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**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Kabul Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This local road map for peace is part of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace initiative (hereinafter the “People’s Dialogue”) and represents a summary of key findings and issues raised in 10 focus-group discussions, 20 individual interviews and 30 surveys of opinion with 353 Afghan men, women and youth from Kabul province. Participants comprised 239 males and 114 females who represented all walks of life, including public-sector employees, community elders, farmers, teachers, students, university professors, journalists, internally displaced persons (IDPs), persons with disabilities, civil society representatives, union members, staff of national and international NGOs, religious scholars and members of local and development *shuras*. Participants came from both districts outside and inside the capital city. The consultations took place as part of phase II of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace programme, initiated by 11 civil society networks, including the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), seeking to consult over 4,500 Afghans with a view to developing 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province. In Kabul province, two civil society organizations, namely the ‘Research Organisation on Children and Women Rights’ and ‘Arman Shahr’, alongside the AIHRC, assisted in the implementation of phase II of the People’s Dialogue.

This local road map for peace aims to provide an analysis of local drivers of conflict, as well as suitable, actionable solutions to help promote peace and stability in Kabul province.

### **Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography, Security and Political Context**

Kabul city, the provincial as well as national capital of Afghanistan, is located at an altitude of 1,800 metres above sea level, which makes it one of the world’s highest capital cities. The province lies at the foot of the Panjshir Valley and consists of arid plains surrounded by mountain ranges. Districts such as Farza and Guldara, which lie at the base of these mountains, have access to water year-round from natural run-off and snow-melt. The Shomali plains, between Kabul and Parwan provinces, on the other hand, are dry and dusty so the water supply in other areas of Kabul province is sporadic and dependent on seasonal wells and irrigation projects. In the more fertile areas of the province, fruit and wheat are grown for sale in Kabul city.

**Geographical Location:** Kabul province shares borders with six other Afghan provinces: Parwan to the northwest, Kapisa to the northeast, Laghman to

the east, Nangarhar to the southeast, Logar to the south and Maidan Wardak to the southwest.

**Capital and districts:** Kabul city and 14 rural districts.

**Estimated population:** Approximately 3,950,300 persons, including 3,289,000 in Kabul city, though some estimates reach 5,000,000. These figures may further vary given the influx of IDPs into Kabul city in the face of a deteriorating security situation across the country.

**Ethnic groups and political divisions:** Kabul city is the political and economic capital of Afghanistan. Dari and Pashto are the main languages spoken and, while most of the population are of Pashtun, Tajik or Hazara ethnicity, all ethnicities present in Afghanistan are represented in Kabul, particularly in the urban centre. Kabul also occasionally hosts a migratory population of Kuchi nomads and IDPs.

**Population and demography:** Kabul province is divided into 14 districts in addition to Kabul city. Kabul municipality is divided into 22 urban districts, and the police have 17 departments in these urban areas. The ethnic composition of the city is diverse; in the west of the city, the majority of the population is of Hazara ethnicity, while the east and south are mostly populated by Pashtuns.

**Security:** In relative terms, Kabul province is stable, with the exception of those areas affected by insurgents, either local or from volatile neighbouring provinces. Since Kabul city serves as a magnet for political and military ambition, it has been the object of complex attacks by insurgents over the past few years,<sup>1</sup> which attracted heightened media attention and reinforced perceptions that the country's capital could not be made secure from the insurgency.

The Taliban in statements announcing their spring offensives,<sup>2</sup> have indicated their willingness to target foreign diplomatic installations, civilian Government officials, including judges and prosecutors, and judicial institutions. Subsequently, Kabul has seen an increase in attacks on civilian premises, including against the international community and major national institutions, which evinces the Taliban's determination to continue

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<sup>1</sup> Inter-continental Hotel in June, British Council in August, Abdul Haq square/US Embassy in September, Ashura celebrations in December 2011 and Embassy district in April, Green Village Guesthouse in May and Qargha Lake/Paghman district in June 2012.

<sup>2</sup> The 2013 Taliban Spring Offensive ('Khalid Ben Walid') highlighted for the first time the Taliban's willingness to focus on targeting foreign diplomatic installations.

targeting civilians. In the past few years the Taliban launched a number of attacks against national and international civilian targets in Kabul: against the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) compound on 25 May 2013; against the Supreme Court on 11 June 2013; on a Lebanese restaurant on 17 January 2014, resulting in the killings of 21 civilians, including 13 foreigners; against the French Cultural Institute on 11 December 2014, causing 12 civilian casualties (two killed and 10 injured); against the Attorney General's Office (AGO) - carrying out two attacks against the AGO shuttles respectively on 4 and 10 May 2015, causing in total 7 civilian deaths and injuring 34; against the Ministry of Justice on 19 May 2015, resulting in killing five civilians and injuring 47 others. The latest Taliban attack targeting a shuttle bus of the Moby Group (the parent company of Tolo TV) on 20 January 2016 in Kabul, killed eight civilians (including seven Tolo TV staff) and injured 30 others. This attack came following Taliban threats to target Tolo TV and 1TV for their reporting on the alleged abuses during the Taliban capture of Kunduz between 28 September and 13 October 2015.<sup>3</sup>

While the northern districts of Kabul province continue to remain relatively calm, southern districts have reportedly observed increased infiltration by armed groups at the gateways to Kabul city, with reports of insurgents intimidating the population not to support the Government, particularly the Afghan national security forces. The most insecure district in Kabul province and that which is most affected by the insurgency is Surobi district, located in the volatile Uzbini valley, where infiltration by insurgents from the east, north and south (Laghman and Kapisa provinces in particular) is facilitated by tensions between ideologically-motivated armed groups (i.e., Jamiat-e Islami and Hezb-e-Islami). The districts of Musehi, Chaharasyab, Khak-e-Jabar and Bagrami, located southeast of the capital, have also recorded movement by armed groups while Paghman, bordering the province of Maidan Wardak, has a history of being affected by incursions and providing safe haven for illegal armed groups/criminal gangs. Shakardara, Dehsabz and Qarabagh districts to the north of the capital are also beleaguered by the presence of armed and criminal groups. Criminality has increased in Kabul city alongside the population increase over the past decade, but has to some degree been attenuated by an increase in the presence of law enforcement. However, criminality remains under-reported and generally

difficult to assess—despite the frequency of kidnappings and extortion, some high-profile, and other similar activities.

## **II. Political Context**

**Background:** Throughout Afghanistan’s rich history, Kabul has been the focal point of all political ambition. Until the 1970s there was little political party activity, although the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) was formed in late 1960s by a group of democratic revolutionary elements. The Soviet intervention in 1979 prompted the emergence of a number of opposition parties and coalitions. Among the key ones were Hezb-e Islami, Jamiat-e Islami, Etehad-e Islami, and Wahdat-e-Islami—which, although acting under their own political banners, were active players during the Jihad (1979-1992). Following the withdrawal of Soviet forces and the collapse of the Najibullah regime in 1992, these loosely aligned interests formed a new government led by Sibgatullah Mujaddedi. However, the country soon plunged into civil war. When the Taliban came to power in 1996, some former jihadis joined the Taliban, while others formed the resistance. Following the ouster of the Taliban regime in 2001, many former jihadi leaders joined the new Government.

In the post-2001 era, more than 100 political parties have been registered with the Afghan Ministry of Justice (MoJ), attesting to the fragmentation of the political scene in the country, with many parties focused on personalities or narrow interests. Subsequent legislation has restricted registration through stricter requirements so there are currently only around 45 political parties formally registered with MoJ. Nevertheless, the political scene continues to be dominated by four to five jihadi parties which, over the past decade, have formed a number of loose coalitions.

## **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

Community members throughout Kabul province identified a wide range of interconnected conflicts and local dispute scenarios that affect peace and stability in their areas, including the Taliban-led insurgency, political rivalries among different political parties, inter-ethnic conflicts, ethnic and language-based discrimination, the ‘drug mafia’ and related drug-trafficking problems, impunity and religious interference of foreigners in Afghan political affairs.

Afghans who took part in the Dialogue generally identified the Taliban-led insurgency as the major threat to peace and stability in Kabul province, highlighting continuous Taliban infiltration into many parts of the province

in recent years. In particular, insurgent groups have increased both their presence and influence in the southern districts of the province. More than ever, community members raised serious concerns over deteriorating security and the escalation of insurgent group activities in Surobi, Khak Jabar and Mosahi districts. As noted by one university student:

*“The increase in suicide attacks is our main concern in Kabul. These attacks might be motivated by religious inspiration, but they are not at all justifiable.”*

Similar threats to security and stability in Kabul province include the existence of other illegally armed groups, armed individuals and organized crime. A female participant from Mir Bacha Kot district stated:

*“The existence of illegal armed groups poses a considerable threat to security and stability in the northern districts of Kabul province, and the DIAG [disarmament of illegal armed groups] was never properly implemented or completed.”*

A tribal elder echoed:

*“The existence of local powerful figures with their armed groups that clash with Government forces is a threat to security and stability in Kabul.”*

Another serious concern highlighted in group discussions was the impact of political rivalries and the existence of political parties based on ethnicity, language and religion, as one participant explained:

*“These parties are focusing on their own ethnicities and religious beliefs; they do not work for the nation of Afghanistan. Their agendas do not support the much needed unity of Afghan people and the formation of a united Afghan nation.”*

Another participant from Kabul city agreed:

*“We have parties which are based on ethnicity and they are working for that specific ethnicity only.”*

Participants further explained that another factor of the factional conflict is the increasing gap between different ethnic and linguistic groups living in Kabul province, which is sometimes manipulated by politicians and political parties to galvanize support. A female NGO employee and women’s rights activist from Kabul city highlighted and summarized the opinions of participants:

*“Ethnic division and consequent language barriers are of great concern to the people. Divisions along ethnic lines have even infected the minds of our children; they openly tell each other, ‘you speak Pashto, you speak Dari, you are Pashtun or you are Tajik, etc.’ Children are so affected that they even play separately. These divisions separate community members, but I believe it is mainly due to a lack of education and the agitation of specific groups in this regard.”*

Another female participant from Kabul city noted:

*“The international community did not pay any attention to nation-building initiatives; instead, they supported ethnic criteria in the political structures and in the recruitment of Government positions.”*

Participants stated that disputes among families and communities and the occupation of Government owned land by powerful figures are further factors which contribute to increasing insecurity and instability in the region. Land disputes between nomads and local people—between two communities on Government lands—have the potential to trigger armed violence leading to, in most cases, the killing and wounding of citizens. A participant summarized these concerns:

*“Community members stated that one million and 250 thousand acres of land across the country have been seized by powerful men, 23 per cent (47 thousand acres of land) alone in Kabul province. Those who attempt to regain the usurped lands, if not equally powerful, face strong reactions from these powerful land grabbers.”*

Another male from Dehsabz district stated:

*“Land conflict is a huge problem in Kabul province. It is the main source of violence; there are a lot of Government lands in the districts of Bagrami and Dehsabz which are currently occupied by powerful figures. These people cooperate with Government officials and the ‘land mafia’.”*

Afghan men, women and youth noted another threat to security and stability to be the existing ‘drug mafia’, followed by a large number of drug addicts in Kabul province. Most participants claimed that the number of individuals addicted to drugs is steadily increasing and that the Government has not taken enough practical measures to eradicate drugs or reduce the number of addicts, which in turn generates large problems for Afghan society.

## **Drivers of Conflict**

During phase II of the People's Dialogue process, Afghans highlighted the root causes of conflict and identified two major categories.

**1. Structural causes of conflict** including widespread corruption and abuse of power by local authorities; lack of implementation and unequal application of the law; lack of social justice; embedded impunity; lack of sustainable social and economic development; poverty and unemployment; and religious extremism. Community members of Kabul province believe that the above factors are the primary reasons for continuation of the conflict, alongside people's dissatisfaction and frustration with weak rule of law and ongoing human rights violations.

**2. Abrupt conflicts** which refer to processes, events and programmes, such as the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) and the presidential and provincial council elections, that occur for a short period of time, but leave a long-lasting impact and exacerbate other conflict dynamics.

### **Structural causes of conflict**

With regards to the structural causes of conflict, participants raised concerns over the Government's failure to ensure security, to protect people or to establish the rule of law in Kabul province, which, they alleged, were the main causes of insecurity and instability in Kabul. Community members attributed the Government's weak functionality to a serious gap in legitimacy for its institutions, resulting mainly from widespread corruption and abuse of authority. People believed that corruption and abuse of authority were a widespread and a pervasive problem in the Government, as well as in Afghan society as a whole. A community leader from Kabul city lamented:

*"Corruption is one of the main causes and drivers of conflict. Corruption has caused insecurity and has created all the problems. Governmental officials are not working for the people; they are working for their own pockets."*

Another participant from Kabul city pointed out:

*"Corruption is everywhere in Governmental institutions. It starts from the recruitment process, then the distribution of assistance and is even exercised within the judiciary and law enforcement apparatuses, which are supposed to be responsible for upholding the law."*

People emphasized that nepotism, bribery and embezzlement were common practice in Government institutions. They alleged that the Government institutions, mandated to fight corruption, are either unable or unwilling to take practical steps to combat corruption. A district *shura* member from Paghman district stated:

*“There is discrimination and nepotism if a minister recruits people from his own ethnic group or region.”*

A civil society activist from Kabul city highlighted:

*“Nepotism and ethnic preferences are everywhere. They are part of the recruitment process in all Governmental institutions.”*

Participants also pointed out that impunity for offences of any type—crimes committed in the past or those more recent—creates a huge divide between people and their Government. The lack of punishment in criminal cases also triggers acts of personal revenge. Community members mentioned that law-enforcement officials, including the police, judiciary and prosecution departments, are responsible for the ongoing impunity more than others by permitting perpetrators of crimes to go unpunished. A participant from Kabul city mentioned:

*“The existence of organized criminal groups and mafias, the theft of cars and motorbikes and burglaries and the knowledge that police are somehow involved is a big concern for us in Kabul province.”*

Additionally, people explained that a lack of social and economic development was another source of ongoing conflict in Kabul province. Afghans generally stated that both a low level of literacy and lack of employment opportunities negatively impacted on the security and stability in their province. They underlined that their confidence in the Government had diminished and that low morale had resulted in inter and intra-community conflicts. People expressed their concerns over the fact that illiterate, uneducated and jobless people could easily be manipulated and used by insurgent groups and by the ‘drug mafia’. A Dialogue participant from Kabul city explained:

*“Unemployment and poverty are widespread in Kabul province. Many people are illiterate and they can be manipulated so easily by the mafia, criminal groups and/or the insurgents.”*

A participant from Masahi district emphasized that marginalized communities with a large number of unemployed persons were more prone to infiltration by the insurgency:

*“The lack of access to justice, to education, existing poverty and unemployment are the main factors that push young people towards the Taliban.”*

A representative of IDPs in Kabul city echoed:

*“Many IDPs who had to leave their homes due to the ongoing armed conflict still face massive problems with regards to unemployment, which causes extreme poverty and poor living conditions. There has been no appropriate solution found by either the Government or international organizations for all these people.”*

### **Abrupt conflicts**

Regarding the immediate causes of conflict in Kabul province, participants raised concerns that the APRP had failed to bring peace and security, instead serving as a tool to intensify conflict and deteriorate the security situation. They believed that the APRP was led by people who had a keen interest in continuing the conflict in order to serve their own personal agendas. A participant from Kabul city expressed the concerns of the majority by saying:

*“The Government’s peace process was not successful and consequently has failed. The armed conflict has increased; even the head of the High Peace Council was killed. Those who run the peace process are not acceptable to the Taliban or even to most other people. The peace process is not a one way process—there should be two ways. The Government proposed peace, but the Taliban did not accept it.”*

Another participant from Kabul city mentioned:

*“The lack of coordination between the High Peace Council and Afghan security forces has resulted in the failure to identify and recognize acceptable mediators/negotiators on both sides.”*

Afghans also raised concerns over the fact that, contrary to its mandate, the APRP had become a Government-led project. A female participant from Mirbacha Kot district of Kabul province stated:

*“The current peace process is symbolic. There is no implementation. The armed opposition does not accept the peace programme of the*

*Government, because the persons who are presently running the peace process are not qualified; these people are not selected by the people of Afghanistan. They are appointed by the Government.”*

Finally, people generally expressed concerns over security and transparency during the election processes.

#### **IV. The Road Map for Peace**

Afghans in Kabul by and large identified what they perceived to be local peace-building initiatives, including strengthening and reforming local government institutions; the implementation of economic and social development projects, particularly infrastructure projects; the strengthening of Afghan national security forces; the strengthening of rule of law; and the implementation of comprehensive peace programmes with meaningful participation by ordinary people, including men, women and youth. People believed that Afghan authorities must implement the foregoing initiatives, with a particular focus on addressing the root causes of conflict and with an aim to bringing durable peace and security to the province.

Peace initiatives offered by participants in Kabul generally fell under the following three interrelated subjects:

#### **Strengthening Governance, Security and Stability**

##### **Strengthening Governance**

Afghan men, women and youth involved in the Kabul dialogues alleged that corruption and bribery had become common practices within the Government, which had further distanced communities from their Government, consequently weakening the Government’s legitimacy and effectiveness. Therefore, people said that the Government must take proactive measures to address and eradicate corruption, which would require strong political will. Such measures necessitate a thorough review of current anti-corruption mechanisms to address their shortcomings and, if necessary, enforce a new mechanism that would achieve the goal of holding corrupt persons accountable and/or removing them from office.

The High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption (HOOAC), responsible for the coordination and oversight of the implementation of the Afghanistan’s Anti-Corruption Strategy, and the judiciary would also benefit from capacity-building activities to bring an end to corruption and abuse of authority. Trainings for Government officials were deemed to be vital for

the improvement of client-oriented service-delivery and for the enhancement of all other professional skills required to carry out their responsibilities within Government institutions.

For the promotion of good governance, Afghans believe that the concept of ‘punishment and reward’ must be applied to penalize those who fail to perform their duties or who abuse their authority, as well as to reward those who perform in accordance with their respective terms of reference. Additionally, community members proposed merit-based appointments for all civil servants and Government officials. They highlighted that the recruitment process must be fair and transparent so that the most qualified individuals obtain Government positions. A university student from Kabul city complained that:

*“A lack of accountability produces widespread corruption and misuse of power.”*

### **Security and Stability**

People emphasized capacity-building activities for the national security forces, including the Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan National Police (ANP) and the National Directorate of Security (NDS) to ensure security and stability and win the fight against criminality and insurgency in Kabul province. They emphasized the increase of capacity-building activities as vital to creating a solid foundation upon which peace and stability could flourish.

Afghans insisted that their main concern was the existence of illegal armed groups and criminal individuals and that the only way to tackle this serious problem was a complete disarmament of illegal armed groups, as well as pro-government militias. Therefore, people strongly demanded the continuation of the DIAG programme in Kabul province.

### **Promoting Human Rights, Rule of Law and Tackling Impunity**

Community members throughout Kabul province also raised human rights concerns, including the increase in the number of civilian casualties, ongoing violence against women and harmful traditional practices, particularly at the district-level. Additionally, they claimed that the right to adequate housing must be addressed, especially in the context of IDPs. People believe that the promotion and protection of human rights can be ensured through a series of awareness-raising programmes with different members of society. Additionally, they stated that the resolution of IDP

settlement problems, enhancing rule of law and the elimination of impunity must be at the forefront of the Government's agenda to guarantee the establishment of sustainable peace and stability in Kabul province. The views of all participants may be summarized by the thoughts of one:

*"The lack of implementation of the law by Government authorities, breach of the law by all three pillars of Government (president, parliament and the judiciary) and the lack of equal application of the law to all Afghan citizens are our key concerns. The law is applied to poorer people but never to the son of a minister, for example. There is obviously a lack of social justice in Afghanistan. Individual human rights necessitate Government protection."*

### **Social and Economic Development**

Afghan men, women and youth in general expressed their satisfaction over the considerable progress made in Kabul in the areas of social and economic development, including swift development in information technology; the establishment of private universities; the creation of public and private hospitals and clinics; development in the private sector, including the formation of private companies that led to new employment opportunities; and the implementation of the National Solidarity Programme. People noted, however, that extreme poverty still existed, and that a high rate of unemployment, poor living conditions and lack of electricity in parts of the province were a major cause for concern. A participant from Kabul city summarized people's views:

*"The promotion of quality education, economic development, the participation of youth and women in social and economic life and the foundation of unions and associations, combined with mutual acceptance, are key issues for social and economic development in Kabul province."*

People's Dialogue participants pointed out that fostering the creation of employment opportunities, particularly for young people, would contribute to preventing youth from joining the insurgency and thus help strengthen peace and stability throughout Kabul province. They further highlighted that sustainable investment in infrastructure and key economic projects, as well as the modernization of agriculture and irrigation systems, would improve urban and rural economies and positively impact people's lives. Participants insisted on an approach with regards to the implementation of such projects that would take into account all parts of Kabul province.

## **Addressing Actors and Spoilers of Peace**

Afghans in Kabul province strongly emphasized the need for wider participation of ordinary people in the peace process, including men, women, youth, influential religious scholars, *ulema*, influential community leaders and minority groups. They stated that an increase in the participation of women, who in their view have been traditionally marginalized, was essential for any peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan. They particularly called for women's participation on the Provincial Peace Committees (PPC) in Kabul province. Participants also stated that peace negotiations must not undermine people's fundamental rights.

Community members also praised local/traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms to address disputes through *jirgas* or *shuras*, particularly at district-level. The role of local *shuras* and influential elders was viewed by a vast majority as helpful in resolving local conflicts and disputes. Community members proposed strengthening and empowering local *shuras*, but cautioned the need for an oversight mechanism to ensure fair and just adjudications. Female participants, however, expressed concern over the proposed strengthening of local *shuras* due to what they believe has been poor judgment on the part of *shuras* in cases of violence against women, given that most *shura* decisions in that context have not been in favour of women's rights.

To address spoilers of peace appropriately, participants strongly advocated for the transparent selection of PPC members based on objective criteria, such as capability, impartiality, authority to negotiate with the armed opposition, honesty, patriotism and acceptance by both sides of the conflict. Participants emphasized that selection must be democratic (i.e., made by and inclusive of all Afghan people). One participant explained:

*"Impartial and influential figures that have authority to negotiate with armed opposition and are acceptable to ordinary people should be selected for running the peace and reconciliation process."*

## **V. People's Recommendations**

Participants urged increased engagement by the Government, political parties, UN, international actors, civil society and local *shuras* in constructive dialogues on how to bring sustainable peace to Kabul.

### **Strengthening and reforming local government institutions and improving good governance**

- Ensure merit-based recruitment and give priority to qualified, honest, professional and capable Afghans without any form of discrimination.
- Conduct a series of effective training programmes aimed at improving Government officials' professionalism, accountability and service delivery.
- Review and reform existing anti-corruption bodies and form an effective anti-corruption mechanism with specific authority to monitor service-delivery to prevent abuse of power.
- Conduct regular outreach meetings with civil society, unions and associations and ordinary citizens of Kabul province where all parties can be meaningfully involved in an interactive and constructive dialogue with Government officials on issues and concerns affecting them, to help mitigate the widening gap between the Government and Kabuli communities.
- Ensure that appropriate capacity-building and reform programmes are undertaken to improve the capacity of national security forces and to fight corruption and criminality, in turn helping to ensure security and stability.

### **Promotion of human rights, the rule of law and tackling impunity**

- Strengthen Afghan national security forces to prevent the infiltration of armed groups into Kabul.
- Promote constructive dialogue with the Taliban through influential *ulema*, religious scholars and influential elders on the negative impact of attacks against civilians and civilian property.
- Implement awareness programmes and Government policies aimed at promoting equality, in addition to increasing capacity-building initiatives to eliminate gender-based discrimination or discrimination based on ethnicity or language.
- Bring perpetrators of violence against women to justice pursuant to the 2009 law on the Elimination of Violation against Women.
- Increase human rights awareness-raising programmes among community members aimed at the elimination of the existing culture of violence.
- Promote tolerance and co-existence.

- Implement capacity-building activities for the judiciary and law-enforcement organs focusing on the promotion of the proper application of the law to all citizens, regardless of race, ethnicity or language.
- Fight Impunity.

### **Strengthen social and economic development**

- Promote sustainable investment in infrastructure and key economic projects, such as construction, industry, public services and agriculture.
- Implement infrastructure projects throughout Kabul province with an effective monitoring system to control the quality and timely implementation of development projects.

### **Support inclusivity in the peace and reconciliation process**

- PPC members must be impartially selected by ordinary people and acceptable to both sides of the conflict.
- Outreach initiatives and peace projects must include all ethnicities, social and religious groups and representatives of all parts of Kabul province.
- The Provincial Peace Council should ensure the participation of ordinary people and obtain the views of traditionally marginalized groups, including women, youth and ethnic minorities;
- The PPC should include capable, honest, knowledgeable, and impartial influential figures, as well as *ulema*, community and tribal elders and civil society activists.
- Ensure perpetrators of serious past human rights violations are brought to justice (transitional justice).
- Bring positive changes and reform to the current APRP by including a national peace programme targeting political and armed opposition groups as a whole and in a comprehensive way.
- Establish and promote a culture of dialogue and negotiation.
- Encourage measures and practical steps for all sides of the conflict to ensure peace, e.g., the declaration of a ceasefire.
- Establish an impartial commission to administer the peace process and solicit views and opinions from all sides of the conflict, with a proper assessment followed by consultation with ordinary Afghans.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Kapisa Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This road map for peace provides a summary of views, opinions and concerns expressed by ordinary residents of Kapisa province raised during four focus-group discussions, four in-depth individual interviews and ten surveys of opinion. The focus-group meetings were attended by 135 people, including 36 women, representing all seven districts of Kapisa province, including the three most restive districts: Tagab, Alasai and Nijrab. The participants were from diverse sections of society, such as teachers, local elders, women's rights activists, university students, Islamic *shura* members, members of the Provincial Council (PC) and Provincial Peace Council (PPC), members of political parties, lawyers, journalists, local officials, housewives, midwives and shopkeepers. The consultations took place as part of Phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace programme (hereinafter the "People's Dialogue") initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) to consult over 4,500 Afghan citizens with a view to developing 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province. In Kapisa province, the consultations were conducted by Women for Afghan Women (WAW), an NGO working in the field of women's rights, acting as the provincial focal point for the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace network, with UNAMA technical support.

The Kapisa provincial road map for peace attempts to provide as comprehensive an analysis as possible of local conflict dynamics and their causes, as well as to offer recommendations and a plan of action agreed by local actors to bring sustainable peace to the province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Kapisa province, with its provincial capital at Mahmood Raqi, is located in the northeast of Afghanistan where it borders the provinces of Laghman to the east, Panjshir to the north, Kabul to the south and Parwan to the west. It has an area of 1,842 square kilometres, making the province one of the smallest of the 34 provinces in the country. It has seven districts: Mahmood Raqi, Kohistan-I and II, Kohband, Nijrab, Tagab and Alasai. The northern and eastern borders of the province are characterized by inhospitable arid mountains, while the central, western and southern parts are characterized by intricate irrigation networks linked to the main river, the Panjshir. The province is home to approximately 419,800 people (an estimate of the Central Statistics Department 2012/13).

There are three major ethnic groups residing in Kapisa province: Tajiks (42%), Pashtuns (37%) and Pashayi (20%). Pashtuns dominate in Tagab district, while the Pashayi predominantly live in Alasai and Kohband districts. Pashayis from Kohband district tend to be closer to Tajik communities in the province and are also Dari-speaking, while the Pashayis in Alasai district are closer to Pashtun communities and speak Pashto. Tajiks predominantly live in Mahmood Raqi, Kohistan-I and II and Nijrab.

The province is dominated by the Jamiat-e-Islami and Hizb-e-Islami political parties, while the three southern districts of Tagab, Nijrab and Alasai face Taliban-led insurgency. The Tajiks in Kapisa are divided into three major political groupings: Jamiat-e-Islami, Hizb-e-Islami Afghanistan (HIA) and the People's Democratic Party Afghanistan (PDPA), a former leftist party. The Pashtuns are also divided politically into two political groups, the Hizb-e-Islami and Harakat-e-Islami, while the Pashayi ethnic group mainly supports Jamiat-e-Islami and Hizb-e-Islami.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

Broadly speaking, Kapisa province appears to be engulfed by three types of conflict: insurgency-related armed conflict; longstanding rivalries between former jihadi commanders and revenge for past crimes/abuses; and property/land disputes.

#### ***Insurgency-related armed conflict***

The three southern districts of Tagab, Alasai and Nijrab have been identified by the participants as being under Taliban influence. During the consultations, participants stated that 95 per cent of Alasai district, 70 per cent of Tagab district and 20 per cent of Nijrab district were under Taliban control. Bordering districts in neighbouring provinces with significant Taliban presence, such as Surobi district in Kabul, Azra district in Logar and Koi-e-Safi in Parwan, reportedly enabled this Taliban infiltration into Tagab, Alasai and Nijrab. The security situation in these three districts began to deteriorate notably in 2006, prompting a number of military operations against the armed insurgent groups. These operations reportedly did not make any sustainable gains, but further antagonized the local population that suffered temporary displacement as a result.

In addition, the following factors have also contributed to the ongoing violence and the expansion of insurgency in the province: the lack of trust in Government; lack of employment opportunities; weak or no youth mobilization and participation; and certain groups' vested interests

benefiting from the war-economy and the persistent of discrimination. Alleged neighbouring countries' support to insurgent groups is another major concern pointed out by a number of participants.

A member of the Kapisa PPC stated:

*“Unfortunately, armed conflict is ongoing in three districts of Kapisa. I blame the Government for it. Government’s response to anti-government elements [AGEs] and their activities is very weak. Ongoing rampant corruption in every sector of the Government, lack of development projects in the insecure districts, endemic poverty and discrimination among various ethnicities and between northern and southern districts by the Government are other key reasons for the increasing insurgency in the province.”*

One of the reasons for the allegedly wider support for the Taliban in these three districts is reported to be the lack of or the weak presence of Government in these areas, with the Taliban establishing parallel government structures. This has resulted in local people relying on the Taliban, especially in seeking justice in any disputes or for crimes. According to participants, the Taliban have investigators, prosecutors and judges. Most of the time, Taliban judges announce decisions on cases during Friday prayers (*juma*) at local mosques. Almost all decisions made by the Taliban “courts” are implemented and the Taliban do not charge money for justice. Therefore, despite the serious human rights deficiencies of the Taliban “courts”, people reportedly are increasingly going to the Taliban for justice because the process is free and implementations of the decisions is swift. The formal government justice system is not only reported to be expensive, corrupt and very slow, but also uncertain with regard to the implementation of its decisions. Still, parallel justice structures are illegal and enjoy no legitimacy under the laws of Afghanistan. “Trials” held under the Taliban parallel justice system are unlawful and lack fair-trial guarantees, while its punishments often constitute human rights violations.

As a second reason for the increasing insurgency in Tagab, Alasai and Nijrab districts, participants pointed to allegations of arrests, detentions and house-searches (even unlawful killings) by pro-government forces without any evidence. People accused the Afghan security forces of acting on false intelligence reports provided by rivals in the communities. Such acts have further angered local people against the Government and security forces, consequently leading communities to switch their support to the Taliban.

A member of a youth organization from Tagab district stated:

*“No one from Tagab, Alasai and Nijrab districts has been appointed in the administration, neither at district nor at provincial level. We, the people in these three districts, feel extremely discriminated. Even the provincial administration sends old school books to the schools in our districts. On the other hand, also night raids have been ongoing forever in these three districts. We want an end to this. Night raids have been disturbing us a lot: during night raids, they [security forces] arrest innocent people, beat them and kill them. We do not like the Taliban either. Government does not care about us. We are frustrated with the Government and forced to take the side of the Taliban, this is question of survival indeed.”*

The third reason cited by the people for the allegedly expanding insurgency in the province is the phenomenon of “family rule” and nepotism at the levels of the provincial and district administration that also antagonizes marginalized communities against the Government. Participants complained that if a provincial governor belonged to a certain clan, ethnicity or political party, he would often tend to appoint his own family members first, then those from the same ethnicity and political party. Participants from the southern districts said that, until the 2009 elections, they had held out hope in the PC and parliament. In the 2009 and 2010 presidential, PC and *Wolesi Jirga* [lower house] elections, reportedly no polling centres were opened in Alasai district, while in Tagab and Nijrab only a few were and most of the votes cast in these were declared fraudulent. As a result, the residents from these districts lacked political representation at the provincial and national level. Participants blamed the provincial government and powerbrokers from the northern districts of the province for not doing enough to maintain security in these three districts, claiming that the powerbrokers from the northern districts relied on insecurity in the southern districts to provide them with an opportunity for gaining additional seats at the provincial and national levels.

