



## **AFGHAN WOMEN: TOWARDS BONN AND BEYOND**

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The women of Afghanistan are the most under-utilized resource in Afghanistan -- a resource that could be instrumental for successful peace and a stable country in the years to come.

**Afghan women have the right, the capacity, and the desire to participate in crafting Afghanistan's future, defining the terms of transition, and shaping the peace process. This paper documents attempts to address the current challenges in Afghanistan with concrete solutions that depend on women's direct inclusion in national and sub-national processes.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Despite many positive advancements in Afghan women's lives over the past ten years, progress remains fragile and at times limited to rhetoric. There have been countless numbers of resolutions, laws, policies, action plans and strategies to empower the women of Afghanistan, but the track record for their implementation remains appalling.

Anticipating gatherings of world leaders and major regional actors in Istanbul, Brussels and Bonn, Afghan women emphasize that any roadmap for economic development, peace, stability and security will not achieve its vision if it does not explicitly address women's inclusion and participation. Women consistently remind policy makers to uphold their existing commitments and frame transition plans based on protecting advancements in human and women's rights and acknowledging the sacrifices Afghan women make for protection of those rights.

This paper reflects the perspectives and recommendations of Afghan women who have participated in a series of meetings, roundtables and workshops organized by Afghan Women's Network (AWN). The following overview of consultation outcomes and recommendations presents how women see their future and the future of Afghanistan thru 2014 and beyond.

*Afghan Women's Network, formed by Afghan women in exile in 1995, is an independent advocacy platform for Afghan women's human rights and peace.*

### **AFGHAN WOMEN: REALITIES, PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The first Bonn Conference in 2001 established a new framework for the Afghan state. Much of women's achievement in the past ten years can be attributed to the vision set forth in 2001. Therefore, Afghan women expect that ten years after Bonn, their achievements and struggles for rights and freedoms will not only be strengthened but also promoted and advanced during the

2011 International Conference on Afghanistan in Bonn. Afghan women, as half of the population, are half of the solution and want to contribute to aspirations and commitments for a better future for their communities and children.

After ten years of international engagement, Afghanistan is looking to move ahead. Democracy, human rights, development, peace and stability are the issues on the minds of many Afghans. However, the question of how the transition process will uphold the promises made regarding protecting constitutional rights and the concerns raised by women groups and civil society at large remains.

## TRANSITION

Policy makers in Afghanistan repeatedly reiterate that transition is not about military and security matters alone. However, practical experience on the ground shows that there is only minimal, if any, attention paid to improving rule of law, governance, access to justice, and women's security during the transition process. **Transition should originate from a citizen-led vision in which the women and men of Afghanistan take responsibility for the solutions that will define a better future for their country.** The road map for the withdrawal of international forces is necessary. A quick transition, however, will jeopardize gains achieved and will not do justice to the many sacrifices of Afghan National Security Forces or the investments of blood and money made by over 40 nations. Women's organizations and activists have better access to local communities than coalition and national security forces, and better understand the causes of insecurity in their communities. Therefore, women should be consulted and included in decision-making related to transition planning to ensure maximum security gains.

### Security:

1. **Women leaders and women-focused organizations should be included in the design, monitoring and evaluation of provincial security indicators. These indicators should be used to guide transition-related decisions.**

Women's organizations and activists working in the transitioned districts have not witnessed any post-transition monitoring or evaluation. Women's analysis concludes that overall security conditions have deteriorated in the transitioned areas as evidenced by increased attacks on civilians, greater restrictions on women's organizations, and heightened direct threats that have forced women's organizations to close or relocate, among other indicators.

2. **Vetting of recruits for Afghan National Security Forces, including Afghan Local Police (ALP), should include a community-based component in which women's groups and women from relevant communities can report on the background of the newly enrolled security forces.** Reports from the transitioned areas demonstrate the provincial authorities, in accordance with orders from the Central government, recruit former and current warlords and militias to increase the number of national security forces without adhering to the proper

*Women's organizations and activists are under increased restrictions in the transitioned areas. For example, one women's organizations in Laghman province reported that in the months following transition, their activities have reduced from 5 districts to 2 districts. Communities do not trust the integrity of the local forces or their ability to provide adequate protection. Now with withdrawal of Coalition forces, they fear that women will be targeted by the Taliban and/or subject to rape or abuse at the hands of the national security forces. As a result, local organizations stop activities for women in their communities*

vetting and background verification processes. These recruits include those who have prior records of rape, murder, torture and misuse of power.

