



Thinking Ahead: Finding Ground at Bonn II and Beyond

(An Afghan Civil Society Roundtable with Policy makers and Thinkers)

July 30, 2011, Serena Hotel, Kabul



Background:

As part of its ongoing advocacy to ensure Afghan women are able to influence and participate in national and international processes related to peace and transition, Afghan Women's Network is conducting a series of meetings and roundtables, in addition to a national level conference ahead of the two major events that will decide the future of Afghan state and the people – the Bonn II Conference and Loya Jirga.

Why this roundtable:

The overall objective of the roundtable was to facilitate a process of information sharing that will enable Afghan civil society and women's groups in particular to formulate educated positions and advocacy issues on the ongoing peace and transition processes. This roundtable was an opportunity for men and women from civil society to have the chance to discuss the substance of the policies that are shaping the agenda of Bonn II and the future of the Afghan state beyond 2014.

Next Steps:

The roundtable strengthened relationships with the key government partners and fostered the opportunity for continued dialogue and interaction as part of the preparatory national consultation for *Loya Jirga* and Bonn II. Following the roundtable discussion, AWN is drafting an Afghan Women's Policy Paper based on the substance of the conversations. This paper will inform AWNs' advocacy efforts in the coming months.

The participants: over 40 civil society and women organizations representatives attended the roundtable on Saturday along with colleagues from the international community and donors.

The Roundtable Structure:

The Roundtable consisted of five thematic discussion panels:

Thematic Discussion 1: Transition Processes

1. Transition – Dr Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, Head of Transition Coordination Commission
2. Good Governance: Abdul Khaliq Farahi - Head of Independent Directorate for Local Governance
3. Security: General Abdul Rahman, Deputy Minister, Security Affairs Ministry of Interior

Main Discussion Points:

1. Transition is not about military and security affairs only, but is a social, political and economic process. Therefore, the Afghan civil society and women groups have a vital role to explore and play in this process by creating awareness, inform communities on the importance of transition and the better outcomes for Afghans themselves. CSOs and women groups should continue the dialogue with the government bringing the concerns of the people.

2. Transition is a three year process planned to ensure that the following factors are improved in Afghanistan: a) Afghan government's ability for governance reform and good governance, b) development and economic progress c) rule of law is improved under the leadership of the Afghan government.

3. Civil Society and women's groups should become people's voices to ensure that local communities concerns are shared with the key decision makers at the same time continue the struggle to preserve the achievements of the past 10 years, and ensure that human rights and civil liberties guaranteed under the Constitution is not violated in this process.

4. Better security is not about increased number of soldiers and their fighting equipments only. Women of Afghanistan are still victims of gender based violence by the police and official structures as well as informal groups in the communities. Women's Security should be defined as one of the indicators of a successful transition and women's groups can be a partner of the government in bringing the gender based sensitivities as part of the security plans.

5. Governance reform and good governance is about inclusion of the 50 % of the society based on merit and capacities. IDLG will work with women's groups to bring in women's leadership as part of the local governance reform process under the observation of the overall CSOs.

Thematic Discussion 2: Rule of Law

1. Rule of Law: Nader Nadery – Commissioner- Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission

2. Transitional Justice and Human Rights : Dr Sima Samar – Chair Person- Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission

3. Women's Rights Protection: Ms Palwasha Kakar, Deputy Minister of Women's Affairs

Main Discussion Points:

6. Progress has been made in improving access to justice, however the main obstacle to ensure women's access to justice is the institutional gender based discrimination as well as lack of political will to tackle the current structural violence against women in the formal and informal judiciary. Afghanistan is not even in the list of countries under the International Organization for Justice, as it doesn't fulfill the basic criteria of inclusion in that list.

6. Women organizations and civil society should work towards the advocacy for human security as the concept is not of importance to the current government. While there is focus on improving the physical security, the social and public aspects of security for women that includes access to fair judiciary is not in the radar. CSOs and women's groups should strengthen their advocacy campaigns.

8. There is still lack of a woman in the Supreme Court Executive Council that interprets the Constitution and other legislation in the country. Three members will be selected this year, CSOs should lobby for at least one woman judge in Supreme Court to ensure women's legal protection. Afghanistan needs more sharia law experts and judges and partnerships with Alazhar and other Islamic law universities should be made to increase the number of women judges.

