



AFGHAN WOMEN TOWARDS BONN AND BEYOND

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The best and most under-utilized resource in Afghanistan, a resource that could be instrumental for successful peace, a successful, stable country in the future, is the women Afghanistan.

Afghan women have the right, the capacity, and the desire to be involved in transition, peace process, and creating Afghanistan's future. This paper is an attempt to craft solutions for the current challenges in Afghanistan if the women are directly included and part of the national and sub-national processes.

If Afghan women continue living under threats and fear, what does this condition say about the country's peaceful and stable future in this region?

INTRODUCTION

Despite of many positive achievements in women lives in Afghanistan during the past ten years, the status of the progress remains fragile and at times limited to rhetoric. There has been countless number of resolutions, laws, policies, action plans and strategies to empower the women of Afghanistan, however the track record for their implementation and upholding remain appalling.

While world leaders and major regional actors will gather in Istanbul, Brussels and Bonn, Afghan women emphasize that any roadmap for economic prosperity, peace, stability and security missing women inclusion and participation will not achieve their vision. Women consistently remind policy makers to uphold to their existing commitments and lay the framework of transition based on protecting the achievements of the rights and sacrifices of Afghan women for those rights.

This paper reflects perspectives and recommendations of Afghan women who have been consulted in several meetings, roundtables and workshop by Afghan Women's Network (AWN). The paper presents how women see their future and the future of Afghanistan in transition and post transition scenario.

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

AFGHAN WOMEN: REALITIES, PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The first Bonn Conference in 2001 set up a new framework in Afghanistan's history. Much of women's achievements in the past ten years could be attributed to the vision of the first Bonn Conference on Afghanistan. Therefore, Afghan women expect that ten years after such a vision was crafted for Afghanistan, their successes and struggles for rights and freedoms will not only strengthened but will be promoted and taken forward during the 2011 International Conference on Afghanistan in Bonn. Afghan women as half of the population are half of the solutions for Afghanistan and want to contribute in aspirations and commitments for a better future for their communities and children.

After 10 years of international engagement, with many achievements, setbacks, and aspirations, Afghanistan is looking to move ahead. There are many challenges to be met, internally and regionally that are associated with international engagement or transition. The newborn democracy, human rights, development, peace and stability are the issues on the minds of many Afghans. How will the transition process uphold the promises made regarding protecting constitutional rights and the concerns raised by women groups and civil society at large.

TRANSITION

Policy makers in Afghanistan reiterate again and again that transition is not about military and security matters only, however the practical experience on the ground shows that there isn't any attention paid to improving rule of law, governance and access to justice during transition process and how women's security is being impacted through such processes. Transition should start from a citizen's led vision in which women and men of Afghanistan take responsibility for their better future. The road map for the exist of international forces is necessary however a quick transition will jeopardize the investments of blood and money by more 40 nations of the World and numerous sacrifices of Afghan National security forces and enormous sacrifice by the citizen of this country women, men and children. Women organizations and activists have better access to local communities and are aware about the challenges and causes of insecurity in their communities, therefore they should be consulted, included to ensure that security and transition plans are implemented successfully.

Security:

1. Women organizations and activists working in the transitioned areas don't see any evaluation/review of the transitioned places. Their analysis concludes that the security conditions overall has deteriorated in the transitioned areas, like there is an increase in the number of attacks on civilians, women organizations receive more restrictions and there are incidents of threats that have forced women organizations to close down or relocate to another area. **Women**

Afghan Women Resource Center- One of the women organizations in Laghman province complained that in the past few months after the transition, their activities have reduced from 5 districts to 2 districts only. Communities fear that since the foreign troops have left their areas, and they don't trust the capabilities of the local forces, they fear that their women would either be targeted by the Taleban or can be subject to rape or abuse by the national security forces. Therefore, they stop activities for women in their communities

organization should be included in designing, evaluation and monitoring of security indicators based on which transition takes place.

2. Experiences from the transitioned areas show that as per the commands from the Central government, the provincial authorities recruit former and even current warlords and militia's just to increase the number of national security forces without any proper process of vetting and verifying their backgrounds. These are the gunmen who have previous records of rape, murder, torture and misuse of power. **The recruitment process of Afghan National Security Forces should go through an external community based process in which women groups and women from communities can report on the background of the newly enrolled security forces.**
3. Women organizations and activists believe if there are no mechanisms to implement the Transitional Justice Action Plan – local communities will not be able to trust and cooperate with the local forces for an effective transition process. **The recruitment of Afghan Local Police (ALP) and other security alternative needs to go through a transparent and vetting process so that former and current warlords with previous record of human rights violations do not automatically become part of the national forces.**
4. 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. **Women leaders in government and civil society are under constant attacks, while it is necessity to make sure women protection in general however women leaders protection needs to be a priority as per their critical role as agent of change of the society against conservative elements taking Afghanistan back to 1990.**

Rule of Law and Justice:

1. Afghan government has signed up to many women's rights and human rights related international treaties, but lacks any clear reporting and compliance. **Women organizations and activists recommend that the Afghan government have a clear reporting process for the human rights instruments and international laws that it has signed and need to demonstrate that Afghan laws are not in contradiction with its international legal commitments for women.**

The presence of gunmen elements in the transitioned areas are of huge concerns for families, they prevent their children and daughters from going to school and etc. Even in provinces like Bamian that used to be secured, situation is different now. Some of the girl's schools in the vicinity of Ghorband valley on Bamian Highway, have received night letters and threatened to close down.