People pointed to the Afghan Local Police (ALP) as the fourth reason for the insurgency in Kapisa. The ALP in Kapisa is allegedly comprised of former criminals and members of rival militias tied to influential local figures. Community representatives stressed that many of these individuals who had joined the ALP were not only responsible for past crimes, but continued to commit human rights abuses. A failure to prosecute them for their past and current actions leaves victims’ families with the sole option of taking revenge as a recourse for justice.

Pointing to abuses committed by the ALP in the province, an NGO worker in Mahmood Raqi gave as an example the below case:

*“Recently ALP killed a young boy in Tagab district. The only fault of the boy was that his brother was a Taliban commander in the district. Neither the police nor the prosecutor’s office investigated the case. Now, the Taliban-affiliated brother of the victim has vowed to continue to attack the ALP and kill as many as he can. We fear it will cause more crossfire incidents between ALPs and Taliban, and civilians will be the one to be caught in crossfire and paying the price.”*

Communities further said that they did not trust the ALP, as its members allegedly continued to defect to the Taliban and then attacking ALP positions. As a result, violence in the area has increased.

Poverty also plays a huge role for the increasing insurgency in the province. The widened gap between rich and poor has not only created an unequal society, but poverty and lack of care on the part of the State has produced frustration among young people with the Government.

A women’s rights adviser from Kohistan-I district stated:

*“In our society, some of the people have more things than they need: they have armoured cars, buildings and farm fields everywhere. But other people who are poor have nothing. They even do not have food to survive. They are suffering from hunger. So, the result you would get is the conflict and violence in society.”*

### **Land disputes**

A number of participants pointed to longstanding land disputes between families or clans that sometimes resulted in armed clashes as one of the major causes of unrest in the province, especially in the relatively secure northern districts. Two particular land disputes were said to cause major problems in the province. The first involved the Pashayi ethnic group of Sangan village and the Tajiks of Ezat Khil and Sherkhan Khil villages over the land located between these villages in Kohistan-I district. The disputed land used to belong to a government-owned factory named ‘Gul Bahar’ that was closed in 1989 and has since been vacant, leading both communities to claim ownership. The issue of ownership is causing disputes between the two communities that could erupt into violence at any time. In addition, until late 2015, there were major land disputes in Sokhi village of Mahmood Raqi and over the banks of the River Panjshir that were resolved through

court decisions. Apart from these major cases, there are a number of smaller land disputes among families and various clans/tribes, partly because of the lack of proper property boundary demarcation and land registry system. Local powerbrokers are said to seize vacant or government lands for development into residential housing.

A women's rights activist from Kohband district stated:

*“Politicians are involved in dirty things: they capture land and exploit local poor people. There is no equality before law; powerful people are above the law and laws are only for poor people. No one can arrest and prosecute any person who has armed militias as bodyguards. Politics and crime has close links and they go hand-in-hand in Kapisa province.”*

### ***Illegal armed groups and the culture of revenge***

Participants criticized the disarmament programmes implemented in Afghanistan, such as, the Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG), the Program-e-Tekim-e-Solhe (PTS) and the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Program (APRP), stating that these had failed to disarm fully former *jihadi* commanders who still had weapons and were running militias. *Jihadi* commanders in Kapisa province live in the relatively secure northern districts. From time to time they have reportedly used their militias against the Government or against their rivals. People testified that in Kohband district, two local *jihadi* commanders had been engaged in armed clashes against each other, killing a number of civilians and forcing the closure of health clinics and schools in the area for fear of injury or death. Members of parliament from the province, local powerbrokers and key provincial authorities were allegedly divided between these two commanders. Groups affiliated with them are also blamed for poppy cultivation and drug-trafficking. In Kohband district in August 2013, an ANP team that was destroying poppy cultivation was reportedly attacked by armed men affiliated with one of these commanders and forced to retreat. Following a number of complaints lodged at the district and provincial levels calling for them to be disarmed and brought to justice, the Office of the President finally appointed a delegation in 2015 that has been looking into the matter.

Additionally, participants highlighted revenge-killing as a major concern, which they said was generating vicious cycles of violence.<sup>4</sup> Rival *jihadi*

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<sup>4</sup> Revenge-killing, in accordance with the *Pashtunwali* (traditional Pashtun code), allows members from the family of someone who has been killed to kill in turn the perpetrator or a

commanders killed a number of their rivals and, as a result, also civilians, but none of the killings had been investigated and no one was prosecuted. The State's failure to render justice has legitimized revenge killings.

A female teacher from Kohistan-II stated:

*"Enmities between families or clans or tribes followed by revenge killings continue. The main reason for the continuation of the cycle of revenge killings is that none of the perpetrators of the past human rights violations and the ongoing revenge killings have been brought into justice."*

Local *shuras* or *jirgas* of elders attempt to address the issue of revenge-killing, but the most common solution used is *baad*, or the practice of offering a girl from the perpetrator's family to the victim's family as compensation. According to this practice, the girl from the perpetrator's family is often forced to marry someone from the victim's family. As a result, instead of justice, an additional abuse is perpetrated in which the girl suffers and pays the price for a crime committed by someone else.

#### **IV. Road Map for Peace**

Throughout the People's Dialogue focus-group discussions, Kapisa participants identified a number of specific local initiatives to be undertaken to address the root-causes/drivers of conflict in the province to achieve sustainable peace. Participants believed that a sustainable peace in Kapisa province would be achieved if the following measures were implemented: the law is enforced; human rights are protected and respected; corruption is tackled; the rule of law is upheld; development programmes are implemented; and security and peace programmes are designed carefully and implemented with all major actors on board. Participants offered the recommendations outlined below in this regard.

##### ***Strengthening Local Governance, Security and Stability***

##### ***Inclusive and representative administration and ensuring political representation***

Community representatives viewed the provincial and district administrations as not being inclusive. They therefore proposed that every institution/department must ensure representation of all the major ethnic

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close relative. In the past, *Pashtunwali* even legitimized the killing of the head of the killer's family or any other member of the killer's family, but current practice has limited revenge-killing to the perpetrator.

groups in the province (Tajiks, Pashtuns, Pashayis and Arabs) in proportion to their population. With regard to geographic balance, they also proposed that every district must be represented in all institutions. The practice of nepotism in recruitment, interference of provincial powerbrokers in local matters and discrimination based on ethnic, religion or politics must end.

A member of the Tagab district *shura* alleged:

*“Both Tagab and Alasai districts do not have representation in the provincial and district administration. We also do not have a Wolesi or Meshrano [upper house] Jirga member from these two districts. Luckily, only one PC member out of the nine is from Tagab district. So, where is our representation? We do not know to whom this government belongs to. It is not ours. It always discriminates against us.”*

The Government must put extra effort into opening polling centres and creating basic democratic space during the provincial, presidential and parliamentary elections in all districts, including the insecure ones in Tagab, Alasai and Nijrab. No polling centres were open in Alasai district during the 2009 and 2010 elections, while only a few were opened in Tagab and Nijrab districts, disfranchising a number of voters and denying them representation. It is worth noting that, in 2004 when the security was relatively good, six members of the PC and two members of the Wolesi Jirga were from these three districts. In the 2009 PC elections, on the other hand, only one member from Tagab district was elected. And in the 2010 Wolesi Jirga elections, no members from these three districts were elected.

#### Implement merit-based recruitment

Participants claimed that the current practice of recruitment, in particular, in key official positions, is designed to distribute posts among key provincial and national powerbrokers, rather than according to educational and professional experience. As a result, most of the provincial and district administration positions, including in law enforcement and the judiciary, have been filled by former *jihadis*. The Personal Appraisal Review (PAR) process does not seem to be effectively implemented. Participants complained that it does not target high-level posts; its decisions lack implementation; and it is very slow and weak. Therefore, participants recommended that the PAR process is strengthened or replaced with a new system that ensures merit-based recruitment, including in the leadership positions at the level of provincial and district administration, while also ensuring ethnic and geographical representation.

A local FM radio journalist from Kohistan-II district claimed:

*“Kohistan-II district governor who was appointed through a merit-based recruitment process was killed on his way to the District Administration Centre on 20 January 2013. It is believed he was killed because he was not affiliated with any political party or powerbrokers and that he was actually killed by local powerbrokers who did not like him. But unfortunately, Taliban falsely claimed responsibility later on. This shows the severity of problems in recruitment of high-ranking government officials.”*

#### Improve government service-delivery

Participants complained that in order to obtain timely services as stipulated by law, one needed to be either known to the official or local powerful person or pay a bribe. Otherwise, they claimed it took days to receive basic services from government officials, such as obtaining *taskera* [national identity card], passport, driving license or a training permit. There are laws and guidelines in this regard, but these are not implemented thoroughly. According to participants, the monitoring teams dispatched by ministries to check on the implementation of the guidelines and on the effectiveness of service-delivery also take bribes from the relevant provincial authorities while monitoring them. This demonstrated how the whole system was knotted in a net of corruption. As a way forward, people recommended that the Government, private sector, civil society and media work together to combat corruption.

#### Strengthen district governance

Participants called on the Government to ensure that a presence of judicial staff members (prosecutors and judges), including in the insecure districts, and to secure the reach of district governors to local communities. Whatever presence the Government and the judiciary have on the ground is allegedly corrupt and very weak. As a result, participants claimed, communities turn to the Taliban for justice. This must be addressed and tackled effectively.

#### Anti-corruption campaign

The ANP or the office of the prosecutor should register, investigate and prosecute complaints/cases regarding corruption, but these authorities allegedly lack the expertise and specialized skills required, as well as also being involved in corruption. It was therefore proposed that a special mechanism be created in the province to investigate and prosecute

corruption claims/cases. The high-level Anti-Corruption Commission and the Anti-Corruption Department of the Attorney-General do not have a presence at the provincial but only the national level. It was recommended that these anti-corruption entities open provincial offices to increase local efforts for combating corruption.

*Strengthen security forces and ensure accountability*

Participants called for strengthened Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) presences in the areas dominated by former *jihadi* commanders, as well as in the three AGE-affected insecure districts. The Government must demonstrate a clear will to impose its writ and control over the AGE-affected districts, including by expanding its service delivery. As a result of the lack of presence of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), the Taliban had increased their activities in these areas, further depriving local people of basic State services. Also, it was pointed that a number of alleged ALPs suspected of human rights abuses had not been arrested or prosecuted. Participants called on the relevant police and military prosecutors to ensure accountability for the ALP.

*Disarmament of illegal armed groups, including jihadi commanders, and accountability*

The province needs a new disarmament project that can in a real sense ensure the disarmament of illegal armed groups (IAGs), including the former *jihadi* commanders. People criticized the previous DIAG programme for failing to disarm the *jihadi* commanders, believing that the process had instead become a profitable weapons business. For example, if an IAG commander deposited ten weapons with the DIAG, he would reportedly receive projects equivalent to thousands of dollars in return, while the ten weapons he had deposited with the DIAG would be worth only a few thousand Afghanis. Often, the real weapons remained with the *jihadi* commanders, while old and dysfunctional weapons were handed over to the DIAG. These *jihadi* commanders allegedly continue to use these weapons against their rivals, causing violence and insecurity in the province.

*Credibility and inclusiveness of the peace and reconciliation process*

Participants stated that mediation/dialogue with armed opposition groups would be better carried out by local people. The role of respected religious elders was identified as being important to bringing peace with AGEs,

however, participants advised that Government should pay close attention while choosing religious leaders as its ambassadors for peace.

A district *shura* member from Tagab stated:

*"I would say that religious leaders in the province are also divided over the matter of peace. The division among mullahs on the peace process has created a kind of confusion among common Afghans, in particular, those who live in remote and traditional communities. First of all, they [religious leaders] must discuss and agree among themselves on making peace and ways to achieve it."*

Further, participants pointed to the lack of access of current members of the PPC to insecure areas and their lack of credibility as challenges to the peace process. Although the PPC head was acknowledged to be well-respected, other PPC members were seen as lacking respect from all parties to the armed conflict, which undermines their effectiveness in the peace process.

The current APRP process was not viewed as a peace programme, so participants demanded its replacement.

The headmaster of a school in Mahmood Raqi stated:

*"If one says he is working for the peace in Afghanistan, the person is just acting as an artist do in dramas. He plays that drama for his own vested interest. No individual or a group has a clear road map for peace. Elders involved in the ongoing so called peace efforts have their own vested interests: they earn money from it. These efforts, including APRP, are false, and they have no base."*

Although community representatives widely acknowledged that it was indeed the responsibility of Government to support the peace process financially and logistically (outreach funds, peace posters, meeting costs and any other operational expenses), they stated strongly that persons who had committed crimes should be arrested and prosecuted, rather than enjoy impunity in the name of peace.

A female university student from Kohistan-I district said:

*"Nobody has the right to mediate with criminals. Criminals must be arrested and prosecuted. Mediation is meant only with the opposition political groups. Members or leaders of a political opposition group must not be*

*granted full amnesty in the name of mediation, if they have committed any serious crimes against civilians, such as, suicide attacks, in the past.”*

### ***Promoting human rights and rule of law and tackling impunity***

The protection of civilians in armed conflict, violence against women, the right to education, the right to work, the right to adequate health care and access to justice are identified by participants as the main human rights concerns in the province. Poverty and corruption are other issues affecting the local population. Participants testified that the human rights situation was deteriorating, especially in the insecure areas impacted by the Taliban insurgency and the lack of State presence.

People urged the Government to expand its control over the insecure areas, including by providing health and educational services. People believed that these initiatives would inevitably help to address the human rights situation. The Government also needs to focus on training of teachers and health professionals to ensure quality services. There are reportedly no girls' schools open in Alasai and Tagab districts due to the increasing Taliban insurgency. In districts where girls' schools are open, they reportedly lack trained teachers.

Government also needs to raise awareness in communities on harmful traditional practices against women and girls and the existence of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW Law). Police, prosecutors and courts must hold accountable those accused of violence against women in accordance with the EVaW Law, while the Family Response Unit of the ANP must be strengthened with skilled staff enjoying stronger terms of reference.

People strongly recommended that members of the armed forces (including ALP), former *jihadi* commanders and others affiliated with provincial powerbrokers who have committed human rights violations or crimes must be brought to justice. Political interference from key provincial authorities and powerbrokers in law enforcement (ANP and prosecution) and the courts must end. The ANP should be trained in modern techniques of criminal investigation and respect for the rights of detainees. The ANSF and international military forces must not use indiscriminate combat tactics, such as firing rockets into villages. They also must follow the law in conducting night raids, as well as respect the cultural sensitivities and human rights of civilians.

Gross past human rights violations must be investigated and prosecuted. The culture of impunity must end. This will help to stop the vicious cycle of revenge killings.

People further called on the Government to tackle the alleged corruption within the ANP, prosecution and judiciary to ensure accountability and justice.

#### **Strengthened role of civil society and media**

Civil society is an important actor in ensuring the transparency of government and accountability for human rights abuses. The province reportedly has a very weak presence of local media, with only two local FM radio stations and a weekly newspaper (*Kapisa Weekly*). Participants claimed that fear of reprisals had impeded civil society organizations and media outlets from speaking freely and reporting on abuses by provincial powerbrokers in Kapisa. Freedom of expression is very limited. Media professionals allegedly receive threats if they broadcast programmes critical of any provincial powerbrokers or key government officials. The government should ensure that freedom of expression is respected and protected in Kapisa and that journalists can freely do their work.

#### ***Achieving social and economic development***

Security and development must go together. In the three insecure districts, there have allegedly been no development projects for quite some time.

According to participants, the northern districts have a university, schools, hospitals and religious madrasas, but the southern districts lack such facilities. Therefore, security and development need to be implemented together in these three southern districts, which would also create jobs for the youth and help dissuade them from entering the pool of new Taliban recruits.

#### ***Peace actors and spoilers***

Former and current members of parliament, presidential advisors from Kapisa province and key provincial authorities (the governor and the chiefs of the PC, ANP, PPC and National Directorate of Security [NDS]), all need to be taken on board when conducting consultations on mechanisms or ways to bring sustainable peace to the province.

## **V. People's Recommendations**

### ***Strengthen local government institutions***

- Ensure merit-based appointment in all sections of government, as well as ethnic and geographic inclusivity.
- Train national security forces (ANA, ANP, ALP and NDS) on conduct and discipline standards and ensure accountability when they commit violations.
- Reform current education with modern and scientific education at all levels.
- Establish Government control over all districts, including the insurgency-impacted Tagab, Alasai and Nijrab districts.
- Combat corruption by ensuring local presence of anti-corruption entities at the provincial level, such as the high-level Anti-Corruption Commission, High Commission to Combat Corruption and the Anti-Corruption Department of the Attorney General's Office.
- Tackle corruption in law enforcement and the judiciary by strengthening the capacity of relevant departments to gather information on corruption.
- Extend protection by provincial government and national security forces to ordinary people, not only provincial powerbrokers.
- Ensure the participation of youth, especially in provincial administration.
- Ensure that judicial officials are present in all districts, including in the three restive districts of Tagab, Alasai and Nijrab, to ensure universal access to justice.
- Ensure the transparency of government institutions and end corruption.

### ***Support inclusivity of the peace and reconciliation process***

- The current PPC must include more influential religious and political figures and elders who are viewed by communities as credible and capable of negotiating with the local Taliban for peace, as well as to evaluate Taliban demands and act to implement legitimate demands gradually.

***Promote human rights, rule of law and tackle impunity***

- Stop all sorts of discrimination, including ethnic and geographic, and promote equality.
- Ensure justice for past gross human rights violations and put an end to impunity for ongoing abuses and violations, including to eliminate revenge-killing.
- Promote respect for human rights, including women's and girls' rights, in communities and among community elders.
- Guarantee investigation and prosecution of cases of serious crimes against women.
- Launch cultural reform, including with the support of mullahs, targeting harmful traditional practices and revenge-killing to end the vicious cycle of violence.
- Support civil society to enable it to advocate against human rights violations and corruption.
- Ensure that freedom of expression is respected and protected.

***Strengthen social and economic development***

- Allocate job-creating projects to communities living in insecure areas, such as Alasai and Tagab districts, and also in the Afganya, Pachaghan and Ghain valleys of Nijrab district.
- Reopen the closed government Gul Bahar Textile factory, which had provided 15,000 jobs in the past.

Open the closed girls' schools in Alasai and Tagab districts.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Parwan Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial road map for peace presents a summary of the main issues and key conclusions raised in focus-group discussions, individual interviews and surveys of opinion carried out during the consultative process with around 120 citizens in Parwan province. Participants consisted of youth group leaders, teachers, members of the judiciary, civil society activists, religious scholars, community elders, students and some influential people who took an active part in the consultations to create a road map for peace in Parwan province.

The consultations took place as part of Phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace programme (hereinafter the "People's Dialogue") initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) to consult over 4,500 Afghan citizens with a view to developing 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Parwan, with its estimated area of 5,974 square kilometres, is a strategically located province to the north of Kabul. It shares borders with Panjshir to the northeast, Kapisa to the east, Kabul to the southeast, Maidan Wardak to the southwest, Bamyan to the west and Baghlan to the north. With its capital at Charikar, the province encompasses eight districts: Sayed Kheil, Sheikh Ali, Shinwari, Sorkhe Parsa, Sia Gird, Kohi Safi, Bagram and Salang.

According to the most recent estimate of the Central Statistics Office (2012-2013, prior to the consultations), Parwan has a total population of 631,600 inhabitants. They comprise a diverse ethnic mix composed of a vast majority of Tajiks (70 per cent), followed by Pashtuns (18 per cent), Hazaras 11 per cent) and Turkmens (one per cent). Additionally, there is a seasonal Kuchi migration to Shinwari, Bagram and Koh-e-Safi districts, with some Kuchis permanently settled in Shinwari.

Parwan politics are mainly organized around patronage networks. Although there are no party offices in the province, provincial political dynamics are shaped by tensions among the main former *jihadi* factions, such as Jamiat-e-Islami and Hizb-e-Islami, followed by Harakat-i-Enqilab-e-Islami and Ettehad-e-Islami.

The province is of a great strategic importance due to the presence of the Salang highway, the main route connecting Kabul to nine northern and northeastern provinces. During the civil war, the Shomali plain, part of

which is located in Parwan, was the front-line between the Northern Alliance and Taliban forces.

The security situation in Parwan province remains relatively calm in comparison to other provinces, although at least three districts in Parwan (Sia Gird and Shinwari in the Ghorband Valley and Koh-e-Safi) have witnessed numerous insurgency-related incidents since 2011 and are rated as volatile. The road between Bamyan and Kabul through the Ghorband Valley is particularly vulnerable to the activities of anti-government elements (AGEs) and illegal armed groups (IAGs).

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

Through the focus-group discussions, people identified different types of conflict and local disputes which may affect stability and peace in the area, such as the Taliban-led insurgency and IAG operations, especially in the Ghorband Valley, as well as ethnic tensions, land disputes and criminal activities. In this regard, community members in Parwan identified AGEs, including the Taliban and Hizb-e Islami (Hekmatyar), IAGs, criminals, corrupt government officials and some local elders as main actors in the conflict.

According to the participants, the AGEs in Parwan aim to destabilize the strategic path along the Salang highway connecting Kabul to the nine northern provinces, and to gain control over the area in order to have access to north and central parts of the country. Taliban and Hizb-e Islami (Hekmatyar) reportedly cooperate in Parwan, both deriving their support from the Pashtun ethnic group. Ideologically, they share the similar views, as participants claimed both groups had almost the same objective of forming a fundamentalist Islamic government and taking power. The Taliban are reportedly more powerful in the province, with Hizb-e Islami operating under Taliban command.

Community representatives alleged that increased Taliban operations in Parwan were mainly due to the failure of Government to respond adequately to the Taliban presence in the province. A community member from Siagird district said:

*“Around two years ago there were only a few Taliban members operating in Siagird district. The government could have easily cleaned up the area, but because of weakness and lack of attention, the number of Taliban increased day by day and now more than 400 Taliban fighters are operating in the district.”*

According to community representatives, Ghorband Valley in Parwan province is gradually becoming a Taliban base. During the last two years the power of the Taliban has reportedly increased immensely in the area, leading to the appointment of shadow district governors for Shenwary and Sia Gird districts. The Taliban allegedly now have hundreds of loyal and reliable fighters. Their criminal activities, such as assassinations, public executions, attacks on government buildings and military convoys and the enforcement of strict Taliban rules among the local people, demonstrate the group's active presence in the valley.

Community members also raised their concerns regarding the presence of the international military base in Bagram, which is often targeted by AGEs. They complained that AGEs sometimes fired rockets that missed their targets, consequently harming innocent civilians.

Political tensions, overlapping largely with ethnic identities, are seen as constituting the main factor triggering the presence of the insurgency in the unstable districts of the province.

In the Ghorband Valley, local communities have traditionally been Hizb-e Islami sympathizers and many members allegedly joined the ranks of the Taliban during their time in power. Sympathies for the insurgency continued after the demise of the Taliban regime in 2001 and were reportedly amplified by perceived political marginalization and ethnic/geographic discrimination. Ghorband communities are, however, not homogenous – the divisions experienced at the provincial level are also visible in the districts. Major powerbrokers affiliated with Hizb-e Islami are accused by communities on both sides of manipulating existing tensions to further their political goals. Political tensions are also linked more largely to competition over political power and economic resources (both licit and illicit), including the recruitment for the Afghan Local Police (ALP). The Hazara population in the Ghorband Valley, mainly located in Sheikh Ali and to a lesser extent in Sorkhe Parsa, is divided across religious lines (Sunni, Shia and Ismaili) and are loyal to various factions, including Hizb-e Islami.

Koh-e-Safi district, the other provincial hotspot, is also divided internally along the lines of the alliances between *jihadi* factions during the civil war. The district was politically divided during the *Jihad* among commanders from Harakat-e Inqelab-e Islami (currently the dominating faction in the district), Hizb-e Islami (Hekmatyar and Khalis factions), Jamiat-e Islami and Etehad-e Islami. These internal divisions reportedly prevented local communities from uniting during the post-Taliban elections and gaining

representation at the provincial level. This apparently resulted in creating a perception of marginalization in the local community by the provincial administration, which further contributes to instability in the province. Some former *jihadi* commanders are also said to be supporting the insurgency, which mostly attracts a new generation of young men.

In addition, the geographical location of Parwan province has often facilitated the infiltration of insurgents into the province: the Ghorband Valley is used as a transit route between north and south, while there are reports of Taliban infiltration into the Ghorband districts from neighbouring Jalriz district in Maidan Wardak and Tala-wa-Barfak district in Baghlan, as well as from the Tagab district of Kapisa province into Koh-e Safi district.

Some of the participants claimed that there were also foreign fighters and foreign countries involved in Parwan, through their reportedly active support to the Afghan Taliban and other AGEs. Community members claimed that the Pakistani Taliban were in control in the Ghorband Valley, with the Afghan Taliban working under their command. Community members further claimed that some other countries were supporting insurgency activities by providing weapons and financial support, as well as access to training camps in Pakistan.

People generally raised concerns that IAGs and other actors in the armed conflict did not have any agenda for peace. Communities alleged that the sole aim of these actors was to create conflict and take advantage of the tensions created to benefit from politically and economically, as some only sought to build up their reputations and popularity.

### **Drivers of Conflict**

The People's Dialogue participants in Parwan listed the following factors as the root causes of the conflict in the province: poor governance; unprofessional police; lack of rule of law and increasing impunity; the gap between Government and the people of Parwan; ethnic-based nationalism; corruption; weakness of the peace process (namely the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme [APRP]); interference from foreign countries; illiteracy; poverty; and unemployment.

In addition, community members claimed that some Government officials actively support AGEs and maintained underground relations with criminals and armed groups.

Furthermore, people claimed that political actors are engaged in creating ethnic tensions to increase their political advantage. One community member alleged:

*“The creation of ethnic conflict is a political game. Most of the Pashtun villages in Ghorband Valley are under influence of Taliban and politicians try to divide people along the ethnic lines to create more tension among the Tajiks and Pashtun communities. The lack of unity among people is a big achievement for AGEs. In some areas where people are united it is difficult for the Taliban and other AGEs to control the area.”*

Impunity was seen as another major factor contributing to the conflict. Many problems exist within the criminal justice system itself, which reportedly is marred by corruption. Investigators and prosecutors are reportedly mostly unprofessional and fail to implement the law in the province. In short, they were either seen as corrupt or unprofessional or too weak to implement the laws and bring perpetrators to justice. People claimed that many crimes occurred, but no legal action was taken so unpunished offenders simply grew stronger. Impunity had opened a big gap between the people and the Government. To get rid of the culture of impunity would be the biggest achievement for Parwan province.

The lack of rule of law and consequent impunity creates tensions among the communities. Communities shared their concern that laws existed only on paper and were not implemented properly and equally in Parwan province.

A civil society activist from Charikar city said:

*“Criminality and impunity is the main cause for conflict in Parwan. Criminality increased in Parwan and the perpetrators are mostly warlords and armed people; they do whatever they want to do - they take private property, they kidnap and kill people, they create all sort of tensions between community members - but their criminal activities remain unpunished.”*

Additionally, people complained about corruption and abusive behaviour by the ALP and Afghan National Police (ANP). They alleged that most police officers were illiterate and addicted to drugs, that some were even collaborating with criminals and AGE groups and misusing their power. In people’s view, this is largely because the Government is paying small salaries that foster corruption in the province.

An elder from Charikar City mentioned:

*“The existence of illiterate and drug-addicted police is the main cause for conflict in some parts of Parwan province. Most of police do not know how to provide security; in most countries police provide people with a safe environment but here in my province, people are afraid of police.”*

A community member from Kohi Safi added:

*“In Kohi Safi district Taliban and Hizb-e Islami (Hekmatyar) are the main causes of conflict, but ALP is also a source of insecurity in the district. After the ALP establishment in Kohi Safi, the security situation got worse day-by-day. ALP misuse their power and create tension among people. Some ALP who had personal hostilities with villagers used their new role as armed ALP to take revenge.”*

The weakness of the APRP was another concern raised by people during the group discussions. Participants claimed that the programme was not transparent and clear. Community members further complained that the Provincial Peace Committee (PPC) did not have any activities in the districts, observing that most people were not even aware of their PPC representative.

Participants raised some issues that, in their opinion, were hampering the success of the peace process in Parwan and must be addressed.

- The Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) process was mainly symbolic in the province.
- The APRP was officially launched in December 2011 with the establishment of a PPC consisting of 25 members, however the PPC was not endorsed for another year by the High Peace Council (HPC)/Joint Secretariat (JS) and remained inactive.
- The HPC eventually reviewed the PPC in Parwan and reshaped it, drafting a new list of 27 members. The new PPC was formally inaugurated in April 2013, but had not yet undertaken any action by the time of the consultations.
- In terms of geographic balance, seven of the PPC members come from Sia Gird and Shinwari districts and three from Koh-e-Safi district. Jamiat-e Islami dominates the PPC, with nine of its members, while two are affiliated with Hizb-e Islami. This may likely create further feelings of marginalization among the political factions that feel excluded from political processes in the province.

During the consultative process, people broadly highlighted the need for greater participation by ordinary people in the peace programme, especially women, in order to build sustainable peace and stability in the province. Among the 27 members of the Parwan PPC, only two are women, so people particularly called for increased female participation.

A female teacher from Siagird stated:

*“A big gap and limitation for peace in Parwan is the lack of female representation in the peace process at district level. In the villages, either the head of the family does not allow women to work or to study or government officials ignore women.”*

Participants also suggested a thorough review of PPC activities in view of the lack of any visible achievements. They claimed that members were not active and that people did not even know their PPC representatives at district level.

Unemployment and lack of work opportunities was pointed out as another contributing factor to the conflict in Parwan.

One representative of the Hajj and Awqaf department stated:

*“One of the causes of conflict is unemployment and the lack of factories in Parwan. During the Mujahideen period, there were two large textile factories in Jabulseraj district. To create employment opportunities for the people is very important and would have a strong impact of ending the ongoing conflict; once people have salary and financial support, they will not join AGEs. Unfortunately, the government does not pay attention to this problem.”*

On the other hand, an elder from Siagird district claimed that the Taliban was opposed to people taking government jobs:

*“Two young jobless boys from Siagird went to the district centre and told the government officials that they are tired of Taliban and they want to work and leave that area. When they came back to their home, Taliban took them and badly beat them with a stick. The boys could not walk for a week.”*

Community members also cited the low quality of education and lack of access to proper health facilities as producing tensions among community members. Because of the uneasy security situation, families hardly allow their children to go to school, as some of the schools are close to the Afghan National Army (ANA) or ALP check-posts. Additionally, community

members from Shinwary and Sia Gird districts said that they were afraid to go to clinics during evening hours, because of the Taliban presence.

A teacher from Bagram mentioned:

*“Illiteracy is the main reason for conflict in our area; a lot of people do not have access to education for different reasons, such as insecurity and traditions that allow only boys to go to schools. In Nikah Khil village there is one girls’ school, but because of security reasons people are afraid to send their children to school.”*

A teenager from Kohi Safi district said:

*“Kohi Safi is the only district in Parwan province without a girls’ high school and even male students face a lot of problems; there are no proper school buildings and the quality of education is low. My brother is currently attending the seventh class, but he does not want to go to school anymore. He complains about the lack of desks and chairs for students, but we force him to attend anyways.”*

A *malik* (tribal chieftain) from Siagird said:

*“At present Taliban does not interfere in the education programme, but it is only a matter of time until they gain power all over Afghanistan and then they will show their real face. They are against human rights and proper schooling.”*

#### **IV. The Road Map for Peace**

During the focus-group discussions in Parwan, participants identified a variety of local practical peace-building initiatives to address the root causes of conflict in the province. These included strengthening the rule of law; fighting against impunity; increasing local employment opportunities; and prosecution of IAGs and criminals. A number of measures were identified to address the core issues, in an effort to strengthen peace and stability in the province.

##### **Strengthen Governance, Security and Stability**

Almost all participants of the focus-group discussions agreed that the main cause of insecurity in Parwan was the existence of AGEs, IAGs and criminals. They claim that the lack of Government attention has created insecurity in the province, while the weakness of local government institutions hinders the halt of criminal activities. This has resulted in impunity and a lack of the rule of law. People recommended disarmament of the armed groups in the

province through the DIAG process, in an effort to reach peace and stability. They also suggested the disbandment of these armed groups by the central Government. Participants and interviewees also suggested the removal of corrupt officials and the establishment of a control mechanism to reduce corruption and build a peaceful society. Some participants suggested increasing the salary of governmental officials to discourage the taking of bribes.

