

ACBAR



اکبر

دافغانانو لپاره د بشري او پرمختيايي مرستو د همغږي اداره

هه ممانگي کمکهای بشري و انکشافی برای افغانها

Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief & Development

## AFGHANISTAN NGO BRIEFING PAPER: WARSAW CONFERENCE

### **Introduction**

ACBAR, the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development, is an Afghan independent body bringing together 151 national and international NGOs working in Afghanistan and abiding by the humanitarian principles of independence, neutrality, impartiality and humanity.

On the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> July 2016, NATO partners will gather in Warsaw to finalize financial commitments to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces for 2018 to 2020. Security challenges facing Afghanistan will be discussed, in addition to the need to work together for ensuring peace and reconciliation.

From a humanitarian perspective, NGOs should not take sides, nor should they pronounce themselves on whether a conflict or war is just or unjust as this undermines their ability to help vulnerable groups and mitigate their suffering. However, NGOs in Afghanistan have a unique role in development and a long experience in delivering services to the population in health, education, agriculture, livelihoods and humanitarian needs in partnership with government, the international community and local communities. The Warsaw Conference therefore provides an important time for those of us working in Afghanistan to highlight progresses and challenges in Afghanistan from an NGO perspective.

### **Conflict affecting humanitarian needs in Afghanistan**

After 13 years of International Military Intervention in Afghanistan, the International Military Forces (IMF) combat mission formally ended in December 2014. NATO launched its Resolute Support Mission, which focuses on providing 'training, advice and assistance activities at the security ministries and national institutional levels and the higher levels of army and police command across the country. Conflict after 2014 has increased sharply. The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan documented 4,921 civilian casualties in the first half of 2015, marking the highest number of total civilian casualties ever recorded during that reporting period.<sup>1</sup>

According to the UN's Humanitarian Needs Overview for 2016, 80 districts out of 398 are now considered highly conflict affected. Fighting affects the lives of 6.3 million Afghans. In 2015, almost 200,000 fled their homes due to conflict. Significant parts of the country have thus become inaccessible or hard to reach by development and relief agencies. Access constraints will likely be exacerbated throughout 2016 due in part to increased numbers of armed groups, financially-driven reductions of humanitarian presence and greater uncertainties about state control.

Growing violence has accentuated acute deficiencies in emergency health services and trauma management. Conflict further disrupts already inadequate access to basic health care. Approximately 40% of the population lives in areas where there is no public health service

<sup>1</sup> [unama.unmissions.org/civilian-casualties-hit-new-high-2015](http://unama.unmissions.org/civilian-casualties-hit-new-high-2015)

coverage<sup>2</sup>. In October 2015, this situation was compounded by the erroneous targeting of the MSF hospital in Kunduz taking out a major medical facility in a war zone.

### **A call to safeguard the humanitarian space**

It is of the utmost importance that humanitarian relief agencies are able to act in circumstances of extreme humanitarian need, including situations of armed conflict, with the assurance that their personnel, their property, and their activities will not be attacked. Any attack, intimidation, violence or threat against humanitarian workers will ultimately result in delays in aid implementation, which will negatively impact the welfare of the people of Afghanistan.

Various reports indicate that since 2014, there has been an increase in attacks on aid agencies in areas where the International Security Assistance Forces have transferred security operations to Afghan forces. NGO workers are increasingly targeted by criminal groups kidnapping and for ransom.<sup>3</sup>

NGOs in Afghanistan strive to provide humanitarian relief and development assistance to vulnerable populations. As they carry out their work, they face many serious dangers. Afghanistan endures protracted internal armed conflict, insurgency, and political instability and is by far, one of the most dangerous places in the world for an aid worker. Violence threatens the safety and even the lives of field personnel. One aid worker killed in their line of duty is one too many. Throughout 2015, 50 NGO workers were killed, 44 wounded and 108 abducted.