3. **International donor countries must develop a systematic approach to supporting women human rights defenders, including establishment of a Women in Crisis Contact Group among international actors.** Women leaders in government and civil society have for decades played a critical role in defending women's rights against powerful conservative forces and, as a result, are under constant attack. While it is necessary to ensure women's protection in general, the protection of women leaders who assume enormous risk by defending women's rights in the public sphere must be a priority. The Afghan government still does not have a clear plan to support women's specific protection needs. Civil society organizations and women's groups worry about the security of women's human rights defenders and call on the international community to take action as Afghan civil society leaders continue to push their own government to make necessary change.

### **Rule of Law and Transitional Justice:**

1. **The Afghan government must have a clear reporting process for the human rights instruments and international laws that it has signed and needs to demonstrate that Afghan laws are not in contradiction with its international legal commitments, particularly those related to women.** The Afghan government has signed and ratified many international women's rights and human rights treaties, but lacks any clear reporting and compliance.

*The presence of gunmen and militias in the transitioned areas are of huge concern to families. These security threats lead parents to prevent their sons and daughters from going to school and accessing other critical services. Even in provinces like Bamian that were once secured, the situation is deteriorating. Some of the girl's schools in the vicinity of Ghorband valley on Bamian Highway, for example, have received night letters and threats.*

2. **A Joint International-Afghan War Memory Commission should be established to document the human rights violations, war crimes, and transgressions of the past 30 years of war.** Identifying and documenting violations is a matter of conflict prevention. To move forward, wounds have to heal. For equal application of law, past violations of the law must be addressed. The War Memory Commission does not have to conclude in legal trials but will serve as the historical memory of war and the beginning of a healing process. The continued practice of impunity will not unite Afghans towards a culture that preserves the rule of law.

*\*Account given by woman activist from Parwan province, AWN workshop 6 September 2011*

## **PEACE AND REINTEGRATION PROGRAM**

### **'You can't build peace leaving half of the people out.'**

President Karzai recently announced that a political settlement with the Taleban will not be pursued. However, official negotiations with the Taleban should not determine the extent to which Afghan communities are engaged in negotiating sustainable peace and security solutions for their country. The time is ripe for a national dialogue on reconciliation, one that will engage ordinary Afghans in discussions on how to ensure rule of law, access to justice, and protections for women's and human rights at the local and national levels. Women must play a meaningful and substantive role in designing and carrying out this dialogue.

As part of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP), women were included in the High Peace Council and Provincial Peace Councils. AWN continuously has lobbied for 30% inclusion of women within the leadership and management of High Peace Council and Provincial Peace Council, but the level of women's inclusion in leadership still remains very low – approximately 13% on the High Peace Council and 10-15% on the Provincial Peace Councils.

Further, women and civil society still have to contend with a lack of transparency and an absence of community-level involvement with APRP implementation. AWN has advocated on behalf of numerous women leaders and activities from different provinces who are ready to become part of the peace process and contribute to a community-driven peace building initiative, but the Afghan government has not yet responded positively.

Any negotiation, at the local or national level, with or without the Taleban, must include provisions to uphold the Afghan Constitution in its totality and adherence to all national and international regulations regarding women's equal participation in politics, education, social development and other civic activities.

1. **Insurgents who commit to reintegration should be strictly monitored for at least two years by the Afghan government under the APRP to ensure that reintegrees do not continue to engage with the insurgency despite participation in the program.**

Women's groups have reported cases of reintegrated insurgents resuming violence and creating further threats for the communities to which they have returned.

2. **Transitional assistance for reintegrees should be family-oriented not fighter-oriented.**

To minimize the likelihood that a fighter will return to the insurgency, it is important to incentivize reintegration of the fighter with his family by offering family packages as transitional assistance rather than monetary distributions directly to the fighter.