A community elder from Sayedkhil district summed up the discussion:

*“Illegal armed people exist all over Parwan; they do not want peace because they would lose power; therefore they create conflict in the communities; this is unfortunately reality and the true limitation for peace in our communities. Until these groups are in power, peace remains to be a dream.”*

Additionally, community members stated that ANP and ALP were very important factors for ensuring security at district level. They alleged, however, that ANP and ALP were comprised mostly of unprofessional and uneducated people, stressing the need for Government, national and international NGOs to make capacity-building for national organizations and law enforcement their main focus.

### **Promoting Human Rights and Rule of Law and Tackling Impunity**

Community members expressed concerns regarding the increase in human rights violations in Parwan province, especially in insecure areas. They agreed that the AGEs (Taliban), IAGs and some of the elders were responsible for human rights violations and must be punished. The existence of AGEs is the main cause of insecurity in the area, resulting in the restriction of basic human rights, including the right to education, access to health care, access to justice and women’s rights.

A youth from Kohi Safi mentioned:

*“In areas under Taliban influence, people only try to survive. This is all that people wish for - we do not have time to think about human rights.”*

In some of the group discussions, participants shared their worries with regard to corrupt practices by government officials and dishonest elders in the area, alleging that some elders had links with the Taliban.

A youth from Bagram mentioned:

*“Officials are the main cause for impunity in Parwan. The officials do not implement the law, they take bribes, and collaborate with criminals. In some cases they told victims of crimes that the perpetrator escaped, but we knew that the perpetrators invited them for dinner and they partied all night with the criminals. The removal of these officials would be an important step to end impunity in the province”.*

People suggested an increase in human rights awareness-raising programmes, especially on such topics as “human rights and Islam”, as well as the inclusion of human rights education in the school curriculum, to provide a foundation for the proper application of the rule of law and tackling impunity.

The main target group for such awareness-raising programmes should be community elders and influential people, including government officials. It is worth pointing out that some participants, especially elders, were opposed to the phrase “human rights” as they believed it to be a Western concept opposed to Islam and Afghan culture.

Additionally, people proposed more capacity-building training and awareness-raising programmes on harmful traditional practices for community members at district level, especially for elders and officials, to combat the continuation of these practices.

A civil society activist from Charekar said:

*“Some of the elders are good and experienced, but some of them are uneducated and fanatics who do not believe in basic women’s rights. In case of a violence against women incident, elders conduct jirgas to solve the case. Then they make a wrong decision which fuels another conflict.”*

A women from Sia Gird said that:

*“A strong movement should be initiated against harmful traditional practices, such as those affecting women, in all of Parwan province to address the practice as illegal and punishable under the EVAW [Elimination of Violence against Women] law.”*

### **Achieving Social and Economic Development**

During the consultative process, people suggested an improvement in social and economic development, including strengthening education and

creating employment opportunities, as a way to establish sustainable peace in Parwan province.

Unemployment and poverty are of great concern to the people of Parwan, having a direct impact on peace and stability.

Unemployment among the younger generation leads youth in Parwan to take part in destructive activities with insurgents or join the Taliban as fighters. Some community members recalled that there had previously been three large factories in the Jabel Seraj district that were destroyed during the war: a textile factory in Jabel Seraj itself, another in Gulbahar and a cement factory. People widely suggested that rebuilding these factories would change the situation for the better in the province by contributing to employment and development. They also proposed the rebuilding of the electricity dam in Jabel Seraj.

In addition, community members suggested the reinforcement of agricultural activity in Parwan province. People believed that: *'If the Government allocates some land for poor people, it will definitely reduce the insurgency activities.'*

The ongoing conflict in insecure areas has negatively impacted access to education, especially for women. Hence, investment in the education system is key to sustainable peace in Parwan and should remain a priority goal for Government and nongovernmental institutions. Besides rebuilding schools, Government and other institutions need to focus on better quality of education. It was recommended that the Ministry of Education review school curriculums to enhance education quality.

Finally, participants emphasized that Government should not allow the military to establish their check-posts near school buildings. Community members cited Sia Gird and Shenwary as districts where some schools are close to military bases, causing families to be afraid to send their children to school.

## **V. People's Recommendations**

Recommendations from the participants to bring peace to Parwan province are summarized below.

### **Tackle corruption and improve good governance**

- Remove corrupt officials and establish a control mechanism to reduce corruption.
- Institute capacity-building programmes for law enforcement to ensure proper conduct and respect for the rights of citizens.

### **Support inclusivity of peace and reconciliation process**

- Disarm and disband armed groups in the province through the DIAG process in an effort to achieve peace and stability.
- Initiate peace-building programmes involving mullahs and influential elders.
- Review Parwan's peace committee activities to ensure effectiveness.
- Improve female participation in the peace process.
- Establish an advocacy network for peace.

### **Promote human rights, rule of law and tackle impunity**

- Prioritize tackling impunity.
- Increase human rights awareness-raising programmes on such topics as "human rights and Islam" and include human rights education in school curricula.
- Launch a robust movement against harmful traditional practices in all provinces.

### **Implement economic and social development projects**

- Create and encourage employment opportunities to foster sustainable peace in Parwan province.
- Rebuild the three main factories and the electricity dam in Jabel Seraj.

Rebuild schools and advance educational quality through revision of the curriculum.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace  
Maidan Wardak Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial road map for peace presents a summary of key findings and issues raised in four focus-group discussions and seven surveys of opinion carried out with 134 ordinary Afghans, including 39 women, residing in Maidan Wardak province. The participants represented diverse ethnic groups including Pashtun, Hazara and Tajik from a variety of social and political backgrounds, including public-sector employees, community elders, farmers, teachers, civil society actors, religious scholars, members of former jihadi parties and representatives of women's interests.

The consultations took place as part of Phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace programme (hereinafter the "People's Dialogue") initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) to consult over 4,500 Afghan citizens with a view to developing 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

In Maidan Wardak province the consultations were conducted by the National Youth and Social Organization (NYSO), acting as the focal point for the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace network.

This local road map for peace attempts to provide as comprehensive an analysis as possible of local drivers of conflict and to offer actionable solutions to help build sustainable peace and stability in Maidan Wardak province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Maidan Wardak province is situated 35 kilometres south of Afghanistan's capital, Kabul. It has nine districts: Maidan Shahr, Jaghatu, Jalrez, Sayadabad, Chak, Dai Mirdad, Behsud-I and II and Nirkh. Its capital is Maidan Shahr.

The province has an estimated area of 10,911 square kilometres hosting 2,234 villages. Two national highways cross the province: the Kabul-Wardak-Ghazni-Kandahar highway, or Highway-I, connecting Pashtun ethnic areas with Kabul; and the Kabul-Wardak-Bamyan-Ghor highway, or Highway-II, connecting the Hazara ethnic areas with Kabul.

According to estimates by the Central Statistics Office, Maidan Wardak province has a population of 549,200 people. Pashtuns from various tribes form the majority inhabitants and live in Chak, Sayedabad, Nirkh, Jaghatu, Maidan Shahr and half of Jalriz and Daimirdad districts. Behsud-I and II and

parts of Daimirdad districts are dominated by Hazara ethnicities. Half of Jalriz is populated by Tajiks.

Politically, the population in Maidan Wardak is extremely divided. The province is fragmented ethnically and politically, with some level of overlap between ethnic and political identities, as outlined below.

- Behsood-I and II and parts of Jalriz and Daimirdad districts are affiliated with Shia political parties, such as the Wahdat-e-Islami-e-Afghanistan (Khalili), Hezb-e-Wahdat-e-Mardumi-e-Afghanistan (Mohaqqeq), Hezb-e-Insejam-e-Milli and, to a lesser extent, Harakat-e-Islami (Anwari).
- Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin Hikmatyar has influence in the districts of Chak, Sayedabad, parts of Daimiradad, Nirkh and parts of Jalriz.
- The parties of Haraka-e-Inqelab-e-Islami and Etehad-e-Islami have influence in Jalriz and Nirkh.
- Hizb-e-Islami Khalis and Mahaz-e-Milli have influence in Jaghatu.
- The Jamiat-e-Islami has also some influence in Jalriz.

The activities of the political parties in the province are very limited by the security situation, which began to deteriorate in 2007, when the Taliban and other armed groups began attacking convoys on the highways. By 2009, Government presence in Chak, Jaghatu, Nirkh and Sayedabad districts was already limited to the district centres, while the Taliban controlled the rest of the areas. The situation continues to deteriorate, with the Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin controlling most parts of the province. Some high-profile incidents perpetrated in Maidan Shahr and Sayedabad district centre have caused casualties among both civilians and the security forces, as well as substantial destruction of government and private property.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

#### **Types of Conflict**

Maidan Wardak province suffers from the following types of concurrent conflicts: Taliban-led insurgency and counter-insurgency; armed conflict between Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin; rivalry between political groups; and land disputes pitting Hazaras against nomadic Kuchis in Behsood-I and II districts.

At the time of the consultations, Jaghatu, Chak, Sayedabad and Daimirdad districts were considered by participants as Taliban strongholds. Parts of Nirkh, Jalrez and Maidan Shahr districts were also reported to be under

Taliban control. Afghan men, women and youth stated that insurgent activities had increased in these districts with the departure of the international military forces. ANSF capacity was viewed by the participants as too weak and inadequate to combat Taliban advances. Lack of coordination among the Afghan security forces, the Afghan National Police (ANP), Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) and National Directorate of Security (NDS), as well as with the civil administration, has also contributed to providing space for the insurgency to operate. Competition inside the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF), mandated to escort supply convoys, has also resulted in clashes among APPF companies, impacting adversely security on the highways.

Several factors have facilitated the infiltration of anti-government elements (AGEs) into Maidan Wardak province. First, the geo-strategic location of the province, hosting two vital national highways, made it attractive for the insurgency to target international military forces and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), in particular on Highway-I, a major supply route between Kabul and Kandahar. Second, Maidan Wardak neighbours two unstable provinces, Ghazni and Logar, which enables the entry of AGEs into Maidan Wardak. Its proximity to the national capital, Kabul, is another factor for the intensification of insurgent activities in the province. Insurgent activities on Highway-II appear to have been targeting Hazara people travelling on the road between Kabul and Bamyan/Daykundi provinces. The Taliban seem to have aimed to inflame ethnic tensions between the Hazara and Pashtun ethnic groups residing in the area so that they can exploit that environment.

Provincial political factors have also played a role in the deterioration of the security situation, such as the marginalization of key *jihadi* commanders, who in return create tension in the province.

A longstanding land dispute between the nomadic Kuchi and Hazara ethnicities in Behsud-I and II and Daimirdad districts has also aided the Taliban's infiltration. In these disputes, Taliban allegedly offer support to the Kuchis, as they comprise a Pashtun sub-group.

Intra-insurgency dynamics between the Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin have also impacted negatively on the security situation in the province. In January 2014, the Taliban abducted and killed a number of Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin fighters in Jalrez district. Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin elements have allegedly been used occasionally by the Afghan Government to combat increasing Taliban influence in the province.

## **Drivers of Conflict**

Throughout the consultative process in Maidan Wardak province, participants identified two major categories of drivers of conflict: (1) structural causes of the conflict, including widespread corruption and abuse of authority, entrenched impunity and lack of sustainable social and economic development; and (2) immediate causes of the conflicts, referring to the processes, events and programmes that occur for a short period of time, but leave a long-lasting impact on conflict dynamics, such as the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP); the creation of pro-government militia forces, such as the Afghan Local Police (ALP); and periodic elections for the presidency, Provincial Council and Wolesi Jirga.

According to the participants, the primary reasons for the continuation of the armed conflict include corruption; weak Government; delayed or failed service delivery; delayed justice or no justice; arrest and detention of innocent people; and night-raids and house-searches conducted on apparently false intelligence. These factors create resentment among people toward the Government and push them toward the side of the insurgents. In addition, the provincial and district governments have failed to expand their legitimate control over the insecure territories, practically leaving the local population residing in the insecure districts without state protection.

The lack of a functioning justice system and impunity also have been seen as major drivers of conflict. According to participants, there are no Government judicial institutions in place in the insecure areas in the province, while justice institutions are often accused of corruption where they are available. Moreover, people complained of delays in judicial services and the failure of the justice system to bring perpetrators to account. As a result, the overall view of the residents of Maidan Wardak is that there is no rule of law and that a culture of impunity predominates in the province.

Participants indicated that the Government had lost its legitimacy as a result of widespread corruption throughout the Government system, combined with abuse of authority and impunity. A community leader from Nirkh district stated that:

*“Corruption and bribe-taking are very common and widespread practices of the government authorities. Even if someone wants to go to Hajj, the officials ask for bribe. Such practices make people unhappy with the*

*Government and increase the gap between the Government and communities.”*

The overall perception of the people is that the government institutions mandated to fight corruption are either unable or unwilling to take serious action against corruption or they are also corrupt themselves. Corruption is not only viewed as a practice infecting government structures, but as a vice that has been extended to society as a whole, making it an integral part of social relations. A member of a local *shura* from Maidan Shahr district said:

*“People don’t want to go to government bodies to resolve their disputes. They do not want to be looted by the Government as every official asks for bribes. Therefore, people approach the elders to settle their disputes, including criminal issues.”*

Counter-insurgency operations conducted by the international military, including arbitrary arrests and night-raids, allegedly often based on false intelligence and accompanied by culturally insensitive behaviour, have also angered the local population, motivating local people to change their support to the Taliban. In March 2013, the US Special Operations Forces (SOF) base in Nirkh district had to be closed in response to allegations that SOF had committed a number of human rights abuses, including unlawful killings and enforced disappearances of local civilians in Nirkh, Maidan Shahr and Jalrez districts. Local people had staged a number of violent protests against US forces, demanding their expulsion from the province.

A community elder from Sayedabad district said:

*“The international military don’t respect our culture and traditions when carrying out night raids. When they [international military] need to search a house in a village, ten surrounding other houses suffer. And at the end, they often find nothing.”*

In Wardak province, participants were of the opinion that the APRP had also been the cause of the worsening security situation, as they believed that the programme was led by people with their own vested interests who actually want a continuation of the armed conflict so that they can secure their political and personal goals. A civil society activist from Sayedabad district of Wardak province said:

*“The persons who run the peace process in my province are dishonest, unfair and incapable. They cannot go to insecure areas and talk with the Taliban. Peace in Wardak is very far away.”*

Participants viewed the APRP as a counter-insurgency programme, rather than a peace process programme, led by the Government to weaken the insurgents' networks by buying off some Taliban foot-soldiers. At the time of the People's Dialogue consultations in 2013-2014 in Wardak, only a small group of insurgents in Nirkh district had come forward to join the APRP. However, the APRP has reportedly failed to provide protection and employment to this small group of reintegrees, discouraging other would-be candidates to come forward and join the process.

Participants also questioned the role of the ALP in the ongoing armed conflict. In the event of a dispute between tribes or ethnicities, participants believed that ALP would take sides. Therefore, communities had opposed the ALP programme and called for strengthening ANPs instead.

Intra-ethnic disputes over public pastures and public and private lands is another driver of conflict in the province. For example, the longstanding and violent land dispute between Taliban-supported Kuchis and Hazaras in Beshud-I and II districts has yet to be resolved, despite that issuance of presidential decree addressing the problem. A local elder from Beshud district stated:

*"Discrimination between Hazara and Pashtun Kuchis and the lack of justice for the crimes committed respectively by the Hazaras and Kuchis during the clashes are the main causes for the continuation of Kuchi and Hazara violent armed clashes in Beshud districts."*

Participants also stated that lack of economic and social development that can offer job opportunities to young men in the communities constitutes another reason for the ongoing violence in the province. Maidan Wardak residents believed that the lack of a quality education also impeded their access to jobs. Unemployment and lack of economic opportunities have also contributed to insecurity, with a number of unemployed young men providing a pool of new recruits for the Taliban movement. A civil society activist from Sayedabad district stated that:

*"The lack of job opportunities among youth leads to extreme poverty and is an underlying cause of the conflict in Madan Wardak province."*

#### **IV. The Roadmap for Peace**

Participants identified in general the following local peacebuilding initiatives to address the root-causes of conflict and to bring sustainable peace in the province: strengthening and reforming local government institutions; implementing economic and social development projects; launching community-driven conflict and dispute-resolution mechanisms; and promoting meaningful participation of ordinary people in the peace and reconciliation process.

##### **Strengthening and reforming local government institutions**

Participants suggested that a provincial monitoring mechanism be established to monitor service-delivery and abuse of authority. In addition, a provincial anti-corruption mechanism should be formed to investigate and prosecute corrupt officials and punish them according to the law, in order to tackle corruption by governmental officials, which participants believed would contribute to building the legitimacy of the Government.

The Government should also conduct trainings for officials to improve service-delivery (ensuring a client-based approach) and professional skills to enhance their capacity to carry out their responsibilities and perform their duties.

To promote good governance, the concept of ‘punishment and reward’ should also be applied to punish those who fail to perform or abuse authority, and to reward those who carry out their responsibilities as expected. Qualified local people from Wardak must be given priority for any employment opportunities in government and the private sector in the province. A civil society activist from Maidan Shar district said:

*“By establishing good administration, eliminating corruption, ensuring timely delivery of governmental services and implementing the principles of punishment and rewards for civil servants will help to bring security and peace in Wardak.”*

##### **Implementing economic and social development projects**

According to the participants, the projects outlined below are ongoing throughout the province.

- Afghanistan National Solidarity Project-run projects - These are micro-income-generation projects, such as rehabilitation of local roads and canals, community forestry and fruit-gardening.

- Basic Health Services Project - Funded by the Swedish Committee in Afghanistan, it focuses on the establishment of health clinics across the province and on training midwives and health assistants.
- National Horticulture and Livestock Project - This focuses on fruit-planting, including apple gardens, creating grazing land (pastures) and allocating productive hybrid livestock, such as cows and chickens.

Participants stated, however, that these projects had not been able to offer enough jobs for young people in the province to prevent youths joining the Taliban movement for economic motives. Projects targeting modernization of the agriculture and livestock sectors, construction of electricity dams cum irrigation systems and exploitation of marble quarries in the province would be helpful in creating more jobs and generating more income. Such opportunities could eventually discourage youths from joining the insurgency. The participants were also concerned about the closure of the Band-e-Chak dam rehabilitation project due to the deteriorating security.

A civil society activist from Jalrez district of Wardak opined:

*“Creation of job opportunities for youths, development of agriculture sector and livestock and construction of electricity dams in the province and a balanced development approach in relatively secure and insecure districts will eventually help to bring lasting peace in the province.”*

On the other hand, participants welcomed the efforts to establish schools and religious madrasas, but pointed out that a number of schools did not have their own buildings and were operating in rented houses. Schools, in particular girls’ schools, also lack trained professional teachers, compromising the quality of education. Participants appreciated the ongoing midwives training programme in the province, but pointed out that the province still lacked professional health assistants and doctors.

### **Promoting human rights, rule of law and combating impunity**

The ongoing civilian casualties caused by both parties to the armed conflict have been a major concern for the residents in Wardak. Participants alleged that the ANSF and international military had carried out indiscriminate rocket attacks into villages in retaliation for Taliban attacks. As a result, civilians are those who pay the price as their houses are hit by rocket fire. Participants called on UNAMA to engage constructively with the ANSF and the international military forces to stop the use of such tactics. Also, the recommended that influential community and tribal elders, as well as the

*ulema*, should engage with AGEs on not using civilian houses and civilians as human shields, as well as to cease the use of IEDs.

Another big human rights concern in the province involves ongoing traditional practices harmful to women and girls. Women's lack of access to justice and lack of women's participation in political and public life are other concerns. Wardak is a conservative and insecure province that will demand more time and resources for a complete solution to these problems, but local government must start implementing appropriate plans and programmes, including the involvement of *ulema*, tribal and community elders to work with civil society and women's rights activists. In this regard, it is important to bring the perpetrators of violence against women to justice in accordance with the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) Law.

The Government and the private sector also must implement social-economic development projects in Maidan Wardak province to ensure access to jobs, tackle extreme poverty and guarantee the right to food and housing of the local population.

### **Promoting meaningful participation of ordinary people in the peace and reconciliation process**

The general view of the participants was that the ongoing APRP was not a comprehensive, transparent and accountable process, but that it actually fell short in bringing about sustainable peace. A national peace programme must therefore replace the APRP. A member of Maidan Shahr's local *shura* stated that:

*"The APRP is not a national peace process. Peace process must try to have peace with 'political and ideological opponents' and between 'perpetrators and victims who have suffered from the armed conflict'. But the APRP appears to be just an economic programme to buy the fighters. I do not support it."*

The participants were also critical of the Provincial Peace Council, claiming that its current membership was neither inclusive nor representative of the ethnicities in the province and that the PPC members lacked the ability to go to insecure areas and talk with the Taliban. It was strongly suggested that the Government consult with district and local *shuras*, as well as with Provincial Council members, before appointing anyone as a PPC member. Respected local religious elders can play a very important role in bringing peace in the province. For a successful peace programme, the current PPC

mechanism, its outreach activities and allocation of peace projects must become inclusive and ensure the participation of religious scholars, tribal elders, political leaders and youth.

### **Peace Process Actors**

It is key that youths, religious scholars, tribal elders and key political leaders are involved in mobilizing peace efforts for the province. People particularly called for increased participation of influential *ulemas*, tribal and community leaders, civil society and women in the Provincial Peace Committee, its outreach efforts and allocation of peace projects in the province. A community leader from Maidan Shahr stated:

*“Involvement of ordinary people, associations and civil societies and women in the peace efforts gives more strength to the cause of the peace. It also helps to galvanize wider community support towards the achievement of the peace.”*

### **V. People’s Recommendations**

To bring peace in Maidan Wardak province, the participants proposed an increased engagement in constructive dialogue among the Government, international actors, civil society and local *shuras* and offered a series of recommendations summarized below.

#### **Reform government institutions, tackle corruption and improve good governance**

- (1) Ensure merit-based recruitment, prioritizing qualified citizens for positions in the provincial and district government.
- (2) Provide trainings to improve government officials’ professionalism and service-delivery.
- (3) Establish a strong anti-corruption body and monitoring mechanism to track service-delivery and prevent abuse of authority by governmental officials.
- (4) Organize outreach meetings where communities can become involved in interactive and constructive dialogue with Government on the concerns and issues affecting them, in order to help mitigate the widening gap between Government and communities.

### **Support inclusivity in peace and reconciliation process**

- (1) The PPC's mechanisms, outreach initiatives and peace projects must be ethnically inclusive and geographically representative.
- (2) The PPC should also ensure participation of ordinary people and obtain the views of traditionally marginalized groups, including women, youths and ethnic minorities.
- (3) Ensure that mechanisms are in place to tackle the negative influence of spoilers in the peace and reconciliation process.
- (4) Ensure that perpetrators of serious past human rights violations/abuses are brought to justice.
- (5) Replace the APRP with a national peace process that targets political and armed opposition groups in a comprehensive way.

### **Promote human rights, rule of law and tackle impunity**

- (1) Promote dialogue between the ANSF and Taliban, including through religious elders, to reduce civilian casualties.
- (2) Implement programmes aimed at eliminating discrimination, including gender discrimination.
- (3) Bring perpetrators of VAW to justice in accordance with the EVAW Law.
- (4) Conduct awareness-raising campaign on women's rights and the EVAW Law covering a broad range of social groups, including religious leaders, community elders, youth groups, students and government officials.
- (5) Include such subjects as 'Human Rights' and 'Peace and Its Benefits' in the education curriculum of schools.
- (6) Build the capacity of the judiciary, prosecution and law enforcement.

### **Implement economic and social development projects**

- (1) Implement projects targeting modernization of agriculture and livestock, electricity dams cum irrigation systems and exploitation of marble quarries to create jobs.
- (2) Ensure equitable access of local communities to development assistance and enable people to monitor development projects in their areas.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Logar Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial road map for peace provides a summary of the key findings and issues which arose during three focus-group discussions, six in-depth individual interviews and six surveys of opinion carried out during phase II of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace (hereinafter the “People’s Dialogue”) with approximately 90 local residents in Logar province. Participants represented diverse social and political backgrounds, including community elders, teachers, religious scholars, former jihadi commanders and representatives of youth organizations and civil society.

The People’s Dialogue was designed to enable ordinary Afghan men, women and youth from across the country to engage in an inclusive peace process. Phase II of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace programme was initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult over 4,500 Afghan citizens with a view to developing 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province. In Logar province, the Civil Society Network conducted inclusive focus-group discussions, interviews and individual surveys of opinion.

This local road map for peace intends to provide, as comprehensively as possible, an analysis of local drivers of conflict, as well as to identify actionable solutions to help build sustainable peace and stability in Logar province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Logar province is a valley located to the southeast of Kabul, surrounded by rugged mountains to the east, south and southwest. Logar borders Maidan Wardak province to the west, Kabul to the north, Nangarhar to the east, and Ghazni and Paktia to the south. Its Azra district shares a 16-kilometre border with Pakistan’s volatile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Logar has seven districts: Pul-e-Alam (the provincial capital), Mohammad Agha, Baraki Barack, Azra, Kharwar, Charkha and Khushi.

According to the most recent (2011) estimates carried out by the Central Statistics Office, Logar province has a population of 360,900 persons. The population is comprised of 70 per cent Pashtuns and 30 per cent Tajiks. Most of the Tajik population lives in Charkh district (75 per cent of the district population), Khushi (50 per cent) and Baraki Barak (40 per cent). Twenty-three per cent of Mohamad Agha district and 20 per cent of Pul-e-

Alam district also belong to the Tajik ethnicity. Kharwar and Azra districts are homogenous Pashtun districts.

Logar province had historically been a stronghold of the Hizb-e-Islami, Jamiat-e-Islami, Harakat-e-Islami and Mahaz-e-Meli parties during the *Jihad* period. As such, it has borne witness to some of the most notorious battles of the *Jihad* and given the nickname 'the Gateway of *Jihad*'. Despite the ethnic heterogeneity of the province, political party affiliations do not overlap with ethnic identities. Jamiat-e-Islami and Hizb-e-Islami are the two major political parties in the province. A former *jihadi* commander said that:

*"During the Jihad time, we nicknamed Logar as 'Bab-al-Jihad' (the Gateway of Jihad). We received most of the military supplies for Mujahidins provided by Pakistan via Logar. Nowadays also, the Taliban use the Logar-Kabul highway for the same purposes."*

By 2005, a Taliban-led insurgency surfaced in Kahrwar, Charkh, Azra and Baraki Barak districts and later spilled over to Pul-e-Alam and Mohammad Agha districts.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

#### ***Types of conflict***

Broadly speaking, Logar province is experiencing two types of conflict: insurgency led by anti-government elements (AGEs), particularly the Taliban and the Haqqani Network, and disputes over land and other natural resources (between nomadic Kuchis and the inhabitants, as well as with the Mes Aynak Mine). Unlike in other provinces, Logar does not have any ethnic or tribal disputes between Tajiks and Pashtuns, nor within the Pashtun tribes themselves. Logar also does not witness conflict between Shia and Sunni along religious sectarian lines. Most of the population belongs to the Pashtun and Tajik ethnicities, and both ethnic groups can speak both national languages (Dari and Pashto). This has helped communities not to feel discriminated against on the basis of ethnic identities.

#### **AGE-led insurgency (Taliban and Haqqani Network)**

Since 2005, a Taliban-led insurgency has been growing day-by-day. First, it appeared in Azra, Kharwar, Charkh and Baraki Barak districts and then expanded to Pul-e-Alam, Khusi and Muhammad Agha districts. Most parts of Logar province are now under the control of the Taliban-led movement.

Logar province also hosts a very active presence of the Haqqani Network. The Haqqanis and Taliban do not seem to have any different ideological or strategic motivations, reportedly operating in a united way. The Haqqani Network is considered extremely strong in Logar province, as Jalaluddin Haqqani's brother's father-in-law is from Baraki Barak district. Some Taliban members in Logar province are also allegedly affiliated with Al Qaeda.

What really distinguishes the nature of the insurgency in Logar province is the presence of foreign fighters who have infiltrated local insurgent networks. Foreign fighters sometimes act against local interests. Their presence also limits the influence of local elders and religious scholars over local insurgent networks, particularly when elders have to negotiate with them to release abductees or to stop targeted killings of community elders. Afghan men and women in Logar emphasized that foreign fighters were ruthless killers who neither cared about local communities nor listened to local elders. They are, according to residents of Logar, "against any peace process".

Kharwar, Azra and Charkh districts fall mostly under the control of Taliban, except their District Administration Centres (DACs). No officials can use the road between Pul-e-Alam and Azra districts as it is also fully under the control of the Taliban. The alternative road to Azra district is from Hesarak district of neighbouring Nangarhar province, which is also under heavy Taliban influence, but officials use this route with armed escorts. Insecurity in Nangarhar province is also increasing, posing further challenges to using the road through Nangarhar to Azra district. Azra district's 16-kilometre border with Pakistan's Tribal Areas (FATA) offers foreign fighters and Taliban a secure infiltration route. Taliban and foreign fighters' incursions into Logar via Azra district are further facilitated by the weak presence and positioning of forces in Azra district. The district has only a nominal presence of 60 Afghan National Police (ANP), and recently around 100 Afghan Local Police have been recruited, trained and deployed. They are, however, also limited only to the DACs and surrounding areas. A member of a civil society association from Pul-e-Alam stated:

*"The strength of the Taliban in Logar has been steadily increasing day-by-day since 2005. Now they control most parts of the province. The Taliban have the power to occupy some of the district centres too, but they know they would not be able to hold on to them for long. In Charkh district, Afghan National Security Forces cannot even go to the bazaar in the district*

*headquarters. So, who is really in charge of the district? Most likely the Taliban are.”*

### **Disputes over land and other natural resources (Kuchi versus local residents)**

There are two major land disputes between Kuchis and local residents in Baraki Barak and Mohammad Agha districts. In Baraki Barak district, the Government has distributed land to Kuchis who migrated from Maidan Wardak and Bamyan provinces, and since then Hazaras and Kuchis have been involved in violent clashes with each other. In Mohammad Agha district, Kuchis who have migrated from other provinces have occupied land and pastures. This has generated competition over limited resources and potential for the exacerbation of conflict between the migrated Kuchis and local inhabitants. A civil society worker in Logar province explained:

*“Kuchi have been a cause for a number of armed clashes in Baraki Barak district. As Kuchis are Pashtuns and they provide shelter to the Taliban, the Taliban support them against locals. The Government also does not listen to us to help solve the issue.”*

### **Drivers of Conflict**

The participants of the People’s Dialogue in Logar identified the following factors as causing increased distance between the Government and communities and also driving conflict in the province.

### **Corruption**

Afghan men, women and youth in Logar province consistently pointed out that corruption was a main cause of many problems. They mentioned that corruption had crippled all aspects of governance and development in their province. It has frustrated communities and distanced them from their Government. People explained that, as a result of rampant corruption within law enforcement and the judiciary, people prefer to go to Taliban *shuras* or tribal *jirgas* for dispute-resolution. The general view was that the judiciary, which is supposed to tackle corruption and eradicate it, is itself involved in corruption. Some people asserted that Taliban *shuras* were not corrupt, and were instead transparent and quicker to deliver justice than Government institutions. Participants also complained of the lack of a mechanism in the province to tackle corruption. A tribal elder from Pul-e-Alam stated:

*“The Government is already too weak, and now also infected with corruption. No official or institutions are free of corruption. The whole government machinery is corrupt, and the total result is increased distance between the community, people and Government and increasing support for the Taliban.”*

### **Weak Governance**

Governmental officials at the provincial and district levels are reportedly not qualified and therefore unable to deliver good governance. As a result, participants explained that poor governance had caused unemployment, poverty and frustration in communities. Poor governance is also due to the constant change in leadership of the provincial government and inefficient donor support. Afghan men and women believed that poor governance and insecurity were interconnected. The outcome is that communities in Logar feel inclined to support the Taliban.