(Woman activist from Parwan province, AWN workshop 6 September 2011)

2. For equal application of law, past wounds have to be healed. **Afghan women recommend creation of a joint International Afghanistan War Memory Commission so that the past 30 years of war violations are identified and there is a documentation process as a matter of conflict prevention. Such an investigation does not have to conclude in a legal trial but a memory of war and the beginning of a healing process. Otherwise, the practice of impunity will not unite afghans towards a rule of law culture.**

PEACE AND REINTEGRATION PROGRAM

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

The women of Afghanistan appreciate the inclusion of women in the High Peace Council, Provincial Peace Council, but still experiencing lack of transparency, and also community level involvement is still missing within the national and sub-national structures created for peace process. AWN has advocated on behalf of numerous activists and women leaders from different provinces who are ready to become part of the peace process and contribute towards a community-based peace building initiative, but the Afghan government has not responded positively yet. No matter who is counter side of negotiation, Afghanistan need to promote dialogue, reconciliation with due participation of women of the country. Any negotiation should respect the minimum standards, which include upholding the Afghan Constitution in totality including all the national and international binding regarding women equal right promotion in politics, education, social development and other civic rights. 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.

1. Women groups have reported cases of reintegrated insurgents resuming violence and creating further threats for the communities in which they have returned. **Women organizations recommend that the insurgents who embrace peace process and join re-integration, should be under a strict monitoring for at least two years by the Afghan government under its Peace and Reintegration Program to ensure that insurgents do not rejoin the insurgency. We equally emphasize that reintegration should be in complete family package ;not only to promote the return of insurgent with his family but also to ensure that the family of insurgent becomes a reason for him not to continue with more violence.**
2. Women organizations and activists are able to connect with the women who live in the areas under the control of Taleban and insurgency and can be effective in implementing peace process in those regions, **therefore, the government should ensure that women organizations are provided with a clear line of inclusion and**

On Thursday, 29th September, Afghan President 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. Its 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)

- participation besides an allocated budget.**
3. Women organizations recommend that the Afghan government should practice what it preaches that the peace process will not harm 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. **Therefore women organizations recommend the allocation of 25-30 % APRP budget for the projects that directly impact women in sectors of access to health services and improved health services, women's participation and access to agriculture projects, women for vocation courses, women's roles in conflict resolution and conflict management, and other women's capacity building and empowerment projects.**

International Commitment beyond 2014

Afghanistan is not where it was in December 2001 during the first Bonn Conference. Despite of setback at the time, the country and its people have moved forward with the support of international community. However, the focus of international aid has shifted drastically from socio-economic and development projects to those that support transition and peace process. Therefore indirectly, the international aid is being used for the political agendas of the Afghan government and not for the basic needs of Afghans.

To sustain and protect the achievements of past ten years, the Strategic Partnership needs to be a binding document of Afghan government and United States. All bilateral and multilateral accords should clearly spell out 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 CSO, NGO, Parliament and Government permanent working group is set up 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. **Therefore, women recommend that the international aid beyond 2014 has a clear gender-allocation so that it can specify a percentage of the aid that will go to the women-focused projects and initiatives, either through the Afghan government or the local non government organizations.**
2. To prevent aid from being used for supporting extremists' elements, **women organizations recommend that the United Nations Assistance Mission gets a strong role in monitoring the transition and peace process and work towards bringing both processes to a coherent platform with a**

special focus on empowering Afghan women in these processes as part of the United Nations mandate and resolutions.

3. The region cannot be peaceful with international diplomatic pressures only. Involving women groups across the border is under utilized. **Women organizations as bridge between the communities of the two sides of the border between Af-Pak region and their access and independence should be utilized to work towards a people-to-people dialogue that should be promoted by the international community members.**

LOOKING FORWARD

During the Bonn process, the Afghan women ask their government and the international community leaders to envisage a prosperous Afghanistan only through upholding the rights and obligations to the half of its population. If Afghan women continue to be ignored within the major political decisions of their country, a vision for a better Afghanistan can not be achieved, whether the international community wants to leave a legacy of stability and success in Afghanistan, that stability and success is not possible without a just rule of law that respects the human rights of Afghan woman.

Though Bonn Conference might be yet another international event on Afghanistan, women want to use the opportunity as a process for seeking accountability from Afghan government and its international supporters as half of the constituencies that are risking their lives for securing the vision of Afghanistan and values of democracy and rule of law that is shared by all our neighbors and international community members. **We as the women of Afghanistan will be watching over the process from now up to Bonn and beyond during the transition process to see whether the Afghan government and its international supporters meet the challenge of doing things right for the last time in Afghanistan.**