

PEACE IS PRIORITY NO 1

**SUBMISSION FOR THE BRUSSELS CONFERENCE ON
AFGHANISTAN**

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1. CURRENT SITUATION

Afghanistan has suffered from protracted war and conflict for four decades. The insecurity is increasing day by day. As a result, Afghans witness more and more civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure. Despite massive international assistance in the last 15 years, political and economic instability is mounting and people are forced to displace and migrate. Insecurity increases unemployment across the country and forces educated Afghans to leave the country (brain drain). More than 35% of the Afghans live below the poverty line.

The escalating armed clashes in provinces such as Helmand, Nangarhar, Baghlan, Kunduz, Urozgan and other provinces as well as blasts and suicide attacks in many parts of the country including Kabul, caused significant civilian casualties. According to a recent UNAMA report¹, civilian casualties were at an all-time high in the first half of 2016. At least 1,601 civilians were killed and 3,565 others were injured. Of these, almost one third are children, which is 18% higher compared to the same period last year.

The situation of Afghan women is becoming increasingly precarious as insecurity increases and spreads across the country. Gender-based violence, exclusion and discrimination continue to limit women's access to justice, education and healthcare and their ability to participate in social, economic, and political life, particularly in rural areas. In parts of the country under opposition control, women's and children's safety and independence have been more severely compromised, with restrictions on employment, education and mobility reinstated. These recent trends and developments have heightened people's fear that their basic human rights are at risk and current gains are fragile.

2. OUR ANALYSIS

Cordaid believes that peace is has the highest importance for Afghans. It is their no 1 priority. Peace and stability are prime conditions for people to rebuild their lives and communities. They allow potentialities to flourish, encourage people to invest and produce and create an enabling environment for public freedoms, promotion of human rights, political participation and public accountability. They are pre-conditions for equitable and sustainable development.

If we want to communities to flourish in fragile Afghanistan and create an enabling environment for sustainable and inclusive development, we have to promote peace and stability. They should be and remain the top priority. Peace and stability should not be looked at as economic commodities, nor should peace efforts be judged on how much they will cost compared to other economic projects. Their direct psychological, social, political and economic impact, as well as the opportunities and favorable environment they provide for recovery and development and the improved quality of life of Afghans all need to come into the equation .

In this context Cordaid would also like to reiterate its commitment and support to the process of New Deal implementation in Afghanistan. We feel that an ongoing and inclusive state-society dialogue on key peacebuilding and statebuilding issues is a pre-requisite to bring about viable prospects for (sustained) peace and stability.

¹ <https://unama.unmissions.org/afghanistan-record-level-civilian-casualties-sustained-first-half-2016-un-report>

3. OUR PROPOSAL : GROUP OF FRIENDS OF THE AFGHAN PEACE PROCESS

The peace process initiated some years back has had no genuine results. Armed conflicts are still ongoing and opposition groups have become more diverse and active. New armed groups which don't differentiate between armed forces and civilians are gaining ground, amplifying insecurity and becoming a big threat to people's life.

Cordaid believes that the Afghanistan peace process should be inclusive and practical. The peace process should be internally driven on the one hand and receive wider, strong and sincere regional and international support on the other. Neighbors, regional powers like Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, India, Russia, China, The Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the United Nations should actively engage in the peace process.

We propose to constitute a "Group of Friends of the Afghan Peace Process" to boost the process. Women, youth, civil society and warring parties should all be involved in the process to make the peace and its related decisions and action steps implementable and sustainable.

We suggest that the peace talk mechanism should be backed by the United Nations Security Council. We think the mechanism should ensure wider engagement and has to guarantee the implementation of decisions made during the peace talk. Peace should be seen as a basic human necessity, not as a political agenda to satisfy the demands and desires of the involved parties.

4. CONCLUSION

Afghans are part and parcel of the global, human family. The Government of Afghanistan and the international community have moral and legal responsibilities to play a constructive role and bring peace and stability to Afghans. Without peace, Afghanistan will remain fragile and development assistance will pay off little. Without peace, the world will continue to witness the death of Afghan women, children and men and the displacement and diaspora of hundreds of thousands of conflict-affected victims. We will witness more violence, poverty and injustice in Afghanistan, aggravating the security situation in the South Asia region and the world at large. Therefore, we ask everyone in the Brussels conference on Afghanistan to support the peace process in the country, join hands and play a responsible, sincere and active role to make peace a reality.

ABOUT CORDAID

Cordaid strives to end poverty and exclusion. We do this in the world's most fragile and conflict-affected areas as well as in the Netherlands. We engage local communities to rebuild trust and resilience and increase people's self reliance. Our professionals provide humanitarian assistance and create opportunities to improve security, healthcare and education and stimulate inclusive economic growth. We are supported by 288.000 private donors in the Netherlands and by a worldwide partner network. This gives us the leverage and implementing power to solve problems and create structural change in the most challenging settings.

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