### **Role of the Afghan Local Police (ALP)**

While the ALP has helped to prevent a mass infiltration of insurgents (such as in Mohammad Agha and Azra districts), their constant unethical behaviour towards communities in Logar province has generated anger and resentment among local inhabitants. Afghan men and women in Logar province explained that the ALP was comprised of individuals who were formerly members of militias. Former militiamen who have been accused of past abuses are now in the ranks of the ALP. Some of these ALP members are allegedly continuing to commit crimes, although none has been arrested or prosecuted. People further claimed that the ALP took sides when ethnic or tribal disputes arose. A Pashtun elder from Baraki Barak district stated that the majority of ALP were Tajiks in Baraki Barak. If there are any disputes between Tajiks and Pashtuns, the ALP will take the side of the Tajiks. They also harass the Pashtun population. A former jihadi commander explained:

*“There are a number of unresolved issues between people in Logar since the time of the Jihad. Nowadays, some of those controversial Jihadists and Taliban regime supporters have become ALPs. It has made them powerful and they are now trying to take revenge against their longstanding rivals.”*

### **Shortage of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)**

Throughout the People’s Dialogue discussions, men, women and youth in Logar said that a shortage of ANSF, especially in Kharwar, Azra and Charkh

districts, had also encouraged the insurgency. Reportedly, there is no Afghan National Army (ANA) in these districts. In Azra district, around 100 ALP have recently been deployed, but only at the DAC. A local elder from Logar province stated:

*“In Charkh, Kharwar and Azra districts, the local government is present only at the District Administration Centre (DAC). And in Charkh district, even the DAC is under influence of the Taliban. In Mohammad Agha and Baraki Barak districts too, the Taliban has increased their activities. If the government doesn’t increase ANSF presence on time, the entire province is likely to fall under the Taliban’s control.”*

### **National and International Military Forces Airstrikes, Night Raids and Search Operations**

Afghan men and women in Logar province further emphasized concerns that pro-government forces (PGF) relied on night raids and airstrikes against insurgents, which cause civilian casualties and harm. These airstrikes and night raids, people said, have actually made communities more frustrated against their Government. Such actions distance local inhabitants from their Government, rather than make them feel more secure.

Many local inhabitants expressed anger against actions of the international military in Logar, including night raids and search operations, even when such operations only targeted members of the Taliban. Logaris claimed that, during night raids, foreign forces do not respect cultural sensitivities of Afghan people. A mullah from Logar province explained:

*“One of the most important causes for continuous expansion of the Taliban insurgency is the presence and behaviour of the international military with the local population. They enter into civilians’ houses and search them during the night which is totally against our culture – we will never accept it. For this very reason, people join or side with the Taliban.”*

Locals stated how they were against any kind of night raids, search operations and airstrikes. A local elder from Baraki Barak district recalled:

*“In June 2012, Americans bombarded the Sajawand village. They killed 18 civilians. They killed women and children. In 2013, they bombarded a civilian’s house. They don’t care about us. Our lives do not have any value for them. If they continue to kill us, we will fight against them to the end just as we did against the Russians.”*

Many participants clarified that when they said they were against night raids and airstrikes and therefore against the Government that this did not mean that they necessarily supported the Taliban. They only sought peace. Communities have been suffering from both parties to the armed conflict; for example, Charkh and Baraki Barak districts have witnessed a number of crossfire incidents between the Taliban and pro-government forces, with civilians caught in between. Civilians also suffer casualties because the Taliban use civilian houses as bases. Locals said that cannot oppose the Taliban as, if they do, the Taliban issue death threats. A local tribal elder from Logar province stated that:

*“No one cares about us. We cannot stop the Taliban from using our houses. If we do that, they kill us. When we go to national security forces to request them not to fire rockets at our village, they ask us why we allow Taliban to stay at our houses and in our village. We are suffering from both sides. On one side, the Taliban accuse us of supporting the local government and on the other side the government accuse us of supporting the Taliban.”*

#### **IV. The Roadmap for Peace**

Throughout the People’s Dialogue consultations in Logar, people proposed recommendations which they believed would assist in bringing stability, long-lasting peace and a better future to their province. Afghan men, women and youth in Logar focused on four main areas:

- (1) fundamental reform of local government institutions (civilian and military);
- (2) review and reform of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme’s (APRP) policies and implementation, as well as Provincial Peace Council membership;
- (3) reinvigorated economic and development opportunities; and
- (4) strengthening the rule of law and human rights at the provincial level, including in peace efforts.

#### **Fundamental Reforms of Local Government institutions**

For good governance, Afghan men, women and youth in Logar suggested that the appointment of provincial and district government leadership and other directors of various line departments should not be based on political, ethnic or family affiliations. They also spoke out against pre-determined educational qualifications and professional experience criteria. For the posts of provincial and district governors, participants desired

elections to be held with the participation of all. A civil society member from Pul-e-Alam stated:

*“The provincial governor is the president of the province like the president at the country level. Therefore, the provincial governor must be elected by the people. How can local communities accept and support a person who is just selected and appointed by the national government, without any consultation with community elders?”*

Dialogue participants in Logar province also urged a more robust fight against corruption. The local government must be held accountable for its expenses and activities, and there must be more transparency. People and media must have access to information in a timely manner. To combat corruption, reforms should first be introduced to the judiciary and law-enforcement institutions. The government must also ensure that corruption is effectively punished. This will help regain the trust of communities and help to narrow the operational space for the insurgency, ultimately bringing sustainable peace. A local elder from Pul-e-Alam stated:

*“Up until now, we have not seen any judge, prosecutor or police officer arrested and prosecuted on corruption charges. If they would be prosecuted, it would set a good precedent for others and, eventually, help to combat corruption.”*

Dialogue participants also mentioned that the security sector could benefit from reform. Local elders and communities must be consulted in the ALP recruitment process. The ALP must also be trained to respond more professionally to the needs of Logar communities. The ANP leadership and the military prosecutor should further ensure that ALP who commit crimes are duly arrested and prosecuted. The government must also increase ANP *tashkil* (staffing list) in Logar province. As for the ANA, the People’s Dialogue participants decided they must take more disciplined precautionary measures when engaging with insurgents during crossfire incidents. This will help reduce civilian casualties. ANA members must not use indiscriminate rocket-fire directed into villages. In general, Afghan men, women and youth expressed an overall satisfaction with the performance of the ANA. Summarizing dissatisfaction with the ALP, a local Pashtun elder from Baraki Barak district questioned:

*“For them [ALP], Pashtuns are Taliban because all of them grow beards and wear turbans. Why can’t the ALP, which is made up of people from ‘next door’, do not respect the rights of the locals?”*

Participants suggested that the international military forces should focus on training and providing other technical and logistical support to national security forces, rather than directly taking part in night raids, searches and airstrikes. International military presence in operations makes people upset and, as a result, communities then turn to support the Taliban. A local elder from Logar province reflected:

*“I would say that the ANSF does have the capacity to fight against the Taliban. What they need more of is modern equipment and training. It is the international military which can provide such support to the ANSF.”*

### **Review and Reform of APRP Policies and Implementation and PPC Membership**

Participants throughout Logar province shared the view that the ongoing APRP programme was a failure. They also saw the current Provincial Peace Council (PPC) entrusted to implement the APRP as dysfunctional. Participants explained that the PPC was neither inclusive nor respected by the Logar community at large. A local elder from Pul-e-Alam district stated:

*“The current PPC members cannot negotiate with the Taliban. Most of them belong to one political party and are not neutral, so they cannot even initiate contact with the Taliban. The Government must replace such people with respected local religious scholars and tribal elders who can initiate negotiations with the Taliban.”*

The PPC must also conduct more public-awareness programmes in the province focused on peacebuilding, while PPC members must maintain constant communication with local communities. The APRP must ensure community participation in all its efforts. A youth working with an NGO in Pul-e-Alam said:

*“The APRP programme should be transformed from a government-led programme to a community-based programme. It will then enable every community member to participate. This will force the Taliban to come for peace.”*

### **New Economic and Development Opportunities**

Unemployment leading to poverty was highlighted as one of main root-causes for increasing violence and insurgency in the province. The action appearing below were identified by Logaris as opportunities to generate jobs and enhance security.

### *Ensure legal exploitation of mineral reserves in the province*

People said there were two kinds of mineral reserves in Logar: commercially-viable huge mines, such as the Mes Aynak Mine (copper), and small-scale mineral deposits. The Government should develop a clear plan of action to exploit these mines, to help create employment and income for local communities. However, local inhabitants claimed that it was powerbrokers who had been involved in extractive operations and that the Taliban also received a share, but that local communities did not benefit from the ongoing illegal extractions. A youth from Pul-e-Alam said that:

*“Powerbrokers, together with some high-ranking officials, are involved in illegal mineral extractions. Government must stop them. And it must come up with a mines extraction plan that is also beneficial to the communities and implement it.”*

### *Create agricultural opportunities*

The economy of the province is an agrarian one, in view of its fertile valleys, plentiful water resources and abundance of orchards. Participants suggested that the Government implement some projects to create water dams/reservoirs to conserve water for times of drought, so that the farmers may cultivate more land and produce more, even when faced with drought.

Although the province produces a variety of fruits, there is no fruit-processing factory. People also suggested that the Government develop new agriculture and horticulture programmes in the province, to create jobs and help to eradicate poverty, with a view to discouraging youths from joining insurgent groups and contributing to peace in Logar.

### **Strengthening Rule of Law and Human Rights**

The province has a weak record in the rule of law and human rights. Upholding the rule of law and human rights will help promote good governance and peace in the province. People stated they were “tired” of weak government and the existing situation with poor rule of law and weak human rights, feeding the vicious cycles of violence. A youth from Baraki Barak district stated that:

*“We constantly live in fear, pain and stress. We live with threats from both sides of the armed conflict. We are caught in the crossfire. We want them to consider us as humans. We are helpless, we cannot protect ourselves.”*

The ANSF was also viewed as lacking a basic understanding of human rights.

People said the ANSF must be trained on human rights and then respect them. A local elder from Logar province said that:

*“Government, especially the ANSF, has to know that they are the one who protect human rights. They must know what the human rights are and why and how they have to respect and protect them.”*

The government must also ensure that violators of human rights enjoy no amnesty during any peace process. They must be arrested and prosecuted. A female participant from Logar province stated:

*“PPC members or anyone else involved in the peace process must know about the concepts, principles and values of human rights. They have to respect women’s rights, in particular. Peace without respect for human rights, including women’s rights, is incomplete and unsustainable.”*

## **V. People’s Recommendations**

Throughout the consultative process, people proposed the following general recommendations with a view to engaging the government, international actors and civil society in a constructive dialogue on addressing root-causes of conflict in Logar province.

### **Fundamental Reforms of Local Government Institutions**

On good governance:

1. The appointment of the leadership of the province should not be based on political affiliations, but on the principles of merit and qualifications.
2. There should be a real mechanism to tackle corruption.
3. Government has to improve the local mechanism for conflict-resolution and involve elders in the peace process.

On security-sector reform:

1. Fundamental reforms in the ALP programme and effective supervision of their activities to ensure accountability.
2. Increase ANP and ANA numbers, as well as deploy the ANA in all districts.
3. ANSF, especially the ANA, must protect civilians.
4. International military forces must not be involved in operations, but rather provide support to the ANSF.

### **Strengthening Rule of Law and Human Rights**

1. Ensure increased public awareness about human rights principles and values.
2. Conduct awareness training for the ANSF and PPC on human rights and humanitarian law.
3. Take measures to improve the implementation of laws, uphold the rule of law and ensure accountability for human rights abuses and violations.

### **Review and Change PPC Membership and APRP Policy and Implementation**

1. Dissolve the current PPC and appoint respected individuals, including religious and tribal leaders, who can negotiate with the Taliban.
2. Review the current strategy of the APRP and PPC.
3. Make the process inclusive and representative of civil society, women, youth, *ulema*, tribal elders, and influential people.
4. Organize a number of outreach programmes on peace to galvanize support from the communities for the peace process.

### **New Economic and Development Opportunities**

1. Promote strategic investments in mining projects, including in small-scale projects.
2. Harness water supplies for the development of agriculture.

Develop agriculture and horticulture programmes in the province, such as fruit-processing factories, for the development of horticulture.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Ghazni Province**

## I. Introduction

This provincial roadmap for peace represents a summary of key findings and issues raised in the focus group discussions, individual interviews and opinion surveys carried out during the consultation process in Ghazni province. The consultations were conducted by civil society organizations, facilitated by the UNAMA Human Rights Unit. The consultations took place as part of Phase II of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace program (hereinafter the “People’s Dialogue”) initiated by 11 civil society networks, including the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult 4,500 Afghan citizens from across Afghanistan with a view to developing 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

## II. Provincial profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context

Ghazni Province is located in southeastern Afghanistan, bordering Paktya and Logar to the northeast, Paktika to the southeast, Zabul to the southwest, Daikundi and Bamyan to the northwest and Wardak to the north. The province covers an area of 23,378 square kilometers. Over half of the province (60%) is mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain, mainly inhabited by members of the Hazara ethnic group, while just over one-third (36%) is made up of flat land, mostly populated by Pashtun tribes. There are also Tajik and Kuchi minorities in the province. Ghazni lies on the strategically and economically vital Kabul-Kandahar road (known as Highway One), and has historically functioned as a major trade center between these cities.

The local population is estimated to be around one million people. Ghazni’s economy is mainly based on agriculture, but is also rich in minerals yet to be exploited. There are only two sizable factories – for salt and chocolate. The majority of commercial activity is related to trade in agriculture products and livestock, with agriculture being the major source of income for 57 per cent of households. Remittances from Afghan migrants working abroad also constitutes one of the major sources of income.

During the 2014 presidential elections, polling stations in several districts did not open due to the presence of AGEs and related insecurity.

Ghazni province was chosen as the 2013 Capital of Islamic Culture in the Asian Region by the International Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO).

### III. Conflict analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict

#### **Conflict types**

Most participants identified the main conflict in Ghazni as being between the Afghanistan Government (supported by the international military forces (IMF)) and AGEs (mostly Taliban). In addition, participants reported that inter-ethnic tensions often provoke violence at the local level, and AGEs and Government officials often utilize these tensions to further their own interests.

Participants also viewed regional powers as being active in the conflict in Ghazni. The influence of foreign countries in the war in Afghanistan, most notably Pakistan, was a constant concern among participants, who often saw Afghans as the victims of a struggle among external actors. In the words of a male participant from Deh Yak district:

*“Foreign people create problems and division among tribes. This is not the war of Afghanistan. Who is providing the weapons that are fired in Afghanistan? It means this is not an internal conflict.”<sup>5</sup>*

#### **Progress achieved in Ghazni since 2001**

Most participants agreed on the directions in which Afghanistan has progressed in the last decade: education, technology and communications, the reconstruction of roads and other infrastructure, development, women’s rights and the creation of ANSF come consistently on the first place. Other fields where Afghanistan has improved, according to the participants, are international relations, economic development, removing the Taliban from the Government, freedom of expression, transition of security from international forces to the Afghan Government, building democratic institutions, and health.

Participants almost unanimously (90per cent) pointed to education as the area where Ghazni has seen the most significant progress. Two thirds also praised the progress achieved in the reconstruction of roads and other infrastructures. Other fields remain more disputed, with only 10 per cent saying there was an improvement in freedom of expression and only 5 per cent mentioning improved security.

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<sup>5</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Deh Yak district.

However, some of these achievements need to be carefully assessed. Even though participants believed that the Afghan education has dramatically improved in the last decade, they still said that the lack of education, “ignorance” and illiteracy are one of the main causes of the conflict both at the local and national level.

In the case of the progress achieved in development, although many participants mentioned that Ghazni is more developed than it was a decade ago, they still consistently expressed that poverty and unemployment, and lack of opportunities, continue fuelling the conflict in the province.

Finally, despite one third of participants in the survey responded that the creation and strengthening of the ANSF is one of Afghanistan’s major achievements in the last decade, many believed that ANSF’s weakness is still one of the causes of the conflict in Ghazni.

#### ***Perception of security in Ghazni province***

Although, during the consultations only 5per cent of participants mentioned security as an achievement for Ghazni province, and 55per cent believed that Ghazni has never been secure in recent times, participants from some districts said that security has significantly improved in their areas,<sup>6</sup> also contributing to improvements in many fields:

*“Many changes happened in the last years. During the Taliban era, schools were closed. Now they are open. The bazaar used to be closed too, now it is open. Government officials are able now to go to their houses, unlike before. Clinics are now open.”<sup>7</sup>*

The deployment of ANSF is said to have generally a positive impact on security and the enjoyment of human rights in Ghazni:

*“The impact of ANSF is very positive. Areas under their control are peaceful. They managed to reopen girls’ schools. As there is no building for the girl’s school, they are using the mosque. Previously there did not use to be a clinic in the province. Now there are also*

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<sup>6</sup> As this opinion was recorded in 2013/2014 it reflects the perceptions regarding security at that time, but it has to be noted that the security across Afghanistan has deteriorated significantly since 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Focus group held with male youth from Andar district.

*medicines available. Access to health services improved significantly. Access to education too.”<sup>8</sup>*

However should be noted that some participants said that they felt more secure during the Taliban rule. Together with the open discussion held with participants, this view can be interpreted in the sense that people often perceived the Taliban era as a period when rights were restricted (particularly women’s rights and freedom of movement) and non-Pashtuns were discriminated against, but less marked by armed confrontation and security “incidents” (IEDs, ground engagements, etc.) than during the current period. One participant also pointed at the lack of balance in the sharing of the power among Afghanistan’s ethnic groups during the Taliban era:

*“During the Taliban era security was very good, but unfortunately the power was at the hands of one nation,<sup>9</sup> otherwise the Taliban government did not have any problem.”<sup>10</sup>*

Half of participants said that they believe all ANSF and international military forces are important for ensuring security in Ghazni. Among ANSF, the ANP is the body that is seen as key by most participants. However, in the open discussions participants praised mostly the ALP as they believed the ALP deployment has been particularly key in improving security in their districts:

*“Only the ALP improved security in the area. Without them, there was no security, no access to education and health.”<sup>11</sup>*

*“ALP is at the first line of fire. If there is fighting, the ALP is there. After that, the ANP will come and arrest people. But the ALP is much more influential. They come to the village, talk to the people, sit with them... so their relationship with people is very close.”<sup>12</sup>*

The ALP’s proximity to the communities they protect is seen as a key advantage by many participants:

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<sup>8</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Qarabagh district.

<sup>9</sup> Taliban predominantly belong to the Pashtun ethnic group.

<sup>10</sup> Anonymous participant in survey: male from Gelan district, 20-50 years old group.

<sup>11</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Qarabagh district.

<sup>12</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Deh Yak district.

*“ALP is different from other ANSF in the sense that they are local people. We can share information with them, we know each other and understand each other very easily. They know the people and the region, so it is much easier for them to control the area.”<sup>13</sup>*

However, some participants complained about cases of abuse by the ALP:

*“ALP generally is very good. But some of their members should be removed because they are misusing their authority. They arbitrarily interfere with the communities’ life. Usually it is people without jobs who join [ALP]. Many were involved in criminal activities before. Majority used to be fighters, either on the Government side or with the Taliban against the Government. Many join for taking revenge for family grievances. [...] They are also involved in corruption. Friends and family members of ALP join ALP operations in order to pursue their own interests.”<sup>14</sup>*

### **Women’s participation in public affairs in Ghazni**

When asked whether conditions in Ghazni are ready for women’s participations in public affairs, 40 per cent responded positively and 60 per cent responded negatively. Among the reasons participants pointed to a conservative local cultural norms, the lack of security and to the Taliban presence and influence.

A female participant described how the local culture restrains women from participating in public affairs:

*“There are many constrains for women in our society, restrictive traditions by which we, the women, are totally excluded. Women in the districts are under pressure. There is no education opportunity for them, and working out of our homes is impossible. Men whose wives are working in the Government or other institutions are under shame and disdain, and this provokes many problems in our society.”<sup>15</sup>*

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<sup>13</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Deh Yak district.

<sup>14</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Qarabagh district.

<sup>15</sup> Focus group held with women from Qarabagh district.

## **Drivers of Conflict**

Despite the diversity in gender, age and place of origin of participants, the People's Dialogue revealed a broadly shared understanding of the causes of the conflict in Ghazni specifically and in Afghanistan more broadly. Most participants saw a clear link between local and national dynamics of the conflict, and identified the presence of AGEs, poverty and unemployment, lack of education, corruption, weakness of ANSF and of Government institutions, foreign interference, and inter-ethnic tensions as being major contributing factors.

Many participants viewed interference by neighbouring countries as a major cause of conflict whilst others blamed corruption and injustice among Government officials. Almost one-third of participants pointed to the Government's lack of capacity to provide security.

### ***AGE presence***

Many participants identified the widespread presence of AGEs in Ghazni as the most important factor driving the conflict stating that: *"Without AGEs, there will be security"*.<sup>16</sup> They blamed AGEs for committing human rights abuses against civilians, including extra-judicial executions, suicide attacks, abductions and harassment. Participants viewed these actions as being at the heart of the armed conflict and the main cause of suffering for the civilian population.

Many participants pointed also to the lack of a *"peace agenda"* among AGEs as perpetuating the conflict: *"Taliban do not have an agenda for peace. They only think of fighting. Otherwise they would have behaved differently in the last ten years."*<sup>17</sup>

### ***Poverty and unemployment***

Most participants believed that poverty and unemployment are one of the main causes of the conflict in Ghazni, with a lack of economic opportunities reportedly encouraging young men to join the insurgency:

*"[P]eople are very poor, so they fight as a way to obtain money."*<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Focus group held with male youth from Andar district.

<sup>17</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Deh Yak district.

<sup>18</sup> Focus group held with male youth from Andar district.

*“Unemployment makes it easier to recruit fighters for the insurgency. When people are occupied in business and jobs and can provide for their families, they do not resort to fighting.”<sup>19</sup>*

According to a male participant from Andar, people who migrate from rural areas to the city are particularly vulnerable to AGEs recruitment:

*“The lack of job opportunities makes it easier for people from the villages to be recruited for insurgency. They come to Ghazni from villages, 15-20 days pass, they do not find anything [any job], so they will join the AGEs.”<sup>20</sup>*

### **Lack of education**

Most participants identified the lack of access to a formal education as one of the main causes of the conflict:

*“[I]f there is no education, it is easy for AGEs to work on the minds of the young generations and make them turn towards them.”<sup>21</sup>*

The lack of education has two negative effects – it not only makes young people more vulnerable to indoctrination and radicalization, but also limits their access to employment, increasing the likelihood that they will join the insurgency to earn an income.

It is interesting to note an apparent contradiction in participants’ responses on the subject of education. Whilst many participants stated that they view improvements in education as the greatest achievement in Afghanistan over the last decade, the lack of education opportunities also came up frequently as a driver for the conflict.

### **Corruption and lack of the rule of law**

Participants viewed the Afghanistan Government as inefficient and corrupt, which they believed undermined its legitimacy and turned part of the population towards the insurgency. Participants also expressed discontent with the justice system alleging that officials often demand bribes. Furthermore, many stated that nepotism in Government appointments creates grievances that are exploited by the insurgency.

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<sup>19</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Qarabagh district.

<sup>20</sup> Focus group held with male youth from Andar district.

<sup>21</sup> Focus group held with female high school and university students in Ghazni city.

*“High level officials hire only their relatives, often not qualified, while qualified poor people do not get jobs [in the public administration]. This creates grievances and encourages conflict.”<sup>22</sup>*

A widespread perception of nepotism exacerbates a general feeling of discontent over the lack of opportunities for many young people. According to one male participant from Deh Yak:

*“The main problem is the lack of education. Most of the people do not have a formal education. But the few people who do have degrees cannot find job opportunities. For example, I just graduated from university, but I am working as a farmer. Powerful people keep all the jobs to themselves. So this is why young people join the insurgency!”<sup>23</sup>*

In addition, many participants blamed the weakness of the Afghan Government and its incapacity to enforce the rule of law as one of the main causes of the conflict. Many believe that weak government results in a loss of trust amongst the population and therefore to a wider support for AGEs. This is particularly visible, and has particularly grave consequences, in the case of the justice system:

*“The Government is very weak. It is unable to solve people’s problems. For example, if someone comes from a village to the district center seeking help to solve a problem, they [the Government officials] demand bribes and are often unable to solve it. They just ask for money from the person asking for help. But if the concerned person goes to the Taliban, in no time and without asking for money, they [Taliban] solve the problem immediately. [...] One of the typical cases that people bring to Taliban courts are land disputes. The Government would take years to solve these disputes.”<sup>24</sup>*

### **Inter-ethnic disputes**

Many participants noted that tensions among ethnic groups provoke violence in Ghazni. Participants said that ethnic groups which are involved in violent disputes often seek support for their cause either from the

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<sup>22</sup> Focus group held with male youth from Andar district.

<sup>23</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Deh Yak district.

<sup>24</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Deh Yak district.

Government or from AGEs, so local disputes may then become an integral part of the broader conflict.

### ***Foreign interference***

Most participants mentioned the influence of neighboring countries as one of the main factors fuelling the conflict. According to participants, those countries pursue their own economic interests by contributing to the instability in Afghanistan. Many accused Pakistan of providing safe havens to AGEs to prepare attacks on Afghanistan, and some claimed that anti-Afghan Government propaganda has been disseminated among Afghan refugees in Pakistan:

*“Most of the people [Afghan refugees in Pakistan] are uneducated. They do not understand the current situation. For instance, they can be easily manipulated to join the insurgency. [...] I was in Pakistan and saw Afghans in the refugee camps. There is a lot of anti-[Afghan] Government propaganda there. If you listened to that information... anyone would wear a jacket with explosives and blow themselves up against the [Afghan] Government.”<sup>25</sup>*

Some participants also blamed the international military forces for contributing to the instability in order to ensure their continuous presence in Afghanistan. However, other participants disagreed, and demanded a more active engagement by the international military forces. A female student from Nawur district believed that *“if the international forces act like the first time, when they removed the Taliban from power in Afghanistan, they could bring peace very easy.”<sup>26</sup>* Another participant stated that the withdrawal of international troops from Afghanistan will not resolve the conflict: *“Without the presence of the international military, fighting will continue forever. There is no chance for it to finish without the help of international forces. Troops leaving is not a solution.”<sup>27</sup>*

### ***Discrimination***

Discrimination is also perceived as a major driver of the conflict. According to one male participant from Qarabagh:

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<sup>25</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Deh Yak district.

<sup>26</sup> A female student from Nawur district, 15-20 years old group.

<sup>27</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Deh Yak district.

*“Inequality in political representation is also a cause of conflict. Certain tribes have more access to Government posts, while others have no representation and remain poor. Persons in the Government do not distribute resources equally, they favor their own people, creating grievances among those who are excluded.”<sup>28</sup>*

### **Land disputes**

Many participants also mentioned local disputes provoked by competition over access to resources (water, agricultural land and forestry). Government officials and AGEs reportedly often support one of the tribes in the dispute to pursue their own interests, instead of promoting understanding and peaceful cohabitation among the confronting groups, and thus exacerbate violent conflicts.

### **Harmful traditional practices**

Certain cultural practices can also provoke violent conflict. A male participant from Qarabagh explained it as follows:

*“Bad traditions are another cause of the conflict. Sharia law is used very strictly. People can be killed just by being accused of not dressing according to the Islamic tradition.”<sup>29</sup>*

Participants also mentioned early marriages, forced marriages and other harmful traditions as provoking tension at the local level and contributing to the overall violence in Ghazni.

### **Lack of sufficient madrassas in Ghazni**

In focus groups discussions, participants consistently stated that the lack of adequate religious schools in Ghazni encourages parents to send their children to Pakistan for religious education. Unfortunately, according to participants, some of these children return to the province trained as militants, bringing radical ideas and encouraging people to support the insurgency.

Male participants from Qarabagh explained the impact of children going abroad for religious education as follows:

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<sup>28</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Qarabagh district.

<sup>29</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Qarabagh district.

*“People in Qarabagh are peaceful and very much into religion and Sharia law. That is why they send children abroad to get religious education. And this is where they get military training. [...] Religious students or Taliban do not know about weapons when they are being schooled in Afghanistan. When they are 15 they go to Pakistan and they get training in using weapons in the madrassas there. So when they come back they are skilled fighters. They go to Pakistan because there is no higher religious education in Afghanistan. If we had this here, they [children pursuing further religious education] would not go to Pakistan and would not learn to use weapons.”<sup>30</sup>*

### **Human rights violations by ANSF and international military forces**

Some participants said that human rights violations committed by ANSF also turn people towards the insurgency:

*“The behavior of security forces is not so good, due to the lack of training, so this also pushes people to join the insurgency.”<sup>31</sup>*

Othersexplained that part of the dissatisfaction with operations conducted by the international military forces stems from their lack of cultural awareness \:

*“The international military forces sometimes have carried out military operations without considering our traditions, demonstrating unawareness of our culture. This has caused great dissatisfaction among the people in this province.”<sup>32</sup>*

### **Other causes**

In addition to the aforementioned causes of the conflict, participants in the survey also identified the following other issues as conflict drivers in Ghazni: use of drugs, lack of unity, lack of cooperation and dialogue among social groups.

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<sup>30</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Qarabagh district.

<sup>31</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Deh Yak district.

<sup>32</sup> Focus group held with women from Muqur district.

*“The use of drugs also promotes conflict. Addiction to hashish and other substances makes people resort to insurgency to find money for buying drugs”.*<sup>33</sup>

#### IV. Road Map for Peace

Almost all participants believed in a broad, holistic concept of peace, comprising an absence of war and violence, justice and equality. Only one in ten participants responded that their idea of peace is limited to the absence of war and violence.

A female participant from Jaghuri district explained her understanding of peace as follows:

*“Peace means that all people can work freely in the country, and no one is forced to leave Afghanistan.”*<sup>34</sup>

#### **Strategies to resolve conflict and local disputes in Ghazni province**

Most participants view the conflict at the provincial level as an integral part of the broader Afghan national conflict:

*“If peace was achieved only in Ghazni province, it would not have any benefit. Peace should be achieved generally for all provinces of Afghanistan. Until neighboring countries stop interfering in Afghanistan, reconciliation will not happen in Afghanistan.”*<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, proposals to achieve peace and security at the local/provincial level reflect measures that need to be primarily taken at the national and international levels and implemented in the provinces, such as fighting corruption, or putting an end to the interference of foreign countries. Some of the proposed measures, however, can be applied locally to respond to the specific needs of Ghazni.

#### ***Fighting corruption and promoting accountability***

Participants highlighted as a priority the need to fight corruption and promote accountability at the provincial level. As discussed above, corrupt government officials jeopardize people’s trust in the Government, create grievances and hinder social and economic development, often turning

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<sup>33</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Qarabagh district.

<sup>34</sup> A female from Jaghuri district.

<sup>35</sup> Focus group held with women from Ghazni city.

people to the insurgency, so addressing these grievances issue was seen as key to promoting peace.

### ***Accountable Government and elected representatives***

Many participants mentioned the need to further strengthen the Government in Ghazni in order to achieve peace and security in the province. A stronger and more accountable Government will be able to provide security and services to communities, and also to prevent cases of corruption and abuse. A key area is the administration of justice, where calls were made for radical improvements in order to ensure adequate access to justice and prevent people appealing to the Taliban courts instead.

Very few participants said that they are satisfied with the work done by Ghazni Members of Parliament (MPs) in the service of peace and security. Most people, 70 per cent, said that they do not believe MPs have worked for peace and security and the promotion of human rights. The main arguments focused on MPs serving their own interests, allegedly been elected by fraud and not able to advocate for peace due to being the target of AGEs.

### ***Improve development***

Participant consistently mentioned the need to improve development including providing employment, education, etc. as essential factors to promote peace in the province.

Some participants proposed development efforts to be focused on agriculture. A male participant from Qarabagh district said:

*“If everyone had lands, and was provided with training and resources for farming, they would not resort to violence.”<sup>36</sup>*

Many participants also proposed programs to promote employment, including vocational training, computer courses, languages courses, and income-generating projects. Many mentioned that those programs should have a specific focus on women.

Participants called on the local Government to be more involved in development. They identified NGOs as being the most in

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<sup>36</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Qarabagh district.

reconstruction in Ghazni, while the local Government authorities came on the second place, and the United Nations on third.

### ***Peace dialogue/negotiations with AGEs***

Participants frequently expressed support for the need to promote dialogue among the parties to the conflict. However, they also said that such negotiations cannot affect the progress achieved on women's rights. One participant stated that, for a dialogue process to take place, regional powers would have to be involved to pressure AGEs to stop the fight and join the negotiation table:

*“Only the Government is interested in dialogue. But AGEs take orders from across the border. If they are told to talk with the Government, they will. When the support ceases, the war will finish immediately. They will accept to join the peace dialogue.”<sup>37</sup>*

### ***Ensure impartiality and inclusiveness of the peace process***

In general, participants showed a very low degree of satisfaction with the activities of the Provincial Peace Council (PPC). Criticism focused on PPC's current membership, its lack of impact, its limited visibility, accusations of nepotism, its incapacity to incorporate AGEs into the peace process and on the fact that sometimes members have worked for their own interests instead of serving the PPC's mandate. The inability of the PPC to access certain areas due to insecurity was also one of the concerns often mentioned.

