

Afghanistan Civil Society Position Paper on Peace and Reconciliation process

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Kabul, Afghanistan

Introduction

A just and lasting peace is a key condition for achieving democracy and comprehensive development in Afghanistan. We the Afghan civil society organizations support a peace process, which respects democratic values and gains Afghanistan has made over the past several years. A peace process must fundamentally end violence and conflict factors in Afghanistan.

We, the representatives of Afghanistan's civil society believe in the divine guidance of Islam that an inclusive peace and reconciliation is an essential precondition for ending conflict, and lasting peace and security in Afghanistan. We acknowledge that peace can only be sustainable if it provides all Afghans with equal opportunities for a better life, with access to services and facilities.

We believe that the current peace and reconciliation process lacks adequate academic and scientific studies and that grieves and aspirations of the people, especially the victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity are not considered. To achieve sustainable peace, civil society calls for more attention to the importance of evidence-based social research to the attain views of all citizens in the country regarding the peace and its requirements

Afghan civil society sees corruption as one of the main drivers of war and believes the anti-corruption fight needs to be independent, non-political and institutionalized. To achieve stability in the country, modern governance infrastructure needs to be provided through sectoral institutions and justice through judiciary institutions.

While there are ongoing efforts to reach peace, security is deteriorating day by day. Recent terrorist attacks in the country's main cities, especially in Kabul, have increased public concerns. The Afghan Civil Society appreciates efforts and commitments of the Afghan government and the international community to Afghanistan's security and peace. However, to solve the current problems, different government structures/institutions for peace must work together more effectively.

Vision: Afghan Civil Society considers it essential for all segments of society, especially women, youth and victims in the decision-making, to participate in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the peace and reconciliation process. To reduce

the gap between the government and the people, we believe active involvement of representatives of civil society, political parties, victim groups, women and youth in policy-making and relevant executive bodies such as the High Peace Council and its Provincial Committees is a need. Such involvement will play a huge role in contributing to a just, comprehensive and sustainable peace that is in line with the Afghan Constitution. Accordingly, we believe that any non-public and non-transparent negotiations, especially without the participation of women and lacking accountability and justice, will not lead to lasting peace.

Afghan Civil Society Recommendations

The current peace-building efforts are characterized by a numerous shortcomings and inefficiencies. These include the minimal and symbolic role of women in peace decisions; the overlapping and conflicting tasks between the National Security Council and the High Peace Council; lack of clarity of the negotiating authorities with the opposition, etc. To address these shortcomings, there is a need to reform the High Peace Council structure and strengthens the judicial institutions of the country.

Peace is not possible without deep and comprehensive institutional reform and people's access to the minimum level of justice in local and national level. The war in Afghanistan has not only internal factors, but regional and global influencers. Therefore, it is equally important to overcome the regional and global factors/ challenges. Otherwise access to peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan is very difficult and unlikely to happen.

The High Peace Council, which is currently the main focal point for reconciliation and peace, is characterized by lack of expertise and impartiality among its members. The active status of women in the Council is diminished and active involvement of representatives of civil society, experts and young people is completely absence. Also based on the statement of most of the members of the High Peace Council in the media, it seems that they lacked a unified analysis, and a clear and strategic vision on peace in consistence with the realities of Afghanistan and regional dimensions in promoting peace and reconciliation; The High Peace Council lacks transparency in their functions. Justice based peace is a national goal, and should not be sacrificed to the interests of figures Afghan civil society has made the following suggestion and is committed to contribute in their implementation

1. The government should not allow peace and reconciliation process fall into a political tool to empower a specific ideological, tribal and gender group.
2. Citizens should be provided with information about the High Peace Council's programs through face-to-face meetings in the villages, districts, provincial canters, and large cities. Outreach through media must be increased.
3. To improve coordination between the High Peace Council and Afghanistan Parliament, the High Peace Council should seek Parliament's consent for implementing its

decisions. The role of provincial councils in the decision-making process of the High Peace Council's Provincial Commission should also be augmented.

4. Afghan Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are seriously concerned about the High Peace Council's intention to provide unconditional privileges to the Taliban and other anti-government armed groups. The Afghan people should not be deprived of the achievements the country has made over the past 16 years, such as its Constitution, women's rights, freedom of speech, media freedom, and other civic, political, and economic freedoms.
5. The Afghan government, its international allies, and the High Peace Council mostly focus on military and political dimensions of peace, while lasting peace in Afghanistan requires serious attention to economic, social and cultural dimensions as well.
6. A Civil Society and Media Monitoring Mechanism should be established at various levels of the High Peace Council's activities.
7. To better understand the situation, the government needs to consider citizens' concerns and expectations regarding the peace and reconciliation process. A vulnerability assessment of the public should be conducted in consultation with CSOs at the earliest opportunity. It should be implemented by one or more accredited national and international bodies and used as the basis for the peace process.
8. To increase the level of trust in the process, the Afghan government should seriously evaluate the Human Rights records of candidates for key positions in the High Peace Council and other peace related organizations.
9. International organizations in Afghanistan and abroad should not only hold meetings with government officials, members of the High Peace Council or terrorist groups, but consult Afghan Civil Society representatives as well.
10. Freedom of speech should never be traded in the peace process, nor should it be curtailed as an excuse to fight against terrorism.
11. New and updated information about each part of the peace process should be made available to the media and therefore accessible to the public as it is their right based on the sub article 3 of Article 50 of the Constitution, which declares the right of access to information to media and the public.
12. Judicial departments and governance reforms should not be subject to political controversy.
13. The government should provide returnees with adequate accommodation and avoid placing them in areas that create long-term conflicts between current residents and returnees.

14. Women's Role:

- Civil Society calls for allocating at least 40 percent of the Peace and Reconciliation Program budget for women. Moreover, at least 40 percent of national level program seats should be allocated to women.

- Civil Society calls for the creation of a supportive mechanism for women and children living in the conflict areas.
- The role of women in the Afghan peace process has always been a quantitative means to show that women are part of the peace process in Afghanistan. Civil Society calls for an increased number of educated women to be involved in national peace and reconciliation processes at the decision-making levels.
- Women, including rural women and youth, should have a greater presence and more active role in the peace process at the national, regional and international levels.
- More women should participate in national and international events organized for the peace and security of Afghanistan.
- Women should have a meaningful presence in the Afghan National Security and Defense Forces.

We Hope for an Enduring and Inclusive Peace Process!