all none traditional and modern sectors such as Construction, Exporting, Manufacturing, Services such as Information Technology, Private Schools and Day cares, Private Health Clinics, Restaurants, Beauty and Fitness, Media and Marketing, Travel Agencies, Logistics, Freight Forwarding and Shipment and many more.

Today, we have more than 20,000 informal businesses owned and run by women in all districts and rural areas of this country. Today, these informal businesses travel to cities to participate in the training, exhibitions and trade shows. They are learning to become formal businesses so they can be better connected.

Today, not only women in government make over 20% of the employees but also of the privates sector large industries such as banking, telecom and airlines.

Afghan women's progress in all sectors but especially as leaders and employees of the privates sector and their empowerment and independence economically is a result of the international community especially of the United States. This accomplishment needs to be acknowledged by the supporters and worth to be appreciated by the Afghan women. We Afghan businesswomen truly honor and thank the international partners specially the United States. We Afghan businesswomen will remain your allies for not only protecting but also building upon and widening the horizon for women's economic and entrepreneurship development in the country. In order to do so we have a number of recommendations for the peace negotiations and post peace situation:

1. We would like the Afghan Constitution to be protected and in the constitution the economic system as free market economy, equality between men and women and the reservations for women's political participation such as in the district and provincial councils and parliament.
2. As a free market economy the billions of dollars of investments that are made are worth protection and provided further opportunities.
3. We would like the freedom of movement and freedom of speech protected as mobility and commuting for girls and women to access schools, universities and markets as businesswomen is vital.
4. We would like freedom of choice for women to run any and all types of businesses based on government regulations and the industry of beauty and fitness the largest for women in the country need a special protection. For instance we have over 1500 beauty salons and around 100,000 women employed by them which gives them a decent earning to run their families.

5. We would like to have both freedom and peace. Peace without freedom of movement, choice, speech and work/doing business is meaningless.
6. We would like for women/girls to earn without changing their identity to a man/boy. It only happened once in our history in 1995. We stand strong for it not to happen again and we hope our allies too.
7. This and many other reasons are there for us to be at the table of the peace negotiation and post-peace planning. We do not only emphasize on women from difference spheres to be part of the negotiation teams but also emphasize that our government take the lead of intra-afghan talks with a good balance of representation from various fields.
8. We Afghan businesswomen are moving forward and we would like for our allies to stand for it and do not compromise any bit of it.

About AWCCI

A group of businesswomen realized lack of a platform to specifically serve businesswomen's needs in the country and the need to do policy advocacy so they collaborated and established **Leading Entrepreneurs for Afghanistan's Development (LEAD)**. LEAD was established in 2013 and officially launched on January 22, 2014. LEAD changed to Afghanistan's Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industries on March 12th, 2017 through the approval of the High Economic Council of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan presided by H.E. the President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani.

Vision: An Afghanistan in which **Afghan women** and female entrepreneurs have national and international **recognition** for their contribution in the sustainable economic development of Afghanistan and **unimpeded access** to economic opportunity and prosperity.

Mission: AWCCI works to meaningfully represent, advance, and secure Afghan women's economic interests, nationally and internationally.

The programmatic areas of the AWCCI are as follows:

- **Research (academic and policy related):** To provide data that can be used practically in developing Afghan Government and donor organization policies related to women's involvement in the Afghan economy
- **Sales support:** To make a tangible impact on women-owned businesses by increasing sales of products, through local and international exhibitions, differentiating Afghan women-made products in international markets
- **Investment support:** To mitigate risks and open up opportunities for female investors in the Afghan economy by providing market insights, improving access to finance, and facilitating access to infrastructure
- **Advocacy and raising awareness:** To ensure that the contributions of businesswomen in the Afghan economy are recognized and promoted, and the perspectives of Afghan businesswomen are considered in both Afghan Government and international donor policies and programs
- **Capacity building for both existing and aspired entrepreneurs:** The objective is to provide training to Afghan businesswomen and entrepreneurs to increase their knowledge in various subjects related to business. AWCCI has and would like to maintain a A-Z guide for both expansions and start-up in both national languages Dari and Pashto.