*“The provincial center of the PPC is in Ghazni, they do not visit the districts. So people in the villages do not know about the peace initiatives.”<sup>38</sup>*

*“We didn't see their activities in our province; they are sleeping and waiting for their monthly payment.”<sup>39</sup>*

Many participants believe that the current PPC membership lacks the necessary impartiality to attract AGEs to the peace process:

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<sup>37</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Deh Yak district.

<sup>38</sup> Focus group held with male youth from Andar district.

<sup>39</sup> A female from Ghazni city.

*“[T]he Taliban do not trust this Council [PPC]. They will never participate. The Council is a target for the Taliban. If they find anyone from the Council they will kill them.”<sup>40</sup>*

Participants called for better inclusivity of the PPC, including tribal elders, in order to achieve more influence and improve the perception of its impartiality.

### ***Involving local mediators in conflict resolutions***

Many participants supported the idea that local mediation initiatives are crucial in achieving peace in the province. Although mediation structures need to be revitalized, many stated that history proves that such initiatives can bring the parties to the conflict together.

In the words of a female participant from Qarabagh district:

*“In my opinion there is only one way, the local shuras and tribal elders can engage in talks with the Taliban, otherwise no body or institution can bring peace; no one else has the ability”.*<sup>41</sup>

### ***Raising awareness to promote peace***

Many participants proposed awareness campaigns in order to promote peace in Ghazni. Tribal elders and religious scholars are often mentioned as the most suitable actors to carry out the campaign.

### ***Solving inter-tribal tensions, including land disputes***

Most participants said that it is essential to solve land disputes in order to achieve peace in Ghazni. Tribes and ethnic groups engaged in land disputes reportedly often turn to AGEs or the Government for support, who often respond to such requests with providing weapons or other types of help, fuelling the disputes instead of contributing to the inter-ethnic and inter-tribal reconciliation. Solving these conflicts is according to most participants indispensable to achieve peace in Ghazni.

### ***Strengthening ANSF***

Participants consistently said that stronger ANSF are needed to maintain security in Ghazni. Many people felt that security improved with the deployment of ANSF (particularly ALP) in their areas. Participants agreed

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<sup>40</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Deh Yak district.

<sup>41</sup> Focus group held with women from Qarabagh district.

that t ANSF strengthening should not only mean increased staffing<sup>42</sup> and better equipment<sup>43</sup>, but also better awareness on human rights and improved accountability systems so that cases of abuse are prevented and do not jeopardize the support for ANSF among communities. Participants further demanded that officials who commit abuses to be removed from ANSF.

### ***Strengthening the media***

Stronger media not only strengthens democracy by facilitating the monitoring and criticism of the Government's performance, but also increases people's awareness and can protect them from radicalization.

A male participant from Qarabagh explained it as follows:

*"Three-four years ago the Taliban had the support of the community. But now we have a stronger Government, and due to the fact that people have wider access to media, they are more aware, and they do not support the Taliban. Chechens, Arabs, Pakistanis are coming as Taliban because local support has decreased a lot."*<sup>44</sup>

### ***Development of local madrassas***

Many participants stressed the importance of developing local madrassas in all districts, as a means to prevent children going to madrassas in Pakistan, where they can be "indoctrinated", and even recruited for suicide attacks. The development of local madrassas in the region could be an opportunity to tackle violent extremism and improve the awareness among religious leaders on women's rights.

### ***Stopping foreign intervention***

Many participants believed that stopping foreign intervention in Afghanistan is the main measure that could help achieve peace in Ghazni, acknowledging that such measures should be supported from national level. When discussing foreign intervention in Afghanistan, most people

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<sup>42</sup> "We have 280 [ALP members], even though we asked for 500". Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Deh Yak district.

<sup>43</sup> "Government should support them more: better weapons, more check posts, food. The only force able to provide security is the ALP". Focus group held with male youth from Andar district.

<sup>44</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Qarabagh district.

focused on neighboring countries, but some also supported the withdrawal of international military forces from Afghanistan. However, there is no consensus on this and many feared negative consequences following ISAF's withdrawal.

### **Ensuring human rights principles are adequately reflected in local peace-building initiatives**

Most participants see the negative impact of the conflict on the enjoyment of human rights in Ghazni.

A male participant from Andar explained:

*"If all actors come together, people will have good access to human rights, including freedom of expression, access to education and health, etc. But if the conflict goes on, there will be no enjoyment of human rights."*<sup>45</sup>

One participant highlighted the role of human rights and accountability in the prevention of further violence:

*"If human rights are respected and observed, no one will engage in violence because they will be afraid of the law".*<sup>46</sup>

Another participant stated that a better general awareness on human rights can also be a factor preventing conflict:

*"People are not aware of their rights. Lack of awareness on human rights also exacerbates conflict. People are easier to influence and convinced to join the insurgency."*<sup>47</sup>

Participants consistently said that Afghans would not allow for a negotiation process with AGEs to result in a loss of human rights or women's rights.

The majority of participants (85%) said that respect of human rights and ending impunity would help achieve sustainable peace. This response is consistent with many participants also calling for ANSF officials responsible for human rights violations to be removed from their posts, and all persons

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<sup>45</sup> Focus group held with male youth from Andar district.

<sup>46</sup> A female teacher from Khwaja Umari district,

<sup>47</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Qarabagh district.

involved in serious human rights violations to be kept away from the peace process.

### ***Useful actors for peace in Afghanistan***

Overall, participants acknowledged the Afghan Government and the international military forces as the most useful actors to bring peace in Afghanistan. However, many considered all actors useful. According to a female student from Ghazni:

*"[I]f they all really try sincerely to work together for bringing peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan, there is no doubt that all of them can bring peace easily."*<sup>48</sup>

Participants believed that the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) and Department of Women's Affairs (DoWA) are the most critical for the protection and promotion of human rights in Ghazni, closely followed by civil society organizations and Members of the Parliament. None of the participants chose religious leaders and tribal elders, even though they are consistently seen by participants in open discussions as potential advocates for peace. This is because although religious scholars and tribal elders are highly influential and could play a determinant role in achieving peace, their awareness on human rights still needs to be strengthened.

Participants viewed tribal elders and religious scholars as influential actors who could successfully promote peace. However, the ability of many of those actors to advocate for peace is threatened by the presence of AGEs.

A participant from Andar said:

*"Tribal elders are under the pressure of AGEs. If the Government has the capacity to protect them, they can become a positive actor in favor of peace. Without security, they are not able to visit people and bring them together. So the Government should make an effort to protect them and use them as facilitators of the peace process."*<sup>49</sup>

Others made the same comments with regard to religious leaders, as demonstrated by the following case:

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<sup>48</sup> A female student from Ghazni city, 15-20 years old group

<sup>49</sup> Focus group held with male youth from Andar district.

*“One Pashtun mullah is strongly against AGEs and spoke openly against them, so he was threatened. [...] Now he remains inside his house”.*<sup>50</sup>

As a consequence, the potential positive role of religious leaders remains unexploited:

*“Mullahs have threats from both sides. If they support the Government, they are targeted by the Taliban. If they support the Taliban, they will be targeted by the Government. So they just pray and do not get involved.”*<sup>51</sup>

*“Mullahs are threatened constantly but none of them has been attacked. They are not taking sides, why shall they be killed? If one of them takes sides with the Government, they would disappear immediately.”*<sup>52</sup>

According to many participants, insurgent groups have a strong position against human rights, which they consider a foreign imposition. However, people also alleged that abuses of human rights are committed by both sides of the conflict. Participants often complained that abuses by ANSF remain unpunished, making victims and relatives join the insurgency for revenge.

## V. People’s Recommendations

- Those who have committed human rights abuses or are against human rights should be excluded from any peace process.
- The fight against corruption, “injustice” and abuses against the population (including human rights violations) must be a priority for peace in Ghazni.
- All efforts for development, particularly in the field of education, must include women, young persons, and different ethnic groups, without discrimination.
- Efforts to strengthen the Government and ANSF must include better capacity-building and accountability mechanisms, including

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<sup>50</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Qarabagh district.

<sup>51</sup> Focus group held with male youth from Andar district.

<sup>52</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders and other male community members from Deh Yak district.

on the prevention and reparation of human rights violations. Violations which occur in military operations against AGEs must be addressed by transparent investigations, in order to prevent discontent among the population against ANSF (particularly ALP) and international military forces.

- Tribal and traditional bodies should be involved in the peace process as they have the capacity to attract AGEs to the negotiation table. However, if tribal and traditional bodies like *shuras* and *jirgas* are to be revitalized, they need to ensure inclusion of all social groups and avoid the possible bias against women's rights by tribal elders, especially in districts outside the provincial capitals.
- Negotiations/dialogue with AGEs must not jeopardize the progress achieved on women's rights, especially on the right to education.
- Disputes among ethnic groups must be solved through mechanisms that will give voice to all ethnic groups involved on the basis of equality, and the Government must refrain from discriminating against certain tribes and ethnic groups based on political convenience.

Madrasahs and religious education should be more strongly supported by the Government in Ghazni in order to prevent children from going abroad facing the risk of radicalization, and should include human rights education to strengthen the role of religious leaders in tackling violent extremism and promoting tolerance.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace**  
**Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Paktika Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial roadmap for peace represents a summary of the key findings and issues raised in a series of consultations in the form of focus groups discussions with respected community representatives in Paktika province. The participants in the discussions included nine tribal elders, representing their communities, from Jhani Khel, Sar Hawza and Urgun districts.

The consultations in Paktika took place as part of the phase II of the People’s Dialogue, initiated by 11 civil society networks, including the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult 4,500 ordinary Afghan with a view to develop 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

The civil society organizations conducting the consultations attempted to select a broad range of participants to ensure maximum inclusiveness. However, due to the severe restrictions on female participation in public life in the Paktika, owing to conservative traditional norms, no women were able to take part in the People’s Dialogue discussions in the province. Furthermore due to the security situation, there is very limited access to the districts in Paktika province, which imposed additional restrictions on reaching out to wider communities.

## **II. Provincial profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Paktika province is located in the south east region of the country, sharing a long and mountainous border with the Pakistan’s insurgent stronghold and conflict areas - the volatile South and North Waziristan tribal agencies (part of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan) and with small part of Zhob district of Balochistan province in Pakistan. . Paktika also borders the Afghan provinces of Ghazni, Zabul, Paktya and Khost. The province has 24 districts (five of which are unofficial),<sup>53</sup> including Sharana, the provincial

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<sup>53</sup> In Paktika there are 19 official district and five unofficial districts. As some of the Paktika’s official districts were very big and largely populated, the Government divided them and established new five “unofficial” districts. The unofficial districts in Paktika province are the following: Shah Khel Abad (unofficial district – separated from Jani Khel district); Bak Khel (unofficial district - from Khair Kot district); Charbaran (unofficial district - from Gomal district); Khoushamand (unofficial district – from Dilla district); and Shakin (unofficial district – from Barmal district).

capital. The province covers an area of 19,336 square kilometers. Half of the province is mountainous or semi mountainous terrain, while two-fifths of the area is flat land. Paktika is one of the most remote and conservative provinces in Afghanistan. Further, 95 per cent of the province is inaccessible due to insecurity. As a consequence, Paktika province is the most insecure province in the southeastern region (SER) with insurgents controlling most of the districts.

There is no exact figure of the population of Paktika province. Based on the Central Statistics Office/UNFPA survey 2005, the population of Paktika is estimated to be 809,772; while local and unofficial sources estimated the population of Paktika to be 830,000. However, both figures are generally considered to be drastically underrated since there were approximately 600,000 registered voters in Paktika in the 2009 elections. The low estimates of the Paktika population has fueled grudges against the Government, as the main consequence being a small number of allocated seats in the Parliament.

The population in the province remains highly conservative, with less than seven percent of girls receiving primary education, and almost a complete absence of female voting participation. Additionally, the strong tribal structure, traditions and informal conflict resolution mechanisms, have a major impact on the overall human rights situation in Paktika. Violence against women and girls and harmful traditional practices are prevalent within the province. However, cases of violence against women are difficult to document due to under reporting, as well as limited access to and interaction with women.

### **III. Conflict analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

#### **Dynamics of the conflict**

Participants' views on the conflict dynamics in Paktika were mixed, with the three focus groups identifying differing trends within the conflict. In Urgun district, participants felt that security conditions had improved with the withdrawal of the international military forces (IMF) from local bases in Ziruk, Lawara or Nawai Add areas. However, this improvement was attributed to an external factor, namely reduced financial support to the Taliban in the district, following the withdrawal of the international military forces (IMF). Despite the then reported reduction in Taliban activities in the above-mentioned areas, participants did not report a positive experience with the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) - they alleged ill-treatment,

illegal searches and corrupt practices by the Afghan Local Police (ALP) and Afghanistan National Police (ANP).

In Sarwhaza district, participants reported a deterioration of the security conditions following the withdrawal of IMF, and claimed that AGEs were operating freely in the district. In areas where the ALP did have a presence, participants expressed little support for pro-Government forces, accusing the ALP of ill-treatment and corruption. As a consequence, residents felt a sense of insecurity from both, the Government and AGEs.

Participants from Jani Khel district expressed some support for the ALP, following the withdrawal of the IMF, stating that the Taliban were no longer a powerful actor in the area. Where insurgents did have control, they reportedly allowed residents some freedom, supporting access to education and commerce through construction companies; and it also appears that insurgents maintained the rule of law in these areas. However participants stated that freedom of expression in AGEs controlled areas has remained limited.

Participants identified the Taliban, as being the primary actor and instigator of the conflict in the province. People in this province felt that the current conflict originates from Pakistan, but they did not give any reason why they felt that Pakistan had an interest in supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan. They also expressed a general lack of confidence in the Government's ability to maintain peace and security in the province given that a large amount of the province is controlled by the Taliban and inaccessible to Government forces, with Sarhawza district being cited as a specific example.

There are mixed views as to the changes in the province following the withdrawal of the international military forces from Afghanistan. Participants reported an increase in the use of IEDs by AGEs and claimed that throughout the region AGEs have strengthened their presence, with some districts being under nearly total control of the Taliban and other AGEs. Although AGEs reportedly do not have the support of the local community, they do seem to have brought some sort of civil order to some districts. Local construction companies work in certain districts, and local schools remain operational. Participants further reported that AGEs instigated a rudimentary form of law and order, however, Taliban punishments often constitute human rights abuses, and freedom of movement and expression have been greatly restricted. In all three districts, participants expressed dissatisfaction with the limited Afghan

Local Police (ALP) presence. Furthermore, participants stated that ALP is ineffective, corrupt and are known to mistreat locals, subjecting them to illegal searches, detaining civilian relatives of Taliban members without due process, and demanding bribes before releasing detainees, thus affecting negatively residents' support towards ALP. On at least one occasion, residents filed a formal complaint to the *Wolesi Jirga* and ALP leadership about ALP abuses, but to no effect.

### **Drivers of conflict**

Participants agreed on the following causes of the conflict in the province and generally in Afghanistan: interference by international forces (namely the United States) and neighboring countries (specifically Pakistan and Iran); corruption; lack of impartiality of negotiating parties – the Government and the AGEs, giving rise to a sense of disconnect between the parties and their constituents; unemployment and poverty.

Participants expressed an almost equal lack of trust in both the Government and AGEs. They complained of intimidation by the Taliban and Government forces, specifically noting that the Taliban forcibly extracted bribes and other forms of extortion from locals in the form of “*zakat*”.

Unlike the other provinces in the South Eastern Region, participants did not identify inter-tribal tensions as contributing factors to the conflict.

### ***Foreign interference:***

Interference from other countries, mainly from Pakistan and the USA, is seen by a majority of participants as the main cause of the conflict. Participants believed that actors in Pakistan not only support AGEs in Paktika, but that they also co-opt the large number of Afghan refugees into the armed conflict.

### ***Corruption and lack of rule of law:***

Both the Government and the insurgent leadership are viewed as being corrupt and as having little legitimacy. Government officials were viewed as financially benefitting from the conflict and “*working for their own pockets*”. The judicial system was viewed as being weak, and hence causing people to turn to tribal or Taliban systems to adjudicate disputes. However, the Taliban were also seen as being unpredictable with some of the participants raising allegations of ill-treatment.

***Biased leadership giving rise to the distrust of constituents:***

Within each of the focus groups, participants stressed their lack of confidence in the formal and informal leadership. Participants stated that peace negotiations cannot succeed without a measure of trust between the parties.

***Ineffective peace process:***

Current peace initiatives are criticized for their lack of impartiality. The Provincial Peace Council in Paktika is seen as being biased and failing to represent the different regional players. Therefore participants expressed limited confidence in its effectiveness or its ability to manage the peace process. The international community was overwhelmingly seen as the primary advocate for peace in Paktika, with residents urging for a third party mediation at the international level.

***Poverty and high levels of unemployment.***

The lack of opportunities turns many young people to the insurgency as a way to ensure economic income.

**Actors in the conflict**

Participants identified three primary actors in the conflict, apportioning responsibility almost equally between (1) direct involvement by foreign elements (namely, Pakistan's intelligence agency - the ISI - and the USA); (2) the Taliban ; and (3) corrupt Government forces.

Participants strongly considered their province (and Afghanistan) to be caught between the competing interests of foreign powers such as the USA and Pakistan. Government security forces are viewed as weak, ineffective and unable to provide adequate security. Participants highlighted that in Sawrhawza district, a small portion of the area is under the control of the Government, with majority of the territory being inaccessible by the ANSF. Furthermore, the Taliban reportedly collect tithes (*zakat*) from local people and the Government security forces are apparently powerless to stop this.

**Useful actors for peace in Afghanistan**

Many participants urged greater participation by the international community within the peace process. In particular, they stressed that the USA, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the wider international community should encourage Pakistan to support the peace process. Participants called for

more robust negotiations with the Taliban, criticizing the 2001 Bonn peace talks as being a missed opportunity for reconciliation, because of the international's community's reluctance then to include the Taliban.

#### **IV. Road Map for Peace and People's Recommendations**

The participants in the People's Dialogue in Paktika province made the following recommendations as a means of ensuring sustainable peace:

##### *Ensure impartial peace negotiations:*

- Participants emphasized the need to select impartial elders, leaders and Government officials to broker a peace agreement with AGE's. In particular, participants highlighted the need for the selection of impartial members to the Provincial Peace Council that have influence in the area and enjoy the confidence of both parties;
- Participants stressed the need for negotiations between the Government and AGEs, with the support of the international community, including the Government of Pakistan. They stated that war is not a solution to the conflict and the Afghan Government needs to make greater efforts to move towards a negotiated solution to bring peace;
- The role of Pakistan came up on a number of occasions, with participants stating that Pakistan should not only support the peace negotiations process, but stop interfering in the Afghanistan's conflict.

##### *Strengthen and ensure accountability of ALP:*

Participants consistently stated the need for a stronger and accountable ALP, able to build trust within the local community. The main issue of concern with ALP operations is the lack of accountability and the abuse of power. . Furthermore, participants called for strengthened ANSF as the existing ANSF and ALP presence was seen as an inadequate in certain districts, with residents raising concerns that the current numbers of ANSF and ALP are insufficient to maintain peace and security in Paktika province.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Paktya Province**

## I. Introduction

This provincial roadmap for peace represents a summary of key findings and concerns raised during consultations with communities in Paktya province. In the Paktya consultations 82 people participated in 8 focus groups, 11 individual interviews and 22 surveys. Participants represented diversity in gender, age and origin - from young female students from the provincial capital Gardez to tribal elders from Zurmat district. The UNAMA Human Rights Unit which facilitated the consultations, and civil society organizations conducting the consultations attempted to select participants ensuring maximum inclusiveness. Although the restrictions on female participation in public life in the province, owing to conservative traditional norms, and although the insecurity, gender balance and a wide representation of communities outside the provincial capital Gardez were achieved.

The consultations in Paktya took place as part of the phase II of the People's Dialogue, initiated by 11 civil society networks, including the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult 4,500 ordinary Afghan with a view to develop 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

UNAMA believes that the below road map for peace in Paktya represent widely-held opinions and that the proposed measures in favor of peace would have the support of many people and communities in Paktya.

II. All opinions expressed in the document were obtained during the People's Dialogue activities and do not necessarily reflect UNAMA's position. Provincial profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context

Paktya is a mountainous province with some arid desert in the southwest and fertile agricultural grazing lands in the central and eastern parts of the province. The provincial capital Gardez, which is located 120 kilometers south of Kabul, is located 2,300 meters above sea-level. Paktya shares a 100-kilometre border with Kurram Agency of Pakistan's insurgency riddled Federally Administered Tribal Areas. It also borders the Afghan provinces of Logar, Ghazni, Paktika and Khost.

The local population of Paktya province is estimated to be around one million inhabitants. Paktya is considered the heartland of the Pashtun tribes and has traditionally played an important role in political events throughout

Afghanistan, most notably in helping to restore the monarchy in 1929. In the past, when leaders wanted to gain power over Afghanistan, they usually requested support from the “king maker” tribes in Paktya, renowned for their strength and unity. Paktya also has a significant Tajik minority, referred to as “Gardezi”, living in the provincial capital Gardez. Tribes remain the most important political and social units in Paktya. The presence and influence of civil society organizations and political parties in the province is very limited.

Paktya remains economically weak with little infrastructure or industry. The local informal economy is based on subsistence or semi-subsistence farming. The formal economy can be divided into the following sectors: 45 per cent of the active population’s main source of income is farming; while 17 per cent make a living as construction workers; 13 per cent from trade; 11 per cent in the transport sector; and the remaining 14 per cent from other sources. Licit and illicit commerce with Pakistan and remittances from Afghan migrants working in India and Arab countries also represent a major source of income. Timber, hashish and weapons smuggling are also major businesses in the province. However, Paktya is one of the few poppy-free provinces in Afghanistan.

### III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict

#### **Main types of conflict and groups involved:**

Most participants identified the main type of conflict in Paktya as the armed conflict between the Afghanistan Government, supported by the international military forces, and the insurgency. In this context people viewed the main actors of the conflict in Paktya as divided into two sides: the Afghanistan Government, Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and international military forces (IMF), on one side; and the Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) - mostly Taliban, Haqqani Network and Hizb-e-Islami, on the other side. At the same time, neighboring countries (especially Pakistan and Iran) were also seen as active actors contributing to the conflict in Afghanistan. Participants did not make a clear distinction between actors involved in the conflict at the national and provincial levels, however, local inter-tribal tensions and disputes for land and forestry resources were often mentioned as affecting peace and security in the province

***Inter-ethnic and inter-tribal tensions:*** Residents of Paktya explained that the province strong tribal character and the competition among tribes for political representation, public positions in the administration and access to

resources (especially agricultural land and forestry) provoke conflicts that are often exacerbated by the Government and insurgent groups to pursue political objectives.

### **Progress achieved in Paktya since 2001:**

Most participants agreed on aspects of progress in Afghanistan in the last decade: education, women's rights and the construction of roads and other infrastructure consistently came on the first place. However, these achievements need to be carefully assessed. Even though participants believed that the Afghan education system is certainly better than it used to be ten years ago, they still pointed out that the lack of education, "ignorance" and illiteracy are one of the major causes of the continuation of the conflict both at the provincial and national levels. In the field of women's rights, participants agreed on the progress achieved at the national level, but much less when talking about Paktya. The improvement of infrastructure, seems to be consistent at the national and local levels according to participants, even though participants proposed this effort to be sustained in the future as one of the means to facilitate peace in Afghanistan.

On the negative side, many participants mentioned the worsening of the security situation across the country in the last few years. Only 14 per cent of participants in the survey saw progress on security in Afghanistan.

Several participants in the focus groups mentioned that the fall of the Taliban regime brought a wider enjoyment of freedom of expression. However, participants stated that the Government still persecute people who voice their opinions publicly. A tribal elder from Chamkani described the issue as follows:

*"There are still restrictions on freedom of speech from both sides the Government puts people [for speaking out] in prison, the Taliban kill them."*<sup>54</sup>

### **Perception of security in Paktya**

Most participants said that Paktya is an insecure province. In many occasions they stressed the worsening of the security situation in the last few years. They mentioned restrictions to their freedom of movement due to AGEs presence, incidents where civilians have been killed and injured by

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<sup>54</sup> Focus group with tribal elders from Chamkani held in Gardez.

actions of pro-Government forces, and cases of persons who have been targeted for their activities in public life. .

Moreover, more than half of the participant stated that during none of the recent political regimes in Afghanistan did people in Paktya enjoy security. However, a student who participated in a focus group was more optimistic regarding the current security situation:

*"I think that despite the ongoing conflict, violence has decreased compared to the [Afghanistan's] Civil War era. There was no Government at that time and international troops were also not present. It was difficult to move around. For instance, if you wanted to go to Kabul you had to have seven ID cards - one for each checkpoint of different militia groups. The war moved from house to house during that period. Today, the war is limited to some occasional insurgency attacks."*<sup>55</sup>

Participants in interviews and focus groups often acknowledged the Afghan Local Police (ALP) as key to maintain security in the districts of Paktya. Some affirmed that security in the province has dramatically improved since their deployment.

A tribal elder from Chamkani said:

*"There was a decrease in violence in the last two years due to the deployment of ALP. Before, people took matters into their own hands. It is good that the ALP is under ANP command so that tribes are not using the ALP for their own fights. ALP has contributed to the reduction of insurgency-related insecurity. Before, people had to travel with their own weapons for protection, but with the establishment of ALP check posts, this is no longer necessary. Since ALP was deployed, there is also improvement in freedom of movement and association, as elders are again able to meet for their shuras [which were banned by the Taliban]."*<sup>56</sup>

One of the advantages participants pointed out in the ALP is that they are part of the tribal structure, and therefore enjoy the support of the tribes. Secondly, they know their communities, the people and the territory, and so they can easier prevent activities by AGEs: *"they know who is who"*.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Focus group with students from Gardez and Zadran held in Gardez.

<sup>56</sup> Focus group with tribal elders from Chamkani held in Gardez.

<sup>57</sup> Focus group with tribal elders from Chamkani held in Gardez.

According to some participants, the ALP is also useful as a symbol that expresses the community's support for the Government:

*"If an area has ALP then it is pro-Government and the insurgency knows it cannot operate there".<sup>58</sup>*

However, it should be noted that the survey showed no clear preference for any of the security forces in the province. The most popular answer was that all ANSF are important in Paktya, then in the second place were the Afghan National Police (ANP) and the Afghan National Army (ANA), while the National Directorate of Security (NDS) was identified by one fourth of participants, IMF by one every ten participants and ALP only by 5 per cent.

### ***Progress on women's rights***

It is interesting to note that the same participants who consistently mentioned progress on women's rights as one of Afghanistan's main achievements in the last decade, were much less eager to mention it a success in Paktya. It seems that participants in the survey did not see the progress on women's rights in Afghanistan reflected in their own area. This divergence might be due to the fact that Paktya is a predominantly tribal region, where conservative culture and strong traditional codes still rule people's lives.

Female students from Gardez, even though were from urban areas less influenced by tribal culture, were also not optimistic about the situation of women in Paktya:

*"We do not know what will be our future. Violence against women has increased to obstruct our participation in public affairs. [...] There is no social space for women in this province. Women do not feel secure. We are often harassed in town, in public places such as markets and at university. Another problem women are facing are conservative and harmful social customs and practices in this province."<sup>59</sup>*

A great cause of concern among women participants was the possibility that a negotiation process with the Taliban might jeopardize the progress achieved on women's rights:

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<sup>58</sup> Focus group with tribal elders from Chamkani held in Gardez.

<sup>59</sup> Focus group with students from Gardez and Zadran held in Gardez.

*“Local people are concerned that if the Taliban join the Government, they will again halt girls’ education and other achievements that we gained in the past ten years”.*<sup>60</sup>

Participants were divided on the issue whether conditions in Paktya are ready for women’s participation in public affairs - almost half of them responded positively and the same number responded negatively, as the latter pointed among the reasons to a conservative local culture, to the lack of security and to the Taliban presence and influence. In a positive development, at the time of the consultations, five women have registered as candidates in Paktya for the 2014 provincial council elections, competing for the three seats reserved for women.

A male tribal elder from Chamkani said that he has seen substantial progress on women’s participation in his district despite the difficulties:

*“In relation to women’s rights, there are intimidation and threats from the Taliban, but the tribes are united on this issue. Girls go to school and women participate in shuras: there are three women in the development committee and two women in the peace committee of the local shura.”*<sup>61</sup>

### **Drivers of conflict**

Most participants saw a clear link between the provincial and the national dynamics of the conflict, identifying the following main causes of conflict in both Afghanistan and Paktya: lack of education, corruption, foreign interference, weakness of ANSF and Government institutions, inter-tribal tensions, and poverty and unemployment. Also, when asked specifically for the causes of the continuation of the war, most participants in the survey identified Afghanistan’s neighbouring countries as culprits, followed by the Taliban and armed opposition groups. One third of participants blamed the Afghanistan Government, while international military forces were also seen by some of the participants as the cause of the perpetuation of the conflict.

#### **: Corruption and injustice**

Participants identified corruption and injustice as one of the major sources of conflict at the provincial level.

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<sup>60</sup> Focus group with women from Chamkani held in Gardez.

<sup>61</sup> Focus group with tribal elders from Chamkani held in Gardez.

The Government was widely seen as inefficient and marred by corruption which impacts on its legitimacy. Participants argued that these factors have undermined people's support for the Government and contributed to residents joining the insurgency. Further participants raised concerns that the justice system officials often demand bribes, and that there is nepotism in the assignment of positions in the Government administration excluding a vast number of people from access to public employment, creating grievances that are exploited by the insurgency.

As explained by a tribal elder from Zurmat, corruption not only affects popular trust and support for the Government, but can also jeopardize the reconciliation processes in Paktya:

*"I cannot encourage insurgents to join the peace process because there is corruption in the process. In the past we promised those who joined the peace process protection, jobs and other kinds of support, but these did not happen. All the money goes to the pockets of the involved."*<sup>62</sup>

Corruption and a dysfunctional justice system can also directly strengthen armed opposition groups, as explained by a student in a focus group:

*"[S]omeone who has a case in court or with the prosecution and do not receive justice [due to corruption], will either bring their case to the Taliban or join the armed opposition to take revenge."*<sup>63</sup>

### ***Inter-tribal tension***

Participants in the interviews also mentioned tensions among tribes as one of the sources of conflict in Paktya. They are often linked to land disputes and access to resources, mostly agricultural land and forestry. According to a tribal elder from Chamkani<sup>64</sup> Government officials, including ANSF, often support one of the tribes in the dispute to pursue their own interests, instead of promoting the understanding among tribes, and thus exacerbating violent conflict.

### ***Foreign interference***

More than one third of participants in the survey and almost half of participants in the interviews pointed to foreign interference as one of the

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<sup>62</sup> Focus group with tribal elders from Zurmat district held in Gardez.

<sup>63</sup> Focus group with students from Gardez and Zadran held in Gardez.

<sup>64</sup> Focus group with tribal elders from Chamkani held in Gardez.

main causes of the conflict in Paktya. Participants accused neighbouring countries of supporting the insurgency as they believed the purpose was to provoke instability and weaken Afghanistan. They also criticized the international military forces of causing civilian casualties and conducting night searches that reportedly resulted in discontentment.

The influence of foreign countries in the war in Afghanistan was a constant concern among participants, who often saw Afghans as the victims of a struggle among external actors.

Accusations of Pakistan supporting insurgent groups in Afghanistan by allowing the use of its territory to prepare Taliban operations were widespread..

The allegations about foreign interference in Afghanistan also focused on its economic roots:

*“Afghanistan is the victim of foreign interference due to its strategic and geographic location. It is an economic war and the benefits go to neighboring countries and to the superpowers.”<sup>65</sup>*

### ***Lack of education***

Participants in the survey identified the lack of a formal education as the main cause for the exacerbation of the conflict in Paktya.

According to the people, the lack of access to formal education has a double pernicious effect: first, it makes people vulnerable to manipulation and radicalization, aiding the recruitment of fighters for the insurgency; and second, it hinders the access to economic opportunities, and high levels of unemployment make joining the insurgency the only viable source of income for many young persons.

A participant in a focus group explained the importance of education as follows:

*“The internal factor of the fighting is the low literacy rate in the country. People can be easily manipulated into fighting.”<sup>66</sup>*

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<sup>65</sup> Focus group with tribal elders from Zurmat district held in Gardez.