3. **The Afghan government should ensure that women's organizations are provided with a clear line of inclusion and participation in addition to an allocated budget for these activities.**

Women's organizations and activists are able to connect with the women who live in the areas under the control of Taleban and other insurgent groups and can be effective in advancing implementation of the peace process in those regions.

4. **An allocation of 25-30% of the APRP budget for community recovery projects should be reserved for programming that directly benefits women.**

Programming could include increased access to health services, improved women's health services, women's participation in agricultural development, vocational training for women, access to justice, expanded women's roles in conflict resolution and management, among other women's capacity building and empowerment activities. Women's organizations demand that the Afghan government uphold its promise that the peace process will not jeopardize the past 10 years' achievements but should promote women's empowerment through increasing the number of women in the security sector, women in judiciary and women in the peace process.

*"On Thursday, September 29th, Afghan President Karzai met with over 30 politicians, members of parliament, independent personalities and religious clerics to solicit their views and inputs around the work of High Peace Council and peace process. It's unfortunate that after 10 years of struggle, we still have to remind our government that we exist and we should be consulted and included in such important discussions." -AWN member*

## International Commitment beyond 2014

Afghanistan is not where it was in December 2001 during the first Bonn Conference. Despite setbacks, the country and its people have moved forward with the support of the international community. However, the distribution of international aid has shifted drastically from socio-economic development writ large to those activities that support the transition and peace process. Indirectly, this has resulted in the politicization of international aid, with funds being used to advance the political agenda of the Afghan government rather than addressing the basic needs of Afghans.

To sustain and protect the achievements of past ten years, the US-Afghan Strategic Partnership Agreement needs to be a binding document for both Afghanistan and United States. All bilateral and multilateral agreements, including the US-Afghan Strategic Partnership, should explicitly state how it will address the objective of protection and promotion of Afghan women's rights.

The regional cooperation should be focus on elimination of overwhelming poverty, low health and education indicators, that is challenging South Asian region, human development progress record. It is important to turn that agreement put in place make changing the status of women and children in this region, where four of the Worst places for women in Asia are attributed to South Asian region. Taking up such challenges can be through strengthening exiting network of women in the region to successfully build models of fighting poverty working across borders.

Considering the Euromines Conference in Brussels, women recommend that a joint civil society-government working group, consisting of civil society representatives, leaders of non-governmental organizations, parliamentarians and ministerial officials, be established with the support of the EU, to develop oversight on rights compliance for all mining and extractive industry tenders/companies/work. It would address ways to mitigate potential rights abuses of women, communities, the environment, workers etc.

1. **International aid beyond 2014 must have a clear gender allocation, specifying that a percentage of the aid that will go to women-focused projects and initiatives, either through the Afghan government or the local non government organizations.**
2. **The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) should have a stronger mandate to monitor the transition and peace processes.** This mandate should include advancing coherence and consistency among the various processes with a special focus on ensuring Afghan women's participation. This has the added benefit of preventing aid from being used for supporting extremist elements.
3. **Women's organizations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as a bridge between communities on both sides of the border, should be engaged in a regional people-to-people dialogue supported by the international community.** The region achieve peaceful relations with international diplomatic pressure alone. The access and independence of many women's groups provides an immense peacebuilding resource that has been underutilized.

## LOOKING FORWARD

In the preparation and execution of the 2011 Bonn Conference, Afghan women ask their government and leaders of the international community to envisage a prosperous Afghanistan

that depends on upholding the rights of and obligations to the half of its population comprised by women. If Afghan women continue to be ignored within the major political decision-making institutions of their country, a vision for a better Afghanistan can not be achieved. For the international community to leave a legacy of stability and prosperity in Afghanistan, it must insist on fully inclusive and participatory processes, and application of a just rule of law that respects the human rights of Afghan woman.

Though the Bonn Conference will serve as one of many international events on Afghanistan, women want to use the opportunity to seek accountability from the Afghan government and its international supporters. Half of the Afghan government's constituents are risking their lives to secure the vision of a peaceful Afghanistan and the values of democracy and rule of law that are shared by all of our neighbors and international community members. **We as the women of Afghanistan will be watching over the process from now through Bonn and beyond during the transition process to see whether the Afghan government and its international supporters meet the challenge of doing things right this time in Afghanistan.**