9. CSOs and women's groups should strategize their positions around the National Action Plan for Transitional Justice launched by Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and that is an important plan to ensure women's access to justice and also a way towards mitigating the potential risks of war and civil unrest.

10. There is a transitional justice advisory board at the President level that reviews the new recruitments for governors, deputies and other civil service positions, but that board is not being utilized properly and is asked selectively for advice on selective candidates. CSOs and women groups should lobby with the president to strengthen the board.

11. Afghan government still does not have any clear plans to support the women's protection challenges. CSOs and women groups are worry of the security of Women's Human Rights Defenders and want the international donors to create a systematic approach towards supporting Women's Human Rights Defenders, as their mandate. The First need is to know what to do in situations of risk, establishment of Women in Crisis Contact Group from international donors.

Thematic Discussion 3: Peace and Reconciliation

1. Reconciliation and Reintegration: Masoom Stanekzai – Head of Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Joint Secretariat

2. High Peace Council: Sediqa Balkhi- Member of High Peace Council
3. Peace process and development: Mohammad Ehsan Zia, Former Minister for Rural Rehabilitation and Development and currently the CEO of Tadbeer Consulting Firm.

Main Discussion points:

12. Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) clarifies the vision for a peaceful Afghanistan beyond 2014. It needs national support to be implemented and put into action. While APRP is about ensuring reconciliation, it also fits well with the transition process and support the responsibility of Afghan forces and Afghan leadership. Reconciliation cannot take place without a proper governance, human rights respect, development and regional cooperation. APRP should not be seen in isolation.

13. Progress so far: Peace Jirga, High Peace Council, redlines clarified as no decision will violate the Afghan Constitution and the achievements of Afghan women and other human rights, women representatives in peace council and established contacts with the regional actors. If the peace and reconciliation fails, there will not be any successful transition in this country.

Thematic Discussion 4: International Commitment

2. The Role of United Nations beyond 2014: Martin Kobler- Deputy Special Representative to the UN Secretary General
3. Bonn2 Conference and beyond: Rudiger Konig, German Ambassador to Afghanistan
3. US Commitment and Strategic Partnership: David Rank, Political Counselor, US Embassy Kabul

Main Discussion Points:

14. The international community's perspective is that transition is going to happen and end by 2014, it's an unavoidable process. However, Afghanistan will not be abandoned and 2014 is not 1989.

15. The international community's vision for Afghanistan is a strong government that should be better than the insurgents. Turning the enemies of today into partners of tomorrow is an important challenge and it's up to Afghans on how they envision such a partnership.

16. Bonn-2 will be a step towards defining that vision for Afghanistan beyond 2014 and transition. There will be another international conference in Istanbul before Bonn-2 to shape the agenda and points of discussion and agreement between Afghan government and international community.

17. Bonn-2 is not a peace conference and will only be hosted by German government but Chaired by the Afghan government that will bring only one delegation. German government is not in a position to influence the participants or delegations of this conference. If women groups want greater women's inclusion, they should lobby with the Afghan government. There will be a civil society conference before the Bonn-2 and a couple will be going to the main conference from that preconference.

18. Access to real information on government and international community's engagement in Afghanistan is a pending challenge. UN was requested to support CSOs in lobbying for access to information for better informed positions.

Thematic Discussion 5: US strategic Partnership and Regional Complexities

1. Strategic Partnership with United States: Dr Rangin Dadfar Spanta – Advisor- National Security Council
2. Current Transition process and beyond : Javaid Ludin, Deputy Minister, Foreign Affairs
3. Regional Cooperation and Complexities: Davood Muradian- FMR, Director of Strategic Studies Center at Ministry of Foreign Affairs and University Lecturer

Main Discussion Points:

19. Talks under going on Strategic Partnership. No consultations with civil society and women groups so far but will be considered. Education, enhanced human resources capacities, and improved defense mechanisms are the Afghan government demands in the Strategic Partnership.

20. CSOs and women’s groups should work towards people to people dialogues with the regional countries, particularly with the Pakistani neighbor.

21. Afghanistan has comparative advantages of natural resources, transit trade routes, and an important factor in regional economy. These assets should be exploited for the better of Afghans.