<sup>66</sup> Focus group with tribal elders from Zurmat district held in Gardez.

### ***Poverty and unemployment***

**Many participants believe that poverty and unemployment are one of the main causes of the conflict in Paktya, as it turns many young persons in Paktya to the insurgency as a way to ensure economic income. Lack of sufficient madrassas in Paktya**

Participants consistently believed that the lack of adequate religious schools in Paktya encourages many children to pursue their religious education in Pakistan where. Many of these children allegedly get radicalized. Given the importance of religious leaders and the high level of influence they have on the local population, the importance of this issue should not be underestimated.

### ***Other causes***

Participants in the survey also identified other causes of the conflict in Paktya, such as the weakness of the Government and ANSF, the “*lack of unity*” among the people of Afghanistan, and the lack of political awareness. Finally, a minority of participants mention the cultivation of illicit crops, the lack of trust in the Government, discrimination and a conservative culture.

In addition, a student pointed to the lack of a common understanding of peace among Afghans as one of the causes of violence:

*“I always ask myself the question why people in my country kill their brothers. Why are we enemies with one another? The answer is that there is no consensus among people on what peace means. People are not united under a common peace agenda.”<sup>67</sup>*

### **Sources of discontentment**

In line with the sources of conflict outlined above, many participants pointed to corrupt and unqualified Government officials, and to harassment by AGEs among the main causes of discontentment for people in Paktya. Another major source of discontentment is cases of abuse committed by ANSF and IMF.

A student stated that:

*“NATO’s and Government’s night-raid and search operations are a source of people’s discontentment with the Government. These*

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<sup>67</sup> Focus group with students from Gardez and Zadran held in Gardez.

*operations sometimes lead to killing, detention and torture of people who have a potential to work for peace.”<sup>68</sup>*

A tribal elder from Zurmat asked:

*“Do the foreigners (IMF) really want to build this country and bring peace? They killed nine children and women in Kunar recently [referring to a NATO airstrike on 7 September 2013].”<sup>69</sup>*

Almost half of the participants in the survey also identified warlords and local commanders, closely affiliated with the Taliban and other armed opposition groups as the main source of discontentment, while one third mentioned criminal groups.

#### **IV. Road Map for Peace**

Most participants had a wide, holistic concept of peace, which means not only the absence of war and violence but also a situation where equality and justice prevail, as well as equal access to facilities and services.

##### **Strategies to resolve conflict and local disputes in Paktya province**

From participants’ responses, it is clear that they see the conflict at the provincial level as an integral part of the Afghan conflict. Therefore, proposals to achieve peace and security at the local/provincial level reflect measures that need to be taken at the national and international levels and also implemented in the provinces, such as the fight against corruption or ending the interference of foreign countries. Some of the measures suggested, however, respond to specific needs of Paktya.

##### **Fighting corruption and promoting accountability**

The need to fight corruption and promote accountability at the provincial level was identified as most important priority to promote peace in Paktya. Although, according to participants, functional and transparent political and justice systems can only be obtained through measures taken at the national level, a student suggested that the local Pashtunwali culture could be a valuable asset in order to promote accountability:

*“We are Pashtun people and our Pashtunwali (Pashtun code of conduct) requires us to first consider our own wrongs and then speak of other people. Don’t we know that there are many abusers*

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<sup>68</sup> Focus group with students from Gardez and Zadran held in Gardez.

<sup>69</sup> Focus group with tribal elders from Zurmat district held in Gardez.

*among Pashtun people? We should give some examples of the wrongs they have done to our people. This should be the common approach of all ethnic groups, and if they stand against their own bad leaders, we will then be able to bring peace in this country”.*<sup>70</sup>

### **Ensure impartiality and inclusiveness of the peace process**

Currently ongoing peace initiatives were often not known to participants. For instance, female participants from Gardez believed:

*“There are no ongoing peace initiatives.”*<sup>71</sup>

Those who did know about some of the initiatives, generally held negative views about them:

*“Currently no one is working for peace and reconciliation. Even the APRP [Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program] did not play any significant role.”*<sup>72</sup>

Furthermore, not many participants knew of the Provincial Peace Committee, and those who knew were critical of its current membership. They believed that many of the posts are filled with family members of Government officials and not based on their capacity, therefore lacking the influence, skills and impartiality required to fulfill their crucial role.

Even though more than half of participants in the survey said that they are satisfied with the activities of the Provincial Peace Committee, they did not explain their reasons, while many of those who responded negatively claimed that members are “working for their own interests”, that “they have not achieved their goal” and that “they need to work harder”.

Criticism focused on the membership of the Committee. A tribal elder from Zurmat stated in a focus group that “[t]he current HPC/PPC [High Peace Council/Provincial Peace Committee] members are not influential and do not have support. They are all involved in corruption”.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, tribal elders from Sayed Karam stressed the importance of members of peace initiatives to be impartial: “In a mediation process there is an impartial third

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<sup>70</sup> Focus group with students from Gardez and Zadran held in Gardez.

<sup>71</sup> Focus group with female participants held in Gardez.

<sup>72</sup> Focus group with women from Chamkani held in Gardez.

<sup>73</sup> Focus group with tribal elders from Zurmat district held in Gardez.

party as the mediator. The HPC should not be part of the Government. Taliban will never talk to their enemy”.<sup>74</sup>

### **Improve development**

Participants mentioned employment, education, agriculture and industry as a requisite for peace. The virtuous cycle between peace, stability and development should be strengthened, so that improved living standards and economic opportunities promote stability. A peaceful environment offers a setting more prone for development.

Participants in the survey identified NGOs and civil society organizations as the main actors that work for reconstruction. Local councils came in second place.

### **Strengthening ANSF**

Participants consistently said that stronger ANSF are needed to maintain security in Paktya. People said that security improved with the deployment of ANSF in their areas, and they specially praised ALP as a key for security, due to its entrenchment in tribal structures and its better knowledge of local communities.

In addition to calls for increased staffing and better equipment (often demanded by participants), participants also urged for better awareness and improved accountability systems so that incidents of abuse by ANSF are adequately addresses and do not jeopardize the overall support for ANSF among communities.

### **Accountable Government and elected representatives**

Many participants mentioned the need to strengthen the Government in Paktya so it provides better security and services to communities, and also prevents cases of corruption and abuse, in order to promote peace and security in the province.

*“If we establish a good and strong governance system in the country, then peace is possible, because all Afghan people want peace.”<sup>75</sup>*

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<sup>74</sup> Focus group with tribal elders from Sayed Karam held in Gardez.

<sup>75</sup> Anonymous participant in interview. Male from Gardez, 50-80 years old group.

The need to strengthen state structures is particularly important in the case of the justice system, as its inefficiency reportedly often turns people seeking justice to AGEs for help.

Elected representatives were severely criticized, and more than half of participants in the survey alleged that elected MPs from their area have not worked for peace, security and human rights. They claimed that elected MPs are “working only for money” or “their own profit”, or that they “have not been seen in the region”. Such responses correspond to participants’ views pointing at corruption as one of the main causes of the conflict and of the lack of trust in the Government.

### **Raising awareness to promote peace**

More than a third of participants in the survey proposed a major awareness campaign to promote peace in the region. Several of them suggested the involvement particularly of the religious scholars given the influence they exert on the population and their access to all areas in the province. However, participants noted that they should be appropriately supported in human rights promotion, such as women’s rights.

### **Traditional institutions**

While most of the measures mentioned above are proposed to be taken at the national level, participants mentioned *shuras* and *jirgas* as institutions that can fulfill a crucial role promoting peace at the local level, as they facilitate the representation of all tribes without discrimination.

However, these institutions require revitalization,

According to a student:

*“The three decades of conflict have enormously affected the country’s social fabric. Among others, local councils (Jirgas), which used to be the highest level of power in collective decision making, have lost their power of making decisions. Local councils cannot anymore stand against a powerful strongman or armed political groups.”<sup>76</sup>*

Also, tribal representation structures require reforming to ensure inclusiveness, because currently they exclude the representation of groups such as women or youth, and awareness about human rights.

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<sup>76</sup> Focus group with students from Gardez and Zadran held in Gardez.

### **Development of local madrassas**

Many participants (including women and tribal elders from Chamkani, women from Zurmat) stressed the importance of developing local madrassas in all districts so that children do not need to leave their homes for Pakistan to attend madrassas. The development of local madrassas in the region could also be an opportunity to improve the awareness among religious leaders on women's rights.

### **Dialogue/negotiation with AGEs**

Participants called for continuation of the dialogue with AGEs as a means to promote peace, and saw AGEs as useful actor to achieve peace in Afghanistan. Some participants advocated for the views of AGEs to be taken into account.

Tribal elders from Zurmat said:

*"Taliban are also from this country, their demands should be heard".*

Women from Zurmat and Ahmad Abad also said that: *"the Government should continue conversations with the Taliban."*<sup>77</sup>

However, participants strongly asserted that negotiations with AGEs or their inclusion in the Government should not put at risk the progress made on human rights, mainly women's right to education.

### **Transitional justice**

Proposals were also made to establish a process of transitional justice. A participant described an eventual process as follows:

*"For good governance, transitional justice is necessary, as this process will send warlords and criminal people to court. Transitional justice should be implemented under the monitoring of the UN. We want the international community to monitor the elections and to support a stable and strong Government".*

Interviewed women from Zurmat and Ahmad Abad also mentioned the need for the *"[e]stablishment of a transitional justice process that will punish warlords"* and *"criminal people working in the Government."*<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Focus group with women from Zurmat and Ahmad Abad held in Gardez.

<sup>78</sup> Focus group with women from Zurmat and Ahmad Abad held in Gardez.

Transitional justice would contribute to strengthening the trust of people in the Government, as many participants pointed to the presence in the Government of corrupt officials and individuals who have committed grave human rights violations as one of the factors that provoke conflict in Afghanistan generally and also in Paktya.

### **Preventing foreign intervention**

Although it is not a measure that can be taken at the local level, many participants believed that putting a halt to foreign intervention (both from neighboring countries and from countries with a military presence in Afghanistan) would help achieve peace in Paktya as well as in the country.

### **Increasing women's participation**

Female participants urged for strengthening the women's participation in the peace process as women can be powerful advocates for peace.

During a focus groups discussion women from Gardez said: *"[t]here are many people working for peace, but they are not heard. Especially women, because people do not like to listen to women."*<sup>79</sup>

### **Solving land disputes**

Tribal elders from Chamkani said that it is essential to solve land disputes in order to achieve peace in Paktya.<sup>80</sup> According to them, the Government should intervene, properly divide all land in consultation with tribes putting an end to inter-tribal disputes for land. Such an effort should particularly focus on forest lands. Unlike agricultural lands, which are more clearly divided among tribes and communities, access to forest resources is not regulated and provokes violent conflict among tribes.

### **Ensuring human rights principles and key concerns are adequately reflected in local peace-building initiatives**

Most participants supported the idea that ensuring human rights and ending impunity will help bring peace to Paktya and Afghanistan, while some disagreed. One of the participants who agreed, said:

*"[T]his is the wish of the Afghan people: to implement human rights and end corruption."*<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Focus group with female participants held in Gardez.

<sup>80</sup> Focus group with tribal elders from Chamkani held in Gardez.

<sup>81</sup> Anonymous participant in survey: male from Lazha Ahmad Khel, 20-50 years old group.

A participant in an interview further stated that:

*“When people have access to human rights, then the conflict will decrease. And oppositely, if people don’t have access to human rights, then the conflict will increase.”*

Among those who disagreed, one participant said that the reason is that: *“human rights might break Sharia law”*, while another one said that *“Afghanistan is too conservative for this”*.

Considering the general opinion among participants that the enjoyment of human rights is a factor that can facilitate peace in Afghanistan, it is important to integrate them in the proposed local road map for peace in Paktya.

### **Useful actors for peace in Afghanistan**

Overall, participants acknowledged that the actors who are causing the conflict are the same who will be useful to bring peace. Despite the strong critical views on these actors, the participants consistently considered them useful for achieving peace. Despite the accusations of inefficiency and corruption, the Afghan Government is still an actor identified by the majority of participants as useful to bring peace to Afghanistan.<sup>82</sup> Even though the neighbouring countries were accused of unfair interference with the country’s stability, the majority saw them as useful actors for achieving peace in Afghanistan. The Taliban and armed opposition groups were seen also as a useful actor for peace. One in every four participants also considered international military forces as useful to bring peace.

Other actors identified were religious scholars, tribal elders and civil society organizations.

Religious leaders and scholars were consistently suggested as having a great potential to work for peace.. A student stated the following reasons:

*“Mullahs can use their tribunes to enhance people’s knowledge about peace. They could use their influence to prevent armed opposition from entering their communities. They can also approach the armed groups to encourage them to make peace.”<sup>83</sup>*

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<sup>82</sup> The percentage is 68% if we add participants who specifically chose the Afghan government (option A) and option E (“All of the above”).

<sup>83</sup> Focus group with students from Gardez and Zadran held in Gardez.

However, the participation of mullahs in the peace process also raised concerns:

*“The problem with Mullahs is that they are not familiar with current global developments. In particular, their awareness and interpretation of women’s rights and needs is very low and problematic. The other problem with Mullahs is that they are under influence of local powerful persons or the armed opposition.”<sup>84</sup>*

Regarding the role of the *ulema*, participants also admitted that their great public exposure and their vulnerability to pressure from armed actors also jeopardizes their capacity to promote peace:

***“Ulemas are not able to preach for peace in the mosque, because if we say something against the Taliban or against the Government, we will be attacked or suffer consequences. We are in the middle.”<sup>85</sup>***  
**Involving local mediators in resolving conflicts and local disputes**

Tribal elders have a strong role as mediators in Paktya. Their impartiality and influence is viewed as an important asset. However, their lack of awareness on women’s rights is perceived as a weakness to play a more crucial role in the promotion of peace. Another identified weakness, according to a tribal elder from Chamkani, is that they have no executive power, and that they lack the resources to travel. On the positive side their role is deeply entrenched in Pashtun traditions: *“people think it is the right way to do things”* and *“believe in their neutrality”*.<sup>86</sup>

## **V. People’s Recommendations**

- Throughout the consultation process with the people of Paktya, the following general recommendations were made with the view of bringing sustainable and just peace in the province: Reform the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) to ensure that it is inclusive and it incorporates the voices of women and civil society;
- Ensure that the peace process is impartial, preventing political interference from powerbrokers, warlords, and other spoilers;
- The fight against corruption, “injustice” and abuses against the population (including human rights violations) must be a priority; .

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<sup>84</sup> Focus group with students from Gardez and Zadran held in Gardez.

<sup>85</sup> Focus group with tribal elders from Chamkani held in Gardez.

<sup>86</sup> Focus group with tribal elders from Chamkani held in Gardez.

- Strengthen the Government and ANSF , provide better capacity-building and accountability mechanisms, including the prevention and reparation for human rights violations. Violations incurred in the fight against AGEs must be addressed by transparent investigations.
- If tribal/traditional bodies such as *shuras* and *jirgas* are to be restored, they need to ensure the inclusion of all social and ethnic groups and that they respect and protect women’s rights.
- Negotiations with AGEs, must not jeopardize the progress achieved on women’s rights, especially on the right to education.
- If international military forces are to stay in Paktya and Afghanistan, clear accountability and compensation mechanisms should be established or strengthened to avoid grievances among local communities and their consequent support for AGEs.
- Land disputes must be solved through mechanisms that will give equal voice to all tribes involved, without discrimination against certain tribes based on political convenience.
- Efforts for development, particularly in the field of education, must include women, young persons, different ethnic groups, etc;

Tackle violent extremism and radicalization. The development of local madrassas and the education of religious scholars should include human rights education, to strengthen their role in the promotion of tolerance and efforts against radicalism.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace**  
**Local Road Maps for Peace**  
**Khost Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial road map for peace represents a summary of key findings and issues raised in consultations with communities in Khost province. 84 people participated in nine focus groups, ten interviews and 20 surveys. 37 per cent of participants were from Khost city, while per cent of participants came from other districts. 45 per cent of participants were women.

The consultations took place as part of phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace program initiated by 11 civil society networks, including the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult 4,500 Afghan citizens from across Afghanistan with a view to developing 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

## **II. Provincial profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Khost province is located in the southeast of Afghanistan. It covers a land area of 4,029 square kilometers, of which 59 per cent is mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain. The provincial capital is Khost city. Khost borders Paktya and Paktika provinces as well as Pakistan, sharing a 185 km border with the tribal areas of North Waziristan and Kurram Agency in Pakistan's insurgency riddled Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

The local population is estimated to be around one million inhabitants. Compared to other provinces in the south eastern Region, Khost is relatively prosperous, benefitting from direct transit links to Pakistan, fertile lands and remittances from Afghan migrants working abroad. Agriculture represents the main source of income for about half of the population. Most farmers are small-plot, subsistence farmers.

With the exception of a small number of people living in Khost city, the population is predominantly Pashtun and Sunni Muslim. The province also has a population of Kuchi nomads whose numbers vary according to seasonal migration. Tribes represent the most important political and social entity in Khost. Communities are guided and organized under the Pashtun tribal customary law, known as *pashtunwali*. The presence and influence of political parties and civil society organizations is relatively weak, with the exception of the provincial capital Khost city.

### **III. Conflict analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

#### **Main types of conflict and actors**

The participants identified three main types of conflict in Khost province: the armed conflict between the Afghanistan Government and anti-government armed groups; conflict between anti-government armed groups and inter-tribal conflicts. In this context the main actors of the conflict were identified as the Government of Afghanistan and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), supported by the international military forces (IMF) on one side, and anti-Government elements (AGEs) such as Taliban, Haqqani Network, Al Qaeda and Hizb-e-Islami, on the other.

Conflict among insurgent groups is mentioned by many participants as provoking violence in Khost. Participants stated that, whilst insurgent groups come together for their common interest in opposing the Government and provoking instability, AGEs do not hesitate to fight each other in their struggle for power and economic interests. At the same time, inter-tribal tensions and their disputes for water, land and forestry resources constantly provoke violence, and these conflicts are also reportedly often used by AGEs and Government officials to further their own interests.

The alleged influence of foreign countries in the war in Afghanistan, most notably Pakistan, was a constant concern among participants, who often viewed Afghans as the victims of a struggle among external actors. Pakistan was seen by participants as an actor in the armed conflict in Afghanistan allegedly supporting insurgent groups as a means to destabilize the country.

#### **Perception of security in Khost**

Most participants acknowledged that Khost has experienced severe security problems in recent years, with many stating that the most secure period in Khost's recent history was the Taliban era. However, many participants also perceived the Taliban regime as a being a period when human rights were restricted (particularly women's rights and freedom of movement and expression), albeit with less armed conflict and security "incidents" (such as IEDs, ground engagements, etc.) than the current period.

In contrast, several participants expressed an optimistic view of the current security situation:

*“Here in Khost, as compared to a few years ago, the situation is getting better and violence and conflict is decreasing.”<sup>87</sup>*

*“[T]he armed conflict is increasing day by day if we are talking about the country. If we talk about Khost, security has been getting better in the last years.”<sup>88</sup>*

Therefore, it can be concluded that perceptions of security in Khost vary greatly, with violence affecting people from different social groups or geographical areas in Khost in very different ways. While some districts remain relatively peaceful, others are constantly affected by security incidents..

### **Drivers of Conflict**

Despite the diversity in the gender, age and origin of participants (from young female students from Khost city to religious scholars from remote districts), the People’s Dialogue revealed a common understanding of the factors driving conflict in Khost and in Afghanistan, namely: corruption, injustice and lack of accountability; poverty and unemployment; lack of education; inter-tribal tensions and land disputes; weakness of the Afghan Government, and interference by neighbouring countries.

### **Corruption**

Participants identified corruption and injustice as one of the major sources of conflict at the province. Corruption affects people’s trust in the Government:

*“Corruption in the Government is another factor of conflict in the province; people have lost their trust in their Government.”<sup>89</sup>*

Corruption was also widely seen as a factor of turning part of the population to insurgency. In addition widespread bribery within the justice system and nepotism in the administration, often creates grievances among the population exploited by the insurgency.

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<sup>87</sup> Focus group held with women from Khost city.

<sup>88</sup> Anonymous participant in individual interview: male from Mandozai district, political analyst, 55 years-old.

<sup>89</sup> Anonymous participant in individual interview: male from Lakan district, doctor, 35-years-old.

### **Weakness of Afghan Government institutions and lack of accountability**

Many participants claimed that the weakness of the Afghan Government and its incapacity to implement the rule of law, are one of the main drivers of conflict. The lack of rule of law erodes trust in Government institutions, which reportedly results in a wider support for AGEs.

In the words of a religious scholar: “[the lack of] accountability of those who have violated human rights and have killed many innocent people” is a factor exacerbating the conflict in Afghanistan.<sup>90</sup>

### **Poverty and unemployment**

Many participants believed that poverty and unemployment are one of the main causes of the conflict in Khost province. The lack of economic opportunities allegedly play a significant role in motivating young persons to join the insurgency as a means of ensuring an economic income for their families.

### **Foreign interference**

All participants mentioned the influence of Pakistan (facilitated by Khost’s long and porous border with that country) as one of the main causes of the conflict. Many accused Pakistan of providing safe havens to AGEs, viewing the porous border with Pakistan as a factor provoking violence in Khost:

*“The only reason for the conflict in our province is that our province has a long border with Pakistan; it is easy for the insurgents to cross the border and keep on their activities against the Government in the province.”<sup>91</sup>*

### **Inter-tribal tension and land disputes**

Most participants also mentioned tensions among tribes as a source of the conflict in Khost. Khost has a strong tribal character, and the competition among tribes for political representation, positions in the administration and access to resources (especially water, agricultural land and forestry) provoke conflicts. The current relationship among tribes is seen by participants as marked by “disunity” and confrontation. Government officials and AGEs reportedly often support one of the tribes in the dispute pursuing their own interests, and thus exacerbating violent conflicts.

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<sup>90</sup> Focus group held with religious scholars in Khost city.

<sup>91</sup> Focus group held with female civil society activists in Khost city.

A female participant from Khost city explained:

*“Land issues among tribes are the main reason for [inter-tribal] conflicts. One tribe tries to get some equipment, including weapons, from AGEs in order to defeat the other side. The other side tries to get the support from the Government, convincing the Government that they are supporting them’. So land disputes are directly linked to the current conflict.”<sup>92</sup>*

### **Lack of education**

Most participants identified the lack of a formal education, and the resulting “illiteracy” and “ignorance”, as the main causes for the exacerbation of the conflict in Khost. Although education is seen as the main areas of progress achieved in Afghanistan in the last decade, a significant part of Afghan society, especially in the remote areas, continue to lack the level of education that would facilitate economic opportunities and prevent youth from indoctrination and radicalization.

Furthermore, many participants highlighted that the lack of formal education makes it easier for AGEs to recruit young persons, as it facilitates their ability to indoctrinate young persons who are illiterate and do not have access to economic opportunities.<sup>93</sup>

### **Discrimination**

Inequality in the distribution of public resources is also seen by participants as a major source of the conflict: “[t]hose who don’t receive any benefits or support from the Government would become a part of the conflict”.<sup>94</sup>

### **Other causes**

Apart from all the aforementioned causes, participants also identified other factors such as harmful traditional practices, lack of accountability, the presence of an internally displaced population and lack of meaningful peace initiatives as being additional drivers of conflict..

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<sup>92</sup> Focus group held with women from Khost city.

<sup>93</sup> Focus group held with female high school and university students in Khost city.

<sup>94</sup> Focus group held with religious scholars in Khost city.

#### **IV. Road Map for Peace**

Most participants articulated a broad, holistic concept of peace involving the absence of war and violence and establishment of justice and equality.

##### **Strategies to resolve conflict and local disputes in Khost**

The participants saw the conflict at the provincial level as an integral part of the Afghan national conflict. Therefore they argued that proposals for peace and security at the provincial level should be taken into consideration at the national and international level - including fighting corruption, or putting an end to the interference of foreign countries. Some of the proposals, however, were in response to the specific needs of Khost – such as strengthening the traditional structures like *jirgas*, *shuras* and *marakas* in order to promote the equal participation of all tribes (therefore promoting peaceful relations among tribes in the province) and to solve land disputes. . The need to put madrassas in Khost under closer Government supervision in order to avoid indoctrination of students into radical views, and to make madrassas centers where peace can be promoted, was another proposal which responds to a specific perceived need in the province.

##### **Fighting corruption and promoting accountability**

The participants consistently stated that fighting corruption and promoting accountability at the provincial level are among the important measures necessary to promote peace in Khost. As previously stated, corruption within the Government erodes people’s trust, create grievances, hinders economic development, all of which are instrumental factors in turning people to the insurgency.

In this regard, a female student explained the positive effect of fighting corruption:

*“If there is no corruption, people will be educated and the Afghan military forces will be improved and able to control the conflict in the province.”<sup>95</sup>*

Although participants recognized the progress achieved by the Khost provincial administration, many highlighted the need to strengthen the provincial Government further to achieve peace and security in the province. Participants believed that an accountable and strengthened

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<sup>95</sup> Focus group held with female high school and university students in Khost city.

Government would be able to provide better security and services to the communities, and to prevent corruption and abuse. The Government should ensure an improved performance on human rights, which would contribute to gaining the trust of the people:

*“[T]he Government must give special attention to human rights to show the people that the Government respects and protects human rights.”<sup>96</sup>*

Around half of the participants said they were satisfied with the Khost Members of Parliament (MPs) in the area of peace and security, while the other half had contrary views. Participant argued that MPs serve their own interests, having been elected by fraud: *“[t]hey got their positions through corruption, not with the support of the people”<sup>97</sup>*; and not being able to advocate for peace due to the presence of AGEs:

*“Due to fear of AGEs, they haven't done anything for peace. Besides, they are busy taking care of their own businesses. Once they go to Kabul we do not see them again. In fact, they do not enjoy the support of the people, they were elected by fraud.”<sup>98</sup>*

### **Improving development**

Participants frequently raised the need for better development. Employment and education were also consistently mentioned by participants as being necessary to promote and consolidate peace in the province. Participants recognized a clear link between improved living standards and better chances for peace in Khost. Participants stated that stability will be achieved if living standards and economic opportunities are improved, and equally that peaceful environment offers better conditions for development.

A tribal elder said:

*“[I]f a conflict is resolved, then nations develop. If not, then the security is affected and the development work decreased”.<sup>99</sup>*

Participants criticized the role of the local Government in implementing development projects with only 10 per cent identifying the local

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<sup>96</sup> Focus group held with female high school and university students in Khost city.

<sup>97</sup> Anonymous participant in survey: male from Khost city, 15-20 years-old group

<sup>98</sup> Anonymous participant in survey: male from Khost city, 20-50 years-old group.

<sup>99</sup> Focus group held with tribal elders from Spera, Matun and Tani districts.

Government authorities as carrying out reconstruction or development projects. NGOs and civil society organizations were most widely identified as implementing development..

### **Promoting human rights**

A large number of participants mentioned the link between human rights and peace, and argued that the protection of human rights is an essential element in conflict prevention and peace building.. They also saw respect for human rights as a 'red line' that future negotiations with AGEs should not cross. Most participants viewed accountability for human rights violations as a key part of the peace process, and considered that the Government was not solely responsible for promoting human rights principles. According to participants, religious scholars also have a role in promoting accountability for human rights:

*“Religious scholars must pass the message under the umbrella of Islam that, those who are involved in violation of human rights have no place in the process”.*<sup>100</sup>

### **Promoting dialogue/negotiation with AGEs**

Participants often defended the need to promote dialogue among the parties to the conflict:

*“If the conflicted groups are brought to the table, or are brought close to each other, it will be useful for peace and security.”*<sup>101</sup>

However, many participants were concerned that such negotiations might jeopardize the progress achieved on women's rights:

*“As AGEs want Sharia law established in Afghanistan, their agenda for peace will be hard. For example they will ask that only female teachers can teach girls, and that girls must stay at home and so on.”*<sup>102</sup>

Likewise, participants fear that the enjoyment of women's rights in Afghanistan would be affected if AGEs were to be included in the Government:

*“[W]hen they [Taliban] come to power first of all they will take the given rights to women and so on.”*<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Focus group held with women from Khost city.

<sup>101</sup> Focus group held with religious scholars in Khost city.

<sup>102</sup> Focus group held with female high school and university students in Khost city.

Also, many participants asserted that those who have violated human rights have no place in a future peace process.

A religious scholar said that:

“[t]hose people who respect and protect human rights must be the part of the peace process; if those people who do not believe in human rights take part in the process it will damage all the achievements of the last twelve years regarding human rights”.<sup>104</sup>

Many participants further stated that the international community and the UN should play an important role in a future negotiation process, encouraging foreign countries to stop illegitimate interference in the process and getting parties to the conflict to get together to negotiate a solution to the war in Afghanistan.

### **Ensure impartiality and inclusiveness of the peace process**

Current peace initiatives were harshly criticized for their lack of impartiality and visible results. Participants showed a little satisfaction with the activities of the Provincial Peace Councils (PPC). Many criticized the PPC’s membership, its lack of impact, limited visibility, nepotism, and inability to engage AGEs in the peace process alleging that sometimes PPC members worked for their own interests rather than upholding the PPC’s mandate. Due to insecurity, PPCs have been unable to access certain areas. In the words of one participant:

*“[PPC members] are not as active as we expected them to be, they do not have any success. They have kept their office open, but their staff cannot access the districts.”*<sup>105</sup>

*“[I]n the province [the PPC] is totally inactive, we have not seen any kind of achievements by them. They are wasting time and spending the money without any reason.”*<sup>106</sup>

Criticism by many participants further focused on the lack of impartiality of the PPC and its incapacity to gain the trust of AGEs:

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<sup>103</sup> Focus group held with female high school and university students in Khost city.

<sup>104</sup> Anonymous participant in individual interview: male from Nadir Shah Kot district, religious scholar, 40 years-old

<sup>105</sup> Anonymous participant in survey: male from Khost city, 20-50 years-old group.

<sup>106</sup> Anonymous participant in individual interview: male from Khost city, academic, 45 years-old.

*"[I]nstead of the current Peace Committee there must be another independent Committee, because AGEs do not trust the members in the current Committee, AGEs think that [current PPC members] are under the influence of the Afghan Government."*<sup>107</sup>

*"As the High Peace Council in Kabul and its branches in the provinces directly work under the Government, their struggle to achieve peace is useless. There must be a Peace Council which is not under the influence of the Government."*<sup>108</sup>

### **Solving inter-tribal tensions, including land disputes**

According to majority participants solving land disputes is crucial in order to achieve peace in Khost. As explained above, tribes, engaged in land disputes often turn to either AGEs or the Government for support, and both AGE and Government often respond by providing weapons or other practical assistance, fuelling the tribal conflict instead of contributing to the inter-tribal dispute resolution.

### **Involving local mediators in conflict resolutions**

Most participants supported the involvement of traditional mediation structures in the provincial reconciliation processes.

*"There is no doubt in this that local conflicts can be solved through local mediators, because jirga and maraka is a valued part of our culture, during our history many conflicts have been solved through mediation."*<sup>109</sup>

Many participants mentioned *shuras*, *jirgas* and *marakas* as mechanisms that can fulfill a crucial role promoting peace at the local level. They emphasized that not only are these local structures deeply entrenched in Khost's social fabric, but they are vital as they also facilitate the representation of all tribes without discrimination (lack of inclusiveness of the tribes is often seen as a source of discontentment). However, the composition of these structures would have to be improved to ensure inclusiveness, as currently they exclude the representation of groups such as women or youth.

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<sup>107</sup> Anonymous participant in individual interview: male from Spera district, tribal elder, 40 years-old.

<sup>108</sup> Anonymous participant in individual interview: male from Nadir Shah Kot district, religious scholar, 40 years-old.

<sup>109</sup> Anonymous participant in individual interview: male from Matun district, tribal elder.

According to one participant, some religious scholars have been marginalized from the peace process by the Government, creating grievances that need to be solved:

*“Religious scholars have been ignored by the current Government; those religious scholars who are with the Government are not those who really represent all the religious scholars. If the Government works closely with religious scholars, including tribal elders, they will have a fruitful result regarding peace.”<sup>110</sup>*

### **Strengthening ANSF**

Although many people expressed the view that security improved following the deployment of ANSF in their areas, participants consistently highlighted the need to strengthen the ANSF to maintain security in Khost. However, they pointed out this should not only involve increased staffing and better equipment, but also improved human rights awareness and more effective accountability systems so that cases of human rights and other abuses are prevented.