The humanitarian space in Afghanistan is increasingly shrinking. Delivery of humanitarian relief to affected populations has been frustrated by those who are wary of aid agencies due to a lack of understanding of the agenda and principles which guide their work. NGOs therefore often find themselves mistrusted by both the State and non-state groups. There are concerns that humanitarian space may decrease further in 2016 as criminal groups—currently loosely controlled by the Government and militant groups—become less accountable and potentially more violent.

Action is needed to protect aid workers and ensure acceptance and understanding of NGO work. In an effort to build the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), NATO partners should increase training in International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and core humanitarian principles, commonly understood as the principles of neutrality, impartiality, independence, and humanity and how they translate into practice for ANSF.

### **A call for greater adherence of International Humanitarian Law (IHL)**

It is vital that IHL and humanitarian principles are complied with to protect and respect medical and humanitarian facilities, aid agencies and their personnel. In circumstances where these laws are violated, there must be accountability.

State and non-state actors are obliged to adhere to principles of IHL which provides protection to health care services. Data collected from NGOs by ACBAR during March 1, 2015 – February 10, 2016 recorded 92 incidents of attacks or interference with hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, medical personnel (including doctors, nurses, dentists, and support staff), medical vehicles, and medical

---

<sup>2</sup> [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg\\_2016\\_hrp\\_final\\_20151224.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg_2016_hrp_final_20151224.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> “In almost every district where security has been handed over from ISAF [NATO-led International Security Assistance Force] to Afghan security forces we’ve seen an increase in attacks,” Omar Hamid, head of Asia Analysis at IHS Country Risk, told IRIN. “The writ of the government to provide security to aid agencies is reduced and there’s a risk that the situation will only get worse as the political instability increases.” <http://www.irinnews.org/report/100585/analysis-challenges-around-aid-access-afghanistan>

supplies. Of the 92 incidents ACBAR recorded, at least 55 people were killed and 48 were wounded. The incident that killed the most people was the US airstrike on the MSF-run hospital in Kunduz; MSF confirmed 42 people were killed, and 27 staff and many patients and caretakers were wounded.<sup>4</sup>

### **Development of Afghanistan**

The withdrawal of the IMF in 2014 has also negatively impacted the Afghan economy and the Afghan population remains chronically vulnerable as a result of the limited development that has been achieved.

More efforts needed to curb government corruption and provide security on roads and in urban areas to reassure an insecure and disenfranchised population. In many rural areas local communities have increasing difficulty negotiating with a different opposition groups to continue to live their lives and take their goods to market.

Paragraph 18 of the Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan states:

*“As the Afghan economy and the revenues of the Afghan government grow, Afghanistan’s yearly share [of security expenditures] will increase progressively from at least US\$500m in 2015, with the aim that it can assume, no later than 2024, full financial responsibility for its own security forces. In the light of this, during the Transformation Decade, we expect international donors will reduce their financial contributions commensurate with the assumption by the Afghan government of increasing financial responsibility.”*

Both the economy and government revenues in Afghanistan have underperformed compared to the projections of 21 May 2012 (date of the Chicago Summit Declaration). In addition the Government of Afghanistan’s Chicago pledges were made in US dollars, but the value of the Afghani has dropped significantly (around 29%) since the summit. World Bank analyses have highlighted the budgetary challenges these commitments pose, particularly in relation to ensuring adequate government funds remain to support government-led development expenditures. It is important for NATO allies and donors to consider that in the next few years, the Government of Afghanistan’s funding commitments should be indexed to actual economic and fiscal performance in order to ensure that there is room to devote resources to both security and development.

### **Conclusion**

In all operations, policies and strategies NATO should prioritize protection of civilians, especially vulnerable groups such as women and children; they should also work with the Afghan government to ensure that the activities of international and Afghan soldiers and police are in accordance with the provisions of UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 on women, peace and security. Activities should not adversely affect access for aid agencies or lead to forced displacement of civilians.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.safeguardinghealth.org/sites/shcc/files/SHCC2016final.pdf>