Ministry of Higher Education's Progress Report on "Against Discrimination in Education Convention" (14/12/1960)

Report duration: 2012 – 2015

1) Please explain to what extent access to higher education is realized?

General access

In general, the access to tertiary education has been increased, which can be seen as a success for Afghanistan. Increasing student access was one of the key goals of the Ministry of Higher Education. While about 100,000 university students were in enrolled at public universities in 2012, that number grew to 171,000 by 2015.

a) Access in the provinces

Access to tertiary education was limited in the past. From 2012 to 2015, access for undergraduates was broadened in the provinces. 27 universities and higher education institutes operated in the provinces in 2012. The number of universities and higher education institutes in the provinces increased to 31 universities and higher education institutes in 2015. At the same time, the number of the students were rose from 71,000 to 135,000 in the provinces.

b) Evening Study Programs

Evening programs have become increasingly popular with student, thus leading to an enrollment of more than 6,200 in 2012 at five public higher education institutions. Evening classes enable students who might otherwise not be able to attend the university to continue their education, finish a degree or obtain further education. They are especially important for students who work during the day and for older students. In addition, evening study programs provide new opportunities for women who are working or have children to care for during the day, to take evening courses. The percentage of women in evening classes has grown over the four years and ca. 22,000 students at fifteen universities were enrolled in 2015.

c) Distance Education

Distance Education (e.g. television, email, video-conference, Internet) has broadened access to higher education to insolated parts of the country, to those who are unable to travel because of disabilities or who are not allowed to leave home (e.g. females).

d) Scholarships abroad

Due to large number of secondary school graduates seeking higher education and the limited number of places, a large number of students went abroad to seek education leading to an undergraduate and postgraduate degree. The Ministry of Higher Education has placed around 10,000 students in programs abroad. The scholarships were either granted by donors or by the Government of Afghanistan.

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2) Please describe the efforts made by your government to ensure that there is discrimination on the ground prohibited by the Convention to enter and complete higher education?

a) Disabled students

In order to train teachers for learners with disabilities, blind as well as intellectual, learning and adaptive behavior difficulties, the Ministry of Higher Education has established the Faculty of Special Education at the Shaheed Rabbani Education University. This faculty encompasses a blind department, a deaf department, and a mentally retarded student department. From 2012 to 2015, it has trained about 300 teachers and university lecturers, who serve in the schools with programs for the deaf, blind and mentally disabled students.

b) Scholarships

In 2012, the Ministry of Higher Education approved a by-law on the scholarship distribution, which foresees 30% of the slots for female students. Further, 7% of scholarships are envisaged for nomads and seven percent for family members of martyrs and 7% for disabled students at the undergraduate level.

c) Entrance exam

All school graduates who wish to enrol at the university, must pass the university entry exam (so called "Kankor"). In order to provide equal opportunity to disabled candidates, the disabled students obtain their exam questions in a way that accommodates their particular disabilities.

d) Female students and gender

In 2012, only about 19,000 (ca. 19%) of the students were female. In the reporting period, the number of female students grew to around 22,000 undergraduates. Besides, a comprehensive higher education gender strategy policy has been approved.

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3) Please also provide quantitative and descriptive information on the difficulties experienced by your government as regards access to higher education and on the progress realized?

Restricted governmental budget and the withdrawal of the donors' technical and financial assistance have hindered the Ministry of Higher Education to achieve its set goals in the reporting period. Besides, the insecure and worsened situation throughout country, in particular in the southern and eastern provinces, did not allow the higher education sector to progress as planned and provide quality education.

The limitation of financial resources has minimized the opportunities to provide special assistance, in particular to disadvantaged groups. The lack of professional of qualified lecturers on special education (blind, deaf, and mentally retarded departments) resulted in disabled students not obtaining appropriate higher education.

Further, Afghan traditional culture in remote areas, marriage at an early age and poverty is holding back female students from enrolling at universities or completing their studies. The lack of adequate numbers of female school graduates in some provinces also plays an important role for the low number of female students.

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