### **Raising awareness to promote peace**

Many participants proposed awareness campaigns to promote peace in Khost, suggesting the proactive involvement of different actors.

Participants saw the positive role of women in promoting peace in the province. According to civil society activists in Khost city: *“women mobile groups should be formed to go from home to home and talk with mothers to encourage their sons to join the peace process.”<sup>111</sup>*

Religious scholars could also participate in raising awareness for peace:

*“There must be a public awareness on peace, there should be seminars, workshops on peace. The role of religious scholars is very important to pass the messages from mosques, people listen and trust them.”<sup>112</sup>*

School teachers and madrassas were also among the groups mentioned that could play a crucial role by raising awareness for peace, given their influence over the younger generations.

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<sup>110</sup> Anonymous participant in individual interview: male from Nadir Shah Kot district, religious scholar, 40 years-old.

<sup>111</sup> Focus group held with civil society activists in Khost city.

<sup>112</sup> Focus group held with female participants in Khost city.

Participants proposed putting madrassas under Government supervision in order to prevent them from becoming centers for recruitment and indoctrination by AGEs and utilizing them as centers to promote peace and justice. Madrassas were often seen by participants as actors with a potential positive role to play in Khost:

*“Madrassas can play very important role for justice if they put their efforts in this direction.”<sup>113</sup>*

### **Stopping foreign intervention**

Many participants called for the need to stop foreign intervention as the main measure that could help achieve peace in Khost:

*“The reason for the conflict in the province is the support to the Taliban, Al Qaeda and other AGE groups by Pakistan. If someone stops Pakistan from this action, there will be no conflict in the country and in the province.”<sup>114</sup>*

Most of the criticism of foreign intervention focused on Pakistan, but some also supported the withdrawal of international military forces from Afghanistan. However, many fear negative consequences of their withdrawal. One participant expressed his concern as follows:

*“We can see positive changes, but these are not permanent. When there are no international military forces in Afghanistan, I am afraid that we will lose all the achievements.”<sup>115</sup>*

### **Increasing women’s participation**

The potential role of women in the peace process was highlighted by many participants. A female student from Khost city proposed that *“participation of women must be increased in the peace process, because mothers can send the message to their sons and bring them to join the peace process.”<sup>116</sup>* Many participants agreed on the idea that women role in families makes them suitable for spreading a message of peace:

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<sup>113</sup> Focus group held with civil society activists in Khost city.

<sup>114</sup> Anonymous participant in individual interview: male from Tani district, politician, 57 years-old.

<sup>115</sup> Anonymous participant in individual interview: male from Lakan district, doctor, 35 years-old.

<sup>116</sup> Focus group held with female high school and university students in Khost city.

*“Women must be a part of the peace process because they sacrifice their sons on both sides and they can pass messages to their sons as well. We will never accept those who violate human rights especially women’s rights to be a part of the [peace] process, we would like to see preserved the achievements on women’s rights in the last decade.”<sup>117</sup>*

### **Ensuring human rights principles are adequately reflected in local peace-building initiatives**

The majority of participants acknowledged that the conflict had significantly impacted the enjoyment of human rights in Khost. A female participant from Khost explained it in the following words:

*“Where there is a war, you cannot enjoy all your basic and constitutional rights: males and females lose their rights, even very important rights such as the right to life and the right to education. Local disputes also deprive males and females from their basic rights. For example, if there is a fight between two tribes in the area, none of the sides can send their kids to school, they lose access to healthcare and so on...”<sup>118</sup>*

Participants also proposed the following ways to integrate human rights in the peace process. A religious scholar expressed the strong link between peace and human rights as follows:

*“Human rights must be a basic concern for the process of peace; in other words human rights must be the condition for peace.”<sup>119</sup>*

Voicing similar sentiments, another participant said that:

*“[i]f we want peace or reconciliation with the Taliban or other AGE groups, it must not cost us to lose all the achievements of human rights in the country.”<sup>120</sup>*

Accountability and rule of law are seen by participants not only as an important element to achieve peace, but also crucial for the protection of human rights:

*“if there is rule of law, it can prevent any kind of crimes in society. If there is rule of law, those who commit crimes against the*

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<sup>117</sup> Focus group held with female participants in Khost city.

<sup>118</sup> Focus group held with women in Khost city.

<sup>119</sup> Focus group held with religious scholars in Khost city.

<sup>120</sup> Anonymous participant in survey: male from Lazha Ahmad Khel, 20-50 years-old group.

*Government and the people will get their punishment. So the only way which can protect human rights is the implementation of law.”<sup>121</sup>*

The majority of participants (75%) were of the opinion that respect for human rights and ending impunity would help achieve peace in Afghanistan. Participants further stressed that human rights violators should be kept away from the peace process, emphasizing the need for accountability for a successful peace process:

*“If we really want peace in this country, we have to respect human rights: both sides of the conflict must give attention to them. Those people who do not know and do not respect human rights must not be a part of the peace building process.”<sup>122</sup>*

Many participants viewed insurgent groups as having a strong position against human rights. However, people also acknowledged that violations of human rights have been committed by both sides of the conflict:

*“To be honest, none of the groups involved in the conflict believe in human rights. If so, why would they kill people, why would they take lives of people without any formal decision of the court? Both sides of the conflict violate human rights.”<sup>123</sup>*

Religious scholars were seen by some participants as lacking awareness on human rights, particularly in relation to women’s rights. Tribal elders were also viewed as sometimes having conservative views in that regard. However, a religious scholar showed that this assumption is not always necessarily accurate:

*“Human rights must be a basic concern for the process of peace; in other words human rights must be the condition for peace.”<sup>124</sup>*

A participant said that all parties to the conflict should be educated on human rights, to ensure they are respected in practice:

*“The parties to the conflict must know about the human rights regulations and standards. It is important because, in this way they can protect and respect human rights. Therefore, it is essential to educate*

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<sup>121</sup> Focus group held with female high school and university students in Khost city.

<sup>122</sup> Anonymous participant in individual interview: male from Gurbuz district, law student, 25 years-old.

<sup>123</sup> Focus group held with female teachers in Khost city.

<sup>124</sup> Focus group held with religious scholars held in Khost city.

*both sides to the conflict on human rights, otherwise it will be difficult for both sides to respect or protect human rights.”<sup>125</sup>*

### **Potential advocates for peace in Khost**

Participants proposed an inclusive approach where various social groups can play a role to advocate for peace. As reported above, many participants said that women could be good peaceadvocates in Khost. Tribal elders were seen as significantly influential actors who could successfully contribute to the promotion of peace. School teachers were also proposed by some participants, as well as the media.

Participants also acknowledged that religious scholars can be good advocates for peace if they receive adequate training:

*“There must be public awareness on peace to educate them, there should be seminars, workshops on peace, as the role of religious scholars is very important to pass the messages from mosques; people listen and trust them.”<sup>126</sup>*

### **V. Key Recommendations**

- Those who stand against human rights must be excluded from the peace process.
- Ensure an independent and inclusive peace process. Review the membership of the Provincial Peace Committee and ensure members are selected based on their credibility and capacity to negotiate with the AGEs. Increase women participation in the peace process recognizing their role in bringing peace in society.
- The progress achieved on women’s rights, especially on the right to education must not be traded away in negotiations or dialogue with AGEs.
- Introduce peace awareness programs, involving women, youth, schools and religious leaders and madrassas in the promotion of peace.
- Improve governance and security: - strengthening of the Government and ANSF must include better capacity-building and accountability mechanisms, including on the prevention and reparation of human rights violations. Violations incurred in the

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<sup>125</sup> Focus group held with women in Khost city.

<sup>126</sup> Focus group held with female participants in Khost city.

fight against AGEs must be proactively addressed by transparent, independent and thorough investigations.

- Protect and promote human rights. Many participants established a clear link between an improved government performance on human rights and better chances for peace in Khost.
- The fight against corruption, “injustice” and abuses against the population must be a priority to achieve a sustainable peace.
- All development efforts, particularly in the field of education, must include women, young persons, and all ethnic groups without discrimination.
- If tribal/traditional institutions like *shuras* and *jirgas* are to be revitalized to take part in the peace efforts, they need to be reformed in order to ensure inclusion of all social groups and prevent bias against women’s rights.
- Resolve inter-tribal disputes: Khost being a predominantly tribal province, local violent disputes among tribes must be addressed as a matter of priority.
- Land disputes must be solved through transparent mechanisms, ensuring fairness, giving equal voice to all parties involved.
- Madrassas and religious education should be placed under the supervision of the Government and include human rights education in order to strengthen their capacity to promote peace and tolerance and work against radicalization of youth.

Foreign interference in Afghanistan must cease. Pakistan should stop providing safe havens to AGEs and should put more pressure on AGEs operating and launching attacks in Afghanistan from its territory.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace  
Nangarhar Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial roadmap for peace provides a summary of the issues raised and recommendations offered during consultations with around 108 Afghans in Nangarhar province. These consultations comprised focus group discussions, individual interviews and surveys of opinion. Participants were drawn from diverse social and political backgrounds and included public sector employees, community elders, religious scholars and leaders, farmers, teachers, civil society representatives, and reintegrees (ex-Taliban). Special efforts were made to survey the views of women and youths to ensure a representative sample of community views.

The consultations took place as part of Phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace program (hereinafter the "People's Dialogue") initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult over 4,500 Afghan citizens with a view to develop 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, demography and political landscape**

Nangarhar province has an estimated population of 1,289,000. Located in eastern Afghanistan, Nangarhar borders Kabul, Kunar, Laghman and Logar provinces, and shares a porous border with Pakistan in the east and south (which enable easy passage for AGEs infiltration from the insurgency-affected Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan). Nangarhar's border areas are mountainous, while its interior is largely flat and fertile, watered by snowmelt from Kunar and Nuristan.

Jalalabad city, Nangarhar's capital, was the former winter capital of Afghanistan. Key locations in Nangarhar include: the Tora Bora caves, where Osama Bin Laden fought the international military forces in 2002; the Speen Ghar mountains in Shinwari district; the ruins of an ancient temple in Hada village in Bihsud district; and the Shrine of Ghazi Amanullah Khan and Serajul Emirate (Royal Garden) in Jalalabad city.

Nangarhar is predominantly Pashtun, with a small Pashayee population. There are three main Pashtun tribes in Nangarhar: Momand, Shinwari and Khogyani. Khogyani mainly live in Sherzad, Hisarak, Pachir-Wa-Agam and Khogyani, but a small number also live in Chaparhar and Surkh-road districts. Shinwar tribe members are mainly settled in Ghani Khail, Achin, Nazyan, Speen Ghar, Dur-Baba, Dih-Bala and Kot districts. Momand reside

in Muhmand Dara, Lal Pur, Goshta, Bati-Kot, Rodat and Kama districts. Pashayee inhabit Khewa and Dara-I-Noor districts ; and a small number of Pashayee also live in Behsud district.

Around 20 political parties are active in the province. Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan, Dawat-e-Islami (also known as Ittehad-e-Islami, , Jamiat-e-Islami Afghanistan, and the Afghan Millat party are the most influential parties in Nangarhar.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: types and drivers of conflict**

#### **Types of conflict**

Community members from Nangarhar identified a range of conflict types in the province, including:

- **Continuing offensive between Pro-Government Forces (PGF) and Anti-Government Elements (AGEs).** Participants identified a number of anti-Government actors active in Nangarhar, including the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan, Tehrik-e- Taliban of Pakistan (TTP), Tehrik-e Nifazi Shariat, Hizb-e-Islami of Afghanistan, and the Salafi group.<sup>127</sup>
- **Personal, ethnic and tribal conflicts,** including conflicts over land between two tribes (Senpai and Alisher Khel) of Shinwar in Achin district, and fighting between Kuchi and local residents in Bati Kot district; and
- **Local political and criminal rivalries.**

#### **Drivers of the conflict**

During the consultations, participants identified a number of drivers of the conflict in Nangarhar: weak governance, corruption and underdevelopment, ineffectiveness of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), human rights abuses in military operations, external intervention, and restriction of media freedom.

#### **Human rights abuses during military operations**

Civilian casualties caused by Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and international military forces (IMF) and the alleged mistreatment of

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<sup>127</sup> In addition to these AGEs groups in Nangarhar province, groups that identify as “Daesh”/Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) have emerged since 2015. Daesh/ISKP fighters frequently targeted civilians and civilian objects in Nangarhar, including tribal elders and religious, education, and healthcare facilities.

community members during military operations were frequently cited as causes of the conflict.

A tribal elder stated:

*“Arbitrary operations, night raids, and airstrikes, pushed ordinary people to leave their homes. Innocent people were arbitrarily detained in prison without charge. These reasons collectively created a big distance between the people and the Government. Therefore, many people support AGEs and are against the Government and IMF.”*

### **External intervention**

Participants alleged interference of foreign countries in Afghanistan in pursuing of their own strategic interests – these countries include India, Iran and Pakistan.

The Head of the Civil Services Commission claimed:

*“Our neighbouring countries support AGEs logistically and morally.”*

A former teacher and women’s rights activist added:

*“These countries support various armed extremist groups to increase their influence in Afghanistan and to challenge each other’s interests.”*

### **ANSF ineffectiveness**

The reportedly worsening security situation in Nangarhar, including in districts such as Bati Kot, Achin, Deh Bala, and Nazyan, was attributed largely to ANSF ineffectiveness and the lack of coherent and transparent counter-insurgency and anti-terrorism policies. Some participants accused ANSF of being uncommitted to combating AGEs. Others pointed to the insufficient deployment of ANSF members to Nangarhar’s districts. In addition the limited number of ANSF at the routes along the porous border with Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Area, allegedly enable AGEs movements, including arms supply.

Participants also blamed ANSF and ANP of corruption, accusing members of taking bribes and protecting criminal groups. The security vacuum that this has perpetuated has allegedly enabled AGEs and criminal groups to flourish, with corresponding increases in abductions, murder, landgrabbing, poppy cultivations, and illegal taxation (*ushar*) of community members.

### **Weak governance, corruption and underdevelopment**

According to participants corruption, weak local governance, a lack of public services and the unfair distribution of resources and development projects fuel the conflict in Nangarhar.

Poor security in the districts has resulted in weak governance. According to participants local leaders are confined to the District Administrative Compounds in some areas.

Governance is also affected by corruption, and local communities accused the Government of not taking effective measures against corrupt officials. They complained that currently corrupt officials are only being shuffled between districts with no punitive measures taken against them. Participants harshly criticised the personal behaviour and ethics of local officials. Misconduct and abuse of power were reported as a motivating factor behind some community sympathy and support for AGEs.

A local Mullah Imam stated:

*“The local government officials are involved in moral corruption, which is against our religion and our traditions. It increases the hate of the people against the Government.”*

Communities further questioned the appointment process for officials, arguing that the lack of transparency and associated nepotism served to protect the personal interests of the powerful, to the detriment of communities.

A tribal elder said:

*“High ranking officials are hired and appointed based on their war backgrounds and other political interests.”*

Additionally complaints were raised against the Government’s overly bureaucratic administrative procedures and the delay that this causes in the delivery of social and economic projects and benefits to local communities, eroding Government’s credibility.

Corruption was frequently blamed for the lack or unequal distribution of services. A Mullah Imam used the delivery of electricity within Jalalabad city as an illustrative example:

*“Those areas where the warlords, commanders, businessmen and officials live have electricity. But in those areas where these figures do not live, electricity is not distributed.”*

A farmer agreed, claiming that *“all the dealings between businessmen and provincial authorities are like a mafia. They increase poverty, joblessness and other problems.”* He identified Shinwar and Khogyani districts as centres of criminality. One woman spoke of the sense of isolation that communities feel: *“the people in the districts and in remote areas have been forgotten. Their voices are not heard.”* This in turn has fuelled popular resentment at the Government and, in stronger cases, driven locals to support AGEs.

Civil society representatives also linked weakened governance to tensions between parliamentarians (MPs) which contributes to the insurgency and insecurity in Nangarhar province.

A lecturer at Nangarhar University stated:

*“Political instability across the country and tensions between Government officials and local politicians over their personal interests has weakened governance and strengthened AGEs. Tensions between provincial officials and MPs, especially in Nangarhar, have increased recently. These persons are all busy undermining each other instead of working for the people and good governance.”*

Others built on this, pointing to the Government’s failure to resolve tribal disputes; and alleged officials favouring particular sides for personal benefit. Participants pointed to the tribal conflict in Achin district between Alisherkhel and Sepai as an example.

### **Restricted media freedom**

Among the drivers of the armed conflict, participants raised restriction of media freedom and the lack of respect of media independence. Local journalists claimed political interference in media. This enables serious violations and issues of national interest and concern to be suppressed, meaning that they cannot be addressed or corrected.

## IV. Road Map for Peace

### Strengthen and reform the ANSF

Participants viewed the role of ANSF as integral to ensuring security and stability in Nangarhar. To strengthen the ANSF capacity, calls were made for the international community to better equip ANSF – particularly providing air assets. An integral aspect of ANSF reform identified by participants was countering-corruption within the ANSF leadership. Corruption and impunity were considered corrosive to the ANSF's capacity to fight the insurgency, demoralising to ANSF members, and a source of criminality, with some ANSF members involved in drug dealing, embezzlement and extortion.

The Director of a local radio station stated:

*“In order to end the war in Nangarhar province, ANSF must be rigorously reformed, supported and equipped. Particularly, the Government should take measures to address corruption within high ranking officials and punish perpetrators.”*

Participants also considered enhancing security at the border with the Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Area essential to achieving an enduring peace in the Nangarhar. They urged the Government to establish permanent checkpoints and deploy ANSF and Afghanistan National Border Police (ANBP) to major routes along the border to prevent infiltration and supply to AGEs.

A former AGE member stated:

*“There is a valley by the name of Baandar in Achin district and it borders Pakistan. All AGEs who travel to Nangarhar come from the corresponding valley in Pakistan. They supply all the weapons and explosives. Suicide attackers coming from that valley should be stopped by an ANBP checkpoint, but there isn't one. Therefore, we request that the Government establish permanent checkpoints and deploy ANSF to the border.”*

The protection of civilians during ANSF operations was regarded as crucial to securing the public's support and trust. Participants expressed concern at civilians casualties caused by ANSF during clean-up operations in the districts, particularly in Bati Kot.

Although some participants raised strong concerns about the Afghan Local Police (ALP) activities, accusing them of involvement in criminal acts, other

participants supported the ALP program and called for its extension to other districts in the province.

A former AGE listed Achin, Bati Kot, Deh Bala, Hisarak, Nazyan and Sherzad among the districts to which ALP should be deployed. In his view:

*“If ALP deployment is approved for those districts, the security situation will improve. The ALP’s real strength lies with its connection to the local community. AGEs cannot confront them. As you know, we were AGE members in the past and our main obstacle was ALP. We were mostly attacked by ALP and we could not do much in the districts where ALP had been present.”*

Participants also viewed the mobilisation of ANSF, ANP and ALP as an effective means of addressing and preventing personal and tribal conflicts.

Finally, participants also called for security resources to be redirected away from the public figures toward the communities most in need.

A local journalist stated:

*“The ANP, ANBP and Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) are busy taking care of officials, warlords and local politicians. We have just 60 ANP members for the whole district, while an official, commander and a politician each have more than 20 for their own security. ANBP should stay at the border, but here in Nangarhar most of them are busy protecting the Governor’s Palace. Some local officials even have personal units and kandaks (battalions) from ANCOP and ANBP.”*

### **Augmenting counter-insurgency efforts**

Connected to the strengthening of ANSF is the improvement of counter-insurgency efforts, including by addressing the root causes of the insurgency. Participants identified securing the return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan, developing and implementing clear and effective anti-terrorism policies and strategies, and cutting sources of financial support to AGEs as critical steps to securing peace in Nangarhar and in Afghanistan more broadly.

As a border province, the return of Afghan refugees was placed high among priorities, with participants attributing the insurgency in large part to AGEs recruitment of Afghan refugees. A tribal elder from Lal Pur district called on the *“international community and the Afghan Government”* to *“support the*

*return of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan, who are a good source of recruitment for AGEs.”*

Participants also called on the Government to improve its counter-insurgency and anti-terrorism policies and to ensure that ANSF clean-up operations are sustainable and directed at achieving long-lasting security improvements in districts, and to put pressure on AGEs to join peace talks. According to participants, this would also alleviate the dilemma faced by many communities which, while not supportive of AGEs activities, are unable to oppose them and are often forced to join them or to provide them with logistical support. As a measure to tackle the insurgency, a youth representative called on the Government to support and protect tribal elders in such areas, who can *“play a big role in challenging AGEs in their districts.”*

Some participants also called on the international military forces (IMF) to ensure counter-insurgency measures are consistent and transparent, and also to put pressure on Pakistan to tackle insurgency infiltration and AGEs taking safe haven on Pakistan’s territory.

Tackling poppy cultivation, drug dealing, and illegal tax collection were identified as key of stemming the sources of financial support to AGEs.

A local youth stated:

*“AGE have a lot of financial support for their activities. In Sherzad, Hesarak and Shinwari-tribe-based districts AGEs collect taxes from the people and from drug dealers. In these same districts, there are some legal mines, which AGEs also extort. The Government should pay more attention to this and should be serious in its counter-narcotics efforts.”*

### **Reforming local governance**

Most participants called for significant reforms to be made of the local governance – including the electoral process – in order to counter corruption and nepotism. In participants’ view this will also help to evade ethnic, tribal and community conflicts.

A tribal elder from Achin district stated:

*“To bring a durable peace to Nangarhar and Afghanistan, the Government must conduct transparent and independent elections that are free of fraud. To achieve this, it must recruit honest and*

*non-partisan persons to the Elections Commission. Further, to have elections without fraud, all the votes should be counted inside the polling stations in each district.”*

Participants also called for anti-corruption policies to be introduced to ensure that unqualified and corrupt local officials are replaced with competent and committed individuals, and punitive measures are taken against those involved in corruption.

Local communities also recommended review and streamlining of administrative procedures in order to improve the effectiveness of the local government and reduce corruption in delivery of services. In particular, a female doctor suggested the introduction of electronic – rather than paper – forms and processes. However, while this would ease administrative procedures for some, the requisite technology remains unavailable to a large proportion of Nangarhar province.

### **Respect media freedom**

Communities acknowledged that media freedom and independence are critical to the accountability of the Government and urged political figures and government officials to respect and promote media freedom. Participants argued that enabling the media to report on the performance of local officials would help to increase transparency and to reduce corruption.

### **Promoting the rule of law and social justice and addressing impunity**

Participants viewed strengthening the rule of law and the equal application of the law and promoting social justice as means through which to achieve peace in Nangarhar.

The Director of a civil society organisation from Sherzad district stated:

*“The Government should apply the law equally to all people without discrimination. The main problem is the enormous corruption in the Government and the lack of application of the law to warlords and powerful and wealthy individuals.”*

Countering corruption within legal and judicial offices, institutions and departments was considered essential to supporting the rule of law and ensuring peace in the province

The Director of a Union in Jalalabad city gave an example of the impact of impunity on the fuelling the conflict:

*“The judiciary and prosecution offices only support people with money. For example, one of our labourers had dispute with a warlord, who had grabbed his house. He had all the ownership documents for his house and three separate courts found in his favour, but he still couldn’t get his house back. He left Afghanistan and joined the Taliban and wants revenge against the warlord.”*

### **Supporting social and economic development**

Participants recommended improving the quality of education, creation of employment opportunities for youth, and ensuring equal access to and the fair distribution of development projects and services for achieving peace and stability in the province.

According to a tribal elder from Sherzad district, the lack of quality education limits the number of youth who can gain entry to university, reduces employment opportunities, and drives many youth to join AGEs:

*“Unemployment has caused some youth to join the armed opposition. Our children do not have access to a modern education. Officials in educational departments follow partisan policies, which damage the true aims of education.”*

Participants called for projects and services to be provided on a needs-assessed basis, prioritising communities and districts with the most pressing and acute needs. As earlier introduced, participants complained about the unfair or nepotistic distribution of development projects and services, which has heightened the deteriorating security situation in those areas deprived of such support.

A former AGE from Achin district stated:

*“Development projects are distributed unfairly among the districts in Nangarhar. Whenever a development project is approved by Kabul, they are implemented in Kama, Surkh Rod and Goshta districts, which are more secure. Parliamentarians push the Government to implement projects in their districts. We need to implement development projects in insecure districts in order to build people’s trust.”*

### **Land reform**

Land reform is being proposed to address land grabbing, which as a result will help to prevent and resolve tribal conflicts and to tackle criminal “land

mafia". Participants called on the Government to establish a new mechanism to address land issues. The proposed mechanism should have the ability to determine lawful ownership (including distinguishing between private and Government ownership), return lands to their lawful owners and punish perpetrators of land grabbing.

A local farmer from Kuz Kunar district stated:

*"To help resolve tribal and other conflicts over land, the Government should introduce an inclusive program to identify private and governmental lands, reform land issues across the country, and resolve land disputes."*

### **Improving the peace process**

Participants identified the following constituent elements as essential to the success of the peace process in Nangarhar:

- Strengthening ANSF's capacity to assert a critical amount of pressure on AGEs, which in turn would force them to join the peace process.
- Ensuring the broader participation and representation of community and civil society representatives in the peace process, including: men, women and youth; tribal elders; academics; minorities; and victims of the conflict. The role of women was particularly emphasised, with participants arguing that women (*Toor Sarey* – black-haired) have an important role to play in convincing AGEs to join the peace process.

A female defence lawyer stated:

*"We have some women in the Peace Council who have worked for the Government and they are now AGE s targets. Their appointment was largely symbolic to show the international community that gender equality is respected in the peace process. But women who don't work for the Government are better placed to mediate between AGEs and the Government. If such women go and talk to AGEs, AGEs will not target them as they respect the Toor Sarey based on traditions and Islamic provisions."*

The importance of victims in the peace process was also underlined. A female teacher at a girls' high school in Jalalabad stated:

*"People who have suffered the consequences of the ongoing war, for example those families who have lost their relatives in airstrikes,*

*IEDs or suicide attacks, can easily access AGEs and negotiate with them.”*

- Some participants also highlighted the important role of international organisations in mediating between the warring parties.

A female employee of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) stated:

*“International organisations that don’t support any party can play a big role in mediation between AGEs and the Government, for example the International Committee of the Red Cross.”*

- Most participants criticised the current structure of the Provincial Peace Council (PPC) and questioned its activities. They expressed their concerns at the ineffectiveness of the current PPC membership, which they argued does not perform an effective mediation role. Calls were made for the structure of the PPC to be revised and the membership to be changed. Some participants proposed that Provincial Peace Council members that have been unable to reconcile AGEs from their districts or communities should be replaced with new more credible members, including former/reconciled AGE members, clerics, heads of district *shuras*, youth and women.
- Participants also called for direct talks between the Government and AGE.

A local Mullah Imam from Chaparhar district stated:

*“Both parties to the conflict should sit together. They should give something and get something. Without flexibilities, peace is not possible.”*

## **V. People’s Recommendations**

### **Strengthen and reform the ANSF**

- The international community should better equip ANSF – particularly through air assets; Corruption within the ANSF’s, including in the leadership, must be addressed, with perpetrators adequately punished;
- Improve border security (at the border with Pakistan) to stop insurgents infiltration and ammunitions supply. Permanent checkpoints should be established and ANSF and ANBP deployed to major transit routes;

- Ensure protection of civilians during ANSF operations – it is crucial to securing the public’s support and trust for the Government and ANSF;
- Mobilise ANSF, ANP and ALP as an effective means of addressing and preventing personal and tribal conflicts in the districts ;
- Security resources – specifically soldiers and police – should be focused and assigned to protect communities in need, not to protect public figures and officials.

### **Augment counter-insurgency efforts**

- Support and manage the safe return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan and develop anti-radicalisation programmes,
- Develop and implement clear and effective anti-terrorism policies and strategies;
- Interrupt sources of financial support (poppy cultivation, drug dealing, and illegal taxes) to AGEs;
- The Government must improve its intelligence-gathering techniques;
- ANSF clean-up operations must be sustainable and directed at achieving long-lasting security improvements in districts and pressuring AGEs to join the peace talks.

### **Reform local governance**

- Reform and improve local governance, including the electoral process to ensure transparent and independent elections –this will contribute to reducing ethnic, tribal and community conflicts and to secure peace;
- Unqualified and corrupt local officials must be replaced;
- The Government’s excessively bureaucratic administrative procedures must be revised in order to improve the delivery of social and economic projects and benefits to local communities. Consideration could be given to introducing electronic – rather than paper-based – forms and processes - this would assist communities that have access to the requisite technology;
- Respect and protect media freedom and independence as a critical tool for accountability of the Government and its officials. Media must be supported to report freely without interference on critical issues,

including on the performance of local officials. This would help to increase transparency and to reduce corruption.

### **Promote the rule of law and social justice and address impunity**

- Counter corruption within legal and judicial offices, institutions and departments to support the rule of law and end impunity;

### **Support social and economic development**

- Improve quality of education; create employment opportunities for youth, and equal access to and the fair distribution of development projects and services;
- Projects and services should be provided on a needs-assessed basis, prioritising communities and districts with the most pressing and acute needs;

### **Land reform**

- The Government should establish a new mechanism to address land issues. This mechanism should have the ability to determine lawful ownership (including by distinguishing between private and Government ownership), return lands to their lawful owners and punish perpetrators of land grabbing.

### **Improve the peace process**

- Strengthen the ANSF's capacity to place a critical amount of pressure on AGEs and force them to join the peace process;
- Ensure a broader participation and representation of civil society organisations and community representatives in the peace process, including equal participation of men, women and youth; tribal elders; academics; minorities; and victims of the conflict;
- Independent international organisations should play a role in mediating between the warring parties;

Revise the structure and membership of the Provincial Peace Council with the view of ensuring its effectiveness and credibility. Replace Provincial Peace Council members who have been unable to reconcile AGEs from their districts or communities. Include as PPC members former/reconciled AGE members, clerics, heads of district shuras, youth and women.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace  
Kunar Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial roadmap for peace provides a summary of the issues raised and recommendations offered during consultations with approximately 155 Afghans in Kunar province. The consultations comprised focus group discussions, individual in-depth interviews and surveys of opinion. Participants were drawn from diverse social and political backgrounds and included public sector employees, community elders, religious scholars and leaders, farmers, teachers, civil society representatives, and reintegrees (ex-Taliban). Importantly, although the highly conservative environment of Kunar, efforts were made to survey the views of women and youth to ensure a representative sample of community views.

The consultations took place as part of Phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace program (hereinafter the "People's Dialogue") initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult over 4,500 Afghan citizens with a view to develop 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, demography and political landscape**

Kunar province is located in the eastern region of Afghanistan. It borders Laghman province (west), Nuristan (north), Nangarhar (south), and shares a long border with Pakistan to the east. Kunar comprises roughly two per cent of Afghanistan's land mass (approximately 4,339 square kilometres) and is sparsely populated, with 90 per cent of the province consisting of mountains, forests and valleys.

Kunar has 15 districts, including Asadabad, the provincial capital. Six of Kunar's districts (Khas Kunar, Sirkanay, Marawara, Shegal, Dangam and Nari) share a 260 kilometres porous border with Pakistan's insurgency affected north-western region. This allows for easy infiltration of insurgents into the province, as there are 12 major passes connecting the province to Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Kunar is an agricultural province, comprising 24,000 hectares of agricultural land of which 18,000 are irrigated. In addition to agricultural production, forestry, livestock husbandry and mineral extraction (tourmaline, kunzite, chromite, and aquamarine) are the main sources of local income. Timber smuggling is the largest source of illegal revenue.

Kunar's population is estimated to be less than 500,000, around 70,000 of whom reside in the capital Asadabad. The population of Kunar is comprised of a mix of ethnic, tribal and linguistic groups. The Pashtun ethnic group is the majority and can be sub-divided into the Safi, Salarzai, Mohmand, Meshwani and Tajik (Dehgan) tribes. The Nuristani and Gojar ethnic groups are also represented, along with other small tribes including the Gojar, Qandari, Chalasai, Youssufzai, Kohistani-wardage, Kochi, and Alokozi. Pashto is spoken by over 90 per cent of the population. Nuristani (Ghazi Abad), Pashaie (Nor Gal) and Gojar are the other languages spoken within the province.

Kunar is popularly known as the 'birthplace of revolutions'. Local residents claim that the resistance movements against the British, Russians and Taliban all began in Kunar. Kunar is also considered a safe haven for foreign terrorist networks. Its porous border with Pakistan and an impenetrable terrain littered with caves provide a tactical advantage to insurgent groups conducting operations.

