



## **ASIA/AFGHANISTAN - Limiting the rights of women: the government agrees with the Ulema**

Kabul (Agenzia Fides) - The Afghan government of President Hamid Karzai has given public support for a "code of conduct" that limits women's rights, issued by the influential Council of the Ulema, an Islamic body that brings together the main Afghan Islamic leaders. As stated in a note sent to Fides by the "Human Rights and Democracy Organization", the NGO Afghan civil society, this step is a concession to sharia (Islamic law) and the Taliban, it is "a huge step backwards" on the issue of women's rights and represents a violation of the Afghan Constitution, which enshrines equality between men and women.

The Code permits husbands to, in some cases, beat up their wives, and encourages gender segregation, almost bringing Afghan women at the time of the Taliban regime. The text indicates a series of guidelines that "women religious should voluntarily observe": women are not allowed to travel unaccompanied by a man and cannot talk to strangers in places such as schools, markets and offices. Beating one's wife - says the text - is banned only "if this action is not carried out in accordance with the sharia".

According to observers, the support publicly expressed by President Karzai concerning these rules could be a ploy to get the political support of the Ulema in the delicate negotiations with the Taliban. Fatana Ishaq Gailani, founder of the NGO "Afghanistan Women's Council", comments: "The rights of women were used as bargaining chips in a political game", adding: "We want a fair Islam, not a political Islam". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 08/03/2012)