Political movements based on Islamic beliefs, such as the Wahabi/Salafi movements, enjoy strong support in local communities. The Hezb-e-Muttahid-e-Milli is the dominant political party (one of the more moderate political parties in the province), followed by the Afghan Millat and Jamiat-e-Islami of Afghanistan. Insurgent groups include the local Taliban and the Pakistani Taliban, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

### **III. Conflict Analysis: types and drivers of conflict**

Community members from Kunar identified a range of conflict types in their province. They were divided, however, in their assessment of the conflict and the security situation. Some participants cited progress, claiming that since the withdrawal of the international military forces (IMF), a number of insurgent groups have ceased *jihad* and reintegrated into communities.

A Kunar elder stated:

*"Several insurgent fighters left once IMF withdrew, believing that jihad could not be legitimately waged against Afghan forces."*

Other participants claimed that the security situation has deteriorated on account of Government and Afghan National Security Forces' weakness, causing reduced freedom of movement and obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian assistance (including vaccinations).

## **Types of conflict**

Afghan men, women and youth identified the following types of conflict in Kunar:

- The continuing offensive between pro-Government forces (PGF) and Anti-Government Elements (AGEs). Participants provided a list of AGEs groups, including Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan , Hizb-e-Islami of Afghanistan, Tahrik-e Taliban Pakistan, Haraktul Ansar, Tahriki Nifazi Sharia, Hizb ul mujahidin, Lashkar-e Jhangavi, Tahrik-e Salafia, Lashkar-e Taiba;
- The interference of foreign countries – particularly pointing to Pakistan – in Afghanistan, sharing the perception that Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is involved in a proxy war in Afghanistan through the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and the Haqqani Network (both based in the bordering north-western Tribal Areas of Pakistan);
- IMF military operations in support of Afghan National Security Forces, specifically air strikes conducted by drones;
- Cross-border shelling against armed groups conducted by the Pakistani Army. While such offensives are intended to target insurgents, they claim civilian lives and damage property in districts of Kunar, including Dangam, Marawara and Sirkanay;
- Personal and tribal enmities; and
- Local political rivalries, fuelled by opposition between political parties with military wings such as Hizb-e-Islami Afghanistan and Jamiat-e-Islami Afghanistan.

## **Drivers of conflict**

During the consultations, Afghan men, women and youth in Kunar identified an array of drivers of the conflict in Kunar, underlining its complexity. People listed the following among the triggers of the conflict in Kunar: timber smuggling, the illegal mining of gems, widespread corruption in judicial and other institutions, weak rule of law, poor performance and disregard of ethics by Government officials, ineffective peace initiatives, and the return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan (many as insurgents).

### **Corruption and impunity**

Corruption was consistently raised by participants, claiming that it permeates all aspects of Government, security and administration.

A group of Kunari farmers claimed: *“Corruption in Government institutions is the biggest cause of the war in Kunar.”* They also pointed to a lack of qualifications and competence among officials, all of whom they alleged had been appointed through nepotism.

A group of women that included teachers, housewives, doctors and university students spoke of corruption within the education system, stating:

*“Corruption in the Department of Education and in universities and schools has increased. The students who can pay bribes or whose relatives have good positions in the government can pass the kankoor (university admission) exam. Those who graduate but don’t have the money to pay bribes or who don’t have relatives in the government can’t get a job.”*

The same group of participants also questioned the quality of teachers, which they described as at a ‘zero level’. This corruption, when combined with the poor quality of education, has perpetuated illiteracy and consequently unemployment. Participants linked this directly to the conflict, arguing that the lack of employment and business opportunities makes insurgency membership an attractive source of income for youth.

Corruption allegedly also affected the media, as a group of teachers and civil society representatives claimed that bribes have been offered to journalists not to investigate impropriety by officials, which as a consequence fosters the broader culture of impunity in Kunar.

### **Abuses against civilians by security forces**

Activities of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) were also commonly flagged as drivers of the conflict. Some participants accused national security forces’ commanders of corruption, claiming that they sold Government-issued assets for their own profit. Others spoke of the animosity that night search operations cause in the community, and which in some cases has driven people to join the insurgency. A media owner from Kunar gave the example of a local resident who, while part of the Government, joined insurgents in Shaygal wa Shilton district after national security forces conducted a night raid at his home.

Some participants claimed that the international military and national security forces have been manipulated by community members pursuing their own personal and tribal conflicts

A journalist stated:

*“Personal enmities between tribes and families contribute to the conflict and are a source of misinformation. False information is provided to the international military and national security forces with underlying personal motivations.”*

The actions of the international military forces were identified by some participants as a driver of conflict, but ultimately community members were divided on the issue. Some supported the deployment of drones and international military air support as effective means of limiting insurgent activities and securing the border with Pakistan. Others viewed them as a cause of civilian casualties in the province and a source of corresponding anger within the community.

### **Foreign interventions**

Kunar residents perceived foreign intervention by India, Iran and Pakistan as drivers of the conflict, with particular resentment directed against Pakistan. Participants accused Pakistan’s ISI of directly financing and supporting insurgents, and also stated that cross-border shelling conducted by Pakistani Military against armed groups in Kunar continues to claim civilian lives and creates an atmosphere of fear in local communities.

### **Limited access to justice**

The absence of effective formal justice mechanisms was further identified as a driver of the conflict. According to the participants, Taliban have capitalised on this vacuum, with many community members turning to Taliban courts for the resolution of disputes.

An elder from Kunar gave an example: he had a personal dispute with a Taliban member and, despite being pro-Government, turned to a Taliban court for resolution due to the inefficacy of formal courts. The Taliban judge found in the elder’s favour, ruling on the basis of *Sharia*. The elder argued that these actions built support for the AGEs within communities. A group of farmers added with disappointment that some judicial officers had referred criminal cases to *jirgas* for resolution, which in their view further undermined the formal legal system.

Finally, a small number of participants, a group of mullah imams, viewed the lack of implementation of *Sharia* as a driver of the conflict, stating:

*“The current Government is Islamic but it is not based on Sharia. It has been established in line with Islamic principles, but it does not implement Sharia. We believe that if the Government implements Sharia, there won’t be any more war or conflict.”*

#### **IV. Road Map for Peace**

##### **Strengthen and reform the Afghan National Security Forces**

Through the consultations, the Afghan men, women and youth considered security in Kunar as essential to achieving security throughout Afghanistan’s eastern region, given Kunar’s porous border with Pakistan. Accordingly, they called for an increased deployment of national security forces and Afghan border police to key border crossings.

A farmer from Marawara district called on the Government to:

*“focus on and invest in protecting the border from insurgent infiltration into the province. We have a 240 kilometre border with Pakistan, along which there are around 26 crossings. Afghan border police are deployed to just four of these: Ghakhai (Marawara), Nawapas (Sirkani), Bain-e-Shahi (Dangam) and Dokalam (Nari). This number is insufficient. The Government must increase it and must also deploy national security forces to strategic crossings.”*

Participants also called for the reform of Afghan National Security Forces, pointing to the ineffectiveness of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) and Afghan National Police (ANP) in fighting the insurgency within communities and in prosecuting insurgents and criminals.

A labourer from Wata Pur district stated:

*“Weaknesses within the NDS and ANP in Kunar have strengthened the insurgency. They [ANP and NDS] don’t respond adequately against insurgents, who walk around freely in the districts and villages. Whenever NDS or ANP do arrest a Taliban member, he is released after a few months. The Talib then seeks to kill the person who arrested him. In these circumstances, ANP and NDS are afraid to act against Taliban due to fear of reprisal.”*

Participants proposed that NDS and ANP members be recruited from outside of Kunar to reduce nepotism and corruption due to local political,

ethnic, tribal and criminal affiliations, as well as the reprisal targeting of ANP and NDS members by insurgents.

A former Jihadi commander in Asadabad described the political divisions and nepotism within NDS and ANP as follows:

*“There is competition and conflict between former members of the Communist regime, who are now in NDS and ANP ... Heads of the NDS sub-directorates are former members of the communist regime (People Democratic Party-PDP).”*

Kunar residents also called for improving of ethics and professionalism of the national security forces by better training and equipping soldiers, and countering corruption and improper behaviour within their ranks.

The principal of a girls’ school in Asadabad stated:

*“Afghan national security forces should be equipped with heavy weapons or at least with weapons that the Taliban and other anti-Government groups don’t have.”*

### **Increasing security and stability**

Considering the conflict drivers identified above, Afghan men, women and youth throughout Kunar province proposed a number of necessary security-related steps that they believe will achieve a durable peace in Kunar. These steps include: cutting the financial funding of insurgent groups through illegal revenue streams (including the smuggling of gemstones, drugs and timber); finding a permanent solution for Afghan refugees in Pakistan; negotiating a security agreement with Pakistan, including the cessation of cross-border shelling by Pakistani forces; and developing a coherent and effective national security policy.

For enhancing the security in the province mullahs considered the implementation of *Sharia* as a critical step to securing the support of religious leaders for the Government, who in turn hold influence and status within their communities.

### **Supporting good governance**

Participants raised a number of governance-related concerns, including corruption and nepotism, the over-bureaucratisation of administrative processes in state institutions, and the lack of transparency in appointments. They called for the implementation of anti-corruption laws and policies such as the Presidential Decree 145 on the elimination of

corruption and to ensure that unqualified and incompetent officials are replaced by qualified individuals.

It was also proposed that duplicative and unnecessary state institutions and offices are disbanded, and that a system of rewards (*makafat*) and punishments (*majazat*) is introduced to reward well performing officials and to punish poor performing or corrupt officials. This could take the form of an oversight mechanism that tracks the performance of local Government institutions and officials and assists with planning.

A tribal elder from Wata Pur district stated:

*“Provincial officials don’t report on the real security picture to other field offices or to central level officials. They are just busy trying to keep their jobs. They don’t report problems out of fear of dismissal.”*

Further participants proposed to encourage greater youth participation in local governance. It was believed that this would replenish local government departments and promote greater local ownership.

Participants also called for government offices and institutions to extend their reach to outer districts and communities, which are often deprived of services and amenities. Not only would this serve to connect districts with the provincial capital, but it would also build the Government’s profile in marginalised communities and facilitate greater public awareness and better relationship between the government and the communities.

A labourer stated:

*“Government officials and other civil society organisations should try their best to extend their activities to cut-off districts and villages . . . All the gatherings, discussions and meetings are currently held in the capital. If officials go to the villages and districts and sit with the people, this will reduce the distance between the people and the Government.”*

### **Promoting the rule of law and social justice**

As previously raised, Afghan men, women and youth in Kunar had serious concerns with the operation of formal justice mechanisms in their province. They alleged that these mechanisms are inaccessible to many locals and described them as slow, expensive and corrupt. A local labourer echoing the common concerns of participants stated that a direct consequence is

that: *“The fundamental human rights of the people in Kunar are not protected.”*

Participants called for improvements to be made to the formal legal system, including through the removal of corrupt officials

On the other hand, mullahs viewed the implementation of *Sharia* as a way to improve security and ensure justice in Kunar as they argued the formal justice system is ineffective.

### **Supporting social and economic development**

Participants considered quality education, the creation of employment opportunities for youth, strengthening local business (including cross-border trade), countering illegal activities and ensuring equal access to and the fair distribution of development projects and services essential precursors to peace and stability in Kunar. Few concrete proposals on how to achieve these aims were offered, such as developing of local industrial projects, including the development of a hydro-electric dam project. These projects would create jobs and provide a steady supply of power to the province.

### **Improving the peace process**

Participants discussed and identified a number of constituent elements essential for the success of the peace process, which follow:

- Changing the structure and composition of the Provincial Peace Council, including by ensuring greater representation of women, youth, members of civil society organisations, tribal elders, and religious leaders and *ulemas*; Getting independent and impartial third parties to mediate between the parties to the conflict. In the view of participants *“the Peace Council is not an independent organization. It is a part of the Government”*;
- Some participants also called for direct negotiations between the Government and the Taliban and viewed the opening of the Taliban office in Qatar as a valid step in this process;
- Encouraging Peace Council members to leave their offices and travel out to communities to meet with people and to hear their views. This would include conducting outreach programs about the importance of the peace process.

A Director of a youth organisation from Dangam district stated:

*“The Provincial Peace Council only covers the capital of the province. It doesn’t extend its efforts to the districts and villages where the war is going on. It doesn’t have awareness programmes to convey messages of peace and the importance of the peace process to the people.”*

- Ensuring that the peace process has a clear and strategic agenda that enjoys the support of the Government as well as the international community, including international military forces;
- Ensuring that the peace process is directed at securing peace with and the reintegration of genuine and high-level insurgents; and
- Supporting proper reintegration of reconciled insurgent members, which should include education and employment opportunities.

## **V. People’s Recommendations**

Throughout the consultation process, people proposed the following general recommendations with a view to engage the government, international actors and civil society in a constructive dialogue on addressing root causes of conflict in Kunar province:

### **Strengthening and reform of the ANSF**

- Increase deployment of national security forces and border police to key border crossings to prevent infiltration of armed groups;
- Reform Afghan national security forces to tackle nepotism and corruption in the appointment of members to NDS and ANP NDS and ANP members should be recruited from outside of Kunar;
- Improve ethics and professionalism of the Afghan National Security Forces; ensure better training and equipment of soldiers.

### **Increasing security and stability**

The achievement of a durable peace in Kunar is dependent upon:

- Developing a coherent and effective national security policy;
- Cutting the financial funding of insurgents through illegal revenue streams (including the smuggling of gemstones, drugs and timber);
- Finding a permanent solution for Afghan refugees in Pakistan; and

- Negotiating a security agreement with Pakistan, including the cessation of cross-border shelling by Pakistani forces; .

### **Supporting good governance**

- Effectively implement existing anti-corruption laws and policies, including Presidential Decree 145;
- Review and optimise state institutions by disbanding duplicative and unnecessary state institutions and offices;
- Replace unqualified and incompetent officials with qualified individuals;
- A system of rewards (*Makafat*) and punishments (*Majazat*) should be introduced to reward well performing officials and to punish poor performing or corrupt officials. Encourage youth to participate in local governance - introduce incentive program and recruitment policies that target youth;
- Government offices and institutions must extend their reach to outer districts and communities, providing them with necessary services and amenities.

### **Promoting the rule of law and social justice**

- Strengthen the formal justice mechanisms in the province to ensure swift, fair and accessible justice delivery to all. Corrupt officials must be removed and substantial and systemic improvements must be made to the legal system.

### **Supporting social and economic development**

- Improve education to ensure better quality and create employment opportunities for youth;
- Strengthen local business (including cross-border trade);
- Counter illegal activities and ensure equal access to and the fair distribution of development projects and services;
- Development a hydro-electric dam to create jobs and provide a steady supply of power to the province.

### **Improving the peace process**

- Improve the peace process to ensure a clear and strategic agenda that enjoys the support of the Government as well as the international community, including international military forces;

- Revise the structure and composition of the Provincial Peace Council guaranteeing greater representation of women, youth, members of civil society organizations, tribal elders, religious leaders and Ulemas;
- Independent third parties should have a role in mediating between the parties to the conflict to ensure impartiality and credibility among the parties to the conflict;
- Peace Council members must outreach to communities;
- Ensure the peace process is directed at securing peace with and the reintegration of genuine and high-level insurgent members;

Develop proper reintegration programme for reconciled insurgent members that includes education and employment opportunities;

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace  
Laghman Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial road map for peace provides a summary of the issues raised and recommendations offered during consultations conducted with around 116 Afghans in Laghman province. These consultations comprised focus-group discussions, individual interviews and surveys of opinion. Participants were drawn from diverse social and political backgrounds, including public-sector employees, community elders, religious scholars and leaders, farmers, teachers, civil society actors and reintegrees (ex-Taliban). Despite the conservative environment in Laghman, significant efforts were made to survey the views of women and youth to ensure a representative sample of community views.

The consultations took place as part of Phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace programme (hereinafter the "People's Dialogue") initiated by 11 civil society organizations and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) to consult over 4,500 Afghan citizens with a view to developing 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

This local road map for peace identifies local drivers and root causes of the conflict in Laghman province and presents participants' recommendations and proposals on how to strengthen peace and stability in their communities and in the province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: geography, demography and political landscape**

Laghman province contains six districts – Alingar, Alishing, Bad-pakh, Dawlat-shah and Qarghayi – with its capital in Mihterlam and covers an estimated area of 4,308 square kilometres. Laghman borders Kunar (east), Kapisa (west), Nangarhar (south), Nuristan (north), Panjshir (north-west) and Kabul (south-west) provinces. Laghman's Alingar, Alishing and Dawlat-shah districts are mountainous.

Accurate statistics on Laghman's demography are not available, but local authorities estimate the population at around 800,000. Pashtuns are the majority ethnic group in the province (around 90 percent), with Pashayis, Tajiks and Nuristanis also represented. With the exception of Dawlat-shah district (in which Pashayis are a majority), Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group in all other districts. There are nine Pashtun tribes represented in Laghman: Abdur-rahimzi, Alokozai, Hoodkheil, Jabar Kheil, Niazi, Nasir, Safi,

Sahak and Tarakheil. Nuristanis and Tajiks are respectively represented by the Kataye and Panjshiri tribes.

Twelve political parties are active in the province, the most influential of which are Hizb-e-Islami Afghanistan and Jamiat-e-Islami Afghanistan. Other active parties include Dawat-e-Islami, Mahaz-e-Milli, People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and Afghan Millat. Laghman province has four Wolesi Jirga seats (three males and one female). Two members are from Hizb-e-Islami Afghanistan, one from Dawat-e-Islami and one from the PDPA.

The main sources of economic productivity in Laghman are agriculture, livestock, timber and the mining of precious stones.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: types and drivers of conflict**

Community members from Laghman identified a range of conflict types in their province. During the consultations, however, most participants acknowledged improvements in the security situation following the deployment of Afghan Local Police (ALP). These gains, which have included greater freedom of movement within Laghman, have not, on the other hand, pressured or encouraged anti-government elements (AGEs) to reconcile and join the peace process.

#### ***Types of conflict***

Participants identified a number of types of conflict in Laghman, including those outlined below.

- **Continuing offensive between pro-government and anti-government groups** – Laghman is strategically located, offering anti-government groups access to neighbouring provinces such as Kapisa, Parwan and Kabul.
- **Interference from foreign countries, particularly Pakistan** – Participants believed that Pakistan's intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), was involved in Afghanistan in a proxy war through Pakistan-based armed groups such as the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and the Haqqani Network.
- **Personal and tribal enmities**
- **Local political rivalries** – These are fuelled by opposition between armed groups such as Hizb-e-Islami Afghanistan and Jamiat-e-Islami Afghanistan.

Further, although the role of international military forces (IMF) has diminished, participants continue to identify the IMF as a source of conflict in the province as a result of lingering resentment at previous actions.

### ***Drivers of the conflict***

During the consultations in Laghman, communities frequently raised as the main drivers of the conflict in the province the civilian casualties caused by Afghan forces, AGEs and IMF, as well as the corresponding failure of the Government to win the popular support of Laghmanis. Participants further identified corruption and weak local governance, lack of public services, the unfair distribution of resources, lack of formal justice mechanisms, an ineffective peace process and illegal business as additional sources of conflict.

### **Failures of the ANSF**

Human rights abuses and civilian casualties caused by the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) have been seen as major factors contributing to the conflict in Laghman.

A local cleric from Alingar district shared his concerns:

*“In Alingar district, ANSF are firing mortar rounds arbitrarily. They impact on civilian residences and cause civilian casualties.”*

According to the cleric, the issue of civilian casualties drives communities to join anti-government groups. Complaints of human rights abuses have also been directed against the ALP.

A former Provincial Council spokesperson further complained about the weakness of the security forces, explaining that community anger at the failings of the Afghan and international military forces and the hurried security transition from the IMF to the ANSF<sup>128</sup> have provoked local people to change their support to AGE groups:

*“We actually handed over our districts and villages to AGEs because, when all the areas in the province were under the control*

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<sup>128</sup> Following the withdrawal of the international combat forces and the completion of the mission of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) at the end of 2014, on 1 January 2015 a follow up NATO-led mission called Resolute Support was launched to provide training, advice and assistance for the Afghan security forces and institutions. The mission operates with one central hub in Kabul/Bagram and four regional spokes in Mazar-e Sharif, Herat, Kandahar and Laghman.

*of the Government and IMF, the Government did not conduct a positive propaganda campaign against AGEs. Instead, it committed many mistakes.”*

Some participants also expressed concern about short-sighted military operations. The director of a disability organization stated that ANSF clean-up operations were often temporary, enabling anti-government groups to re-infiltrate areas after the ANSF withdrew and conduct reprisal attacks against persons who had assisted or supported the ANSF.

In addition, a local journalist expressed concern about the tribal structure of ALP units, who conduct activities in their own interests, causing tensions with other tribes and communities.

### **Corruption, weak local governance, a lack of public services and the unfair distribution of resources**

These factors fuel the conflict in a number of ways. Residents said that such Government shortcomings have slowed development, increased poverty at a high rate and perpetuated unemployment and illiteracy. In turn, the lack of education and employment opportunities has reportedly driven many youth to join anti-government groups.

An advisor to the Provincial Council stated that most AGE recruits in the province were between 14 and 25 years of age. A local defence lawyer added that *“youth are raw material for the on-going war. Most are jobless ... so they are easily recruited.”*

Weak governance and widespread corruption were widely cited causes of mistrust in the Government. Added to this were concerns as to ethnic representation, overly bureaucratized and complex administrative procedures and the nepotistic appointment of unelected officials.

Corruption was also alleged within the ANSF and was viewed as a trigger for public resentment and opposition, so also fuelling for the conflict. Participants believed that Afghan National Police (ANP) and National Security Directorate (NDS) officials had close ties to local warlords and politicians. According to those consulted, this perpetuates corruption and nepotism, as well as offering protection to criminal networks in some cases.

Participants also alleged corruption in the allocation of services, projects and resources had also fuelled personal and tribal tensions. For instance, a local civil society activist identified as a source of corruption the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), through which money is distributed to local

*shuras* to implement development projects. The activist complained that NSP funds had been misappropriated by tribal elders or projects had been allocated to areas of personal benefit to *shura* members, resulting in the heightening of pre-existing and underlying tensions between communities and tribes.

#### **Lack of formal justice mechanisms**

The absence of formal justice mechanisms in Laghman also perpetuates personal and tribal disputes. Residents claimed that formal justice mechanisms in the province, namely courts, were inaccessible, ineffective, slow and corrupt. Disputes therefore remain unresolved or, according to a representative of a disability organization, *“there is no option but to get Taliban judges to resolve disputes.”*

#### **Ineffective peace process**

Participants expressed doubts and concerns as to the role and effectiveness of the Provincial Peace Council. Some persons questioned the commitment of Council members, suggesting that many only saw the role as an additional source of income. Doubts were also raised as to the genuineness of “reconciled” members of AGE groups, with participants suggesting that most reconciled fighters were junior or had been fighting for economic, personal, tribal or criminal reasons, not ideological commitment.

#### **Illegal businesses**

In Laghman, these include the mining of precious stones and timber-smuggling, which provide a source of enrichment for corrupt local officials, as well as criminal and AGE groups. As reported by participants, these businesses also have an environmental impact that affects local communities, perpetuates poverty and denies communities revenues from these industries that could be reinvested into local development.

### **IV. Road Map for Peace**

#### ***Strengthening and reforming the Afghan National Security Forces***

Most participants linked sustainable peace and security to the reform and strengthening of the ANSF. They recommended better training and equipment for troops, in addition to air support; the assumption of greater responsibility for national security and the protection of civilians; a renewed commitment to fighting criminal and anti-government groups; increased professionalism; and the removal of corruption from ANSF ranks.

A local defence lawyer suggested:

*“In addition to financing ANSF, the international community should strictly monitor ANSF activities. Corruption in the ANSF has increased. The ANA, Police and NDS officials are involved in drug dealing. Fuel is stolen and weapons are sold.”*

Participants also viewed the prevention and addressing of human rights violations by the ANSF, including the ALP, as critical to building public confidence and as a vital peace-building measure. In this regard, they also called for a reduction in ANSF-attributed civilian casualties.

In order to address human rights abuses committed by the ANSF and ALP, participants called for a mechanism to monitor both entities. The director of a non-governmental organization specifically called on the Government to *“establish a national monitoring mechanism over ANSF to assess its operations.”* In the participants’ view, such a mechanism would help to protect civilians, increase accountability and build stronger community links and credibility.

Participants were ultimately divided in their views of the IMF. Some supported the full withdrawal of international forces, regarding them as a stimulus for the insurgency and accusing them of supporting Pakistan’s interests over Afghanistan’s. Others participants called for greater air support from international forces and encouraged Afghan forces to build bridges with communities to garner popular support.

#### ***Promoting local governance and the rule of law and countering corruption***

Participants called for sweeping changes to the political system and the removal of corrupt and unqualified office-holders as moves to tackle nepotism and corruption. They considered such changes as necessary precursors to achieving peace and lasting stability in Laghman. The director of a local madrasa in Alishang district proposed the introduction of an oversight mechanism:

*“An independent commission which would be comprised of different ministries should be established to monitor governmental institutions. This commission should have employees to gather information on illegal activities involving officials.”*

Participants also called on officials and politicians to establish a better connection with communities, by regularly initiating meetings with communities to hear their views and concerns.

A local housewife from Qarghayi district stated:

*“National and provincial policies should aim to reduce the distance between the Government and the people. Officials should sit with the people, listen to their concerns and take their ideas in mind.”*

In order to enhance the rule of law and social justice, participants proposed reforms of the legal system to enable courts to deal with disputes in a fair, effective and expedient manner.

### ***Achieving social and economic development***

Participants considered social and economic development as essential to peace and stability. Improving the quality of education, creating employment opportunities for youth, ensuring equal access to resources and the fair allocation of development projects can play a vital role in attracting people’s support for the Government and in countering youth recruitment to anti-government groups.

Participants also called for greater Government investment in agricultural development in Laghman and in the productive use of its water resources. Laghman’s two main rivers in Alingar and Alishing districts can be used for irrigation and as a source of power production. Agricultural development would raise provincial revenues and also create employment opportunities for local people.

An advisor to the Provincial Council stated:

*“Laghman has natural resources, which should be taken advantage of. It has a good climate and agricultural land. Fifty percent of the vegetables supplied to the eastern region are produced in Laghman. If the Government supports local agricultural production, it will be a good way of improving income and development...”*

Agricultural development, however, is also tied to the complicated countrywide issue of land ownership. To address issues of alleged land-grabbing by warlords and local officials, participants proposed that the Government introduce a programme of land-ownership reform that includes a mechanism for the resolution of disputes and with the power to return lands to their rightful owners.

Some participants also viewed Laghman's economic development as tied to China, proposing the construction of a highway linking the eastern region to Badakhshan province, which in turn is linked to China. This would boost trade and benefit the entire eastern region, including Nuristan.

***Improving peace processes and resolving local disputes***

To address concerns over the lack of commitment of some Provincial Peace Council members, participants called for those members that have other Government jobs (and are therefore drawing multiple salaries) to be removed and replaced. They also called for a more representative peace process that would include broader participation by women, youth, civil society, local *shura* members and political parties.

Some participants believed that the underlying issues fuelling anti-government activities and motivating fighters could be more effectively addressed through informal and traditional dispute-resolution processes, accompanied by a proper disarmament programme.

The headmaster of a girls' school in Mihterlam stated:

*"There should be a real and honest policy for disarmament of irresponsible groups and people. Millions of dollars were spent on disarmament programmes such as DDR and DIAG, but we still have many armed people. On one hand, the Government spends money on disarmament; on the other hand, they issue arms licenses to irresponsible groups. The Government should create a proper and nationwide policy for disarmament."*

With regard to reconciliation with anti-government groups, some participants supported a dialogue with the Taliban and other groups, considering the opening of the Taliban office in Qatar as a step in this process. A local cleric welcomed the office's opening as a *"good initiative ... that will work for peace."*

## **V. People's Recommendations**

Participants offered a series of recommendations to the Afghan Government for strengthening peace and security in Laghman province, which are summarized below.

### ***Strengthen and reform the Afghan National Security Forces***

- Reform and strengthen the ANSF by providing better training and equipment for troops, as well as air support).
- Address and prevent civilian casualties and ensure protection of civilians.
- Renew commitment to fighting criminal and anti-Government groups;
- Increase professionalism within the ANSF.
- Ensure accountability for human rights violations committed by ANSF, ANP and ALP.
- Corruption within the ANSF must be addressed, with perpetrators removed and punished.

### ***Promote local governance and the rule of law and counter corruption***

- Revise and strengthen Government administration and processes to prevent overly bureaucratic and unnecessarily complex procedures and the nepotistic appointment of unelected officials. An independent commission should be introduced as an oversight mechanism.
- Ensure regular meetings of officials and politicians with communities to hear their views and concerns.
- Reform formal legal mechanisms, particularly the courts, to enable them to resolve disputes in a fair, effective and expedient manner.

### ***Improve social and economic development***

- Improve the quality of education, create employment opportunities for youth, ensure equal access to resources and the fair allocation of development projects to enhance people's support for the Government and prevent youth recruitment to anti-government groups.
- Increase investment in Laghman's agricultural development and in the use of its natural resources, including water.
- Resolve issues of land ownership by introducing a land-ownership reform that includes a mechanism for the resolution of disputes with the power to return lands to their rightful owners.

- Construct a highway linking the eastern region with Badakhshan province to connect the province to China to boost trade and benefit the entire eastern region.

***Improve the peace processes and resolve local disputes***

Remove and replace Provincial Peace Council members who have other Government jobs.

- Ensure better inclusiveness of the peace process by broadening participation by women, youth, civil society, local *shura* members and political parties.
- Address and resolve the underlying issues that fuel anti-government activities and motivate fighters, including through informal and traditional dispute-resolution processes.
- Implement a proper disarmament programme.

Initiate a dialogue with the Taliban and other AGE groups as a constructive step toward peace and reconciliation.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace  
Nuristan Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial roadmap for peace provides a summary of the issues raised and recommendations offered during consultations conducted with around 50 Afghans in Nuristan province. These consultations comprised focus group discussions, individual interviews and surveys of opinion. Participants were drawn from diverse social and political backgrounds and included Provincial Council members, public sector employees, community elders, religious scholars and leaders, civil society representatives and young people. Importantly, despite the conservative environment in Nuristan, efforts were made to survey the views of women and youths to ensure a representative sample of community views.

The consultations took place as part of Phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace program (hereinafter the "People's Dialogue") initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult over 4,500 Afghan citizens with a view to develop 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

This local road map for peace identifies local drivers and root causes of the conflict and

presents participants' recommendations and proposals on how to address them

in order to strengthen peace and stability in their communities and in Nuristan province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, demography and political landscape**

Nuristan is a 9,267 square kilometer province located in north-east Afghanistan. It is surrounded by Badakhshan, Kunar, Laghman and Panjshir provinces, and shares a porous 160 kilometer border with Pakistan. Nuristan comprises seven districts: Bargi-Matal, Doab, Kamdesh, Mandol, Nugram, Wama and Waygal. Parun, its capital, is accessible through Kunar and is around 290 kilometers from Kabul by road. Nuristan has three main valleys: eastern, central and western. The eastern and central valleys are accessible through Kunar by unpaved road, while the western valley is accessible through Laghman province.

Local authorities estimate Nuristan's population to be 481,200, which can be divided into five sub-tribes: Katta (65 per cent), Kalsha (20 per cent),

Wamayee (ten per cent), Passio (three per cent) and Pashayee (one per cent). Other minorities, including Kordar, Gojar and Pashtuns, comprise the remaining one per cent.

Nuristan's political landscape is volatile and vulnerable to insurgency. Since the 1970s, the province has been a gateway for insurgents carrying out cross-border operations. After the collapse of the Najibullah regime in 1992, most major *Jihadi* parties were active in Nuristan. Due to its mountainous terrain and isolation, Nuristan was a safe haven for Hizb-e Islami Gulbuddin Hekmatyar commanders from all over the country, particularly after their defeat in Kabul in 1994. It has since provided safe haven to and served as a training ground for other armed groups, including the Salafi Movement, the Taliban (from Afghanistan and Pakistan) and foreign fighters, including Al-Qaida.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: types and drivers of conflict**

#### **Types of conflict**

Community members from Nuristan identified a range of conflict types in their province, the main conflicts are outlined below.

#### **Personal and tribal disputes**

Personal and inter-tribal disputes are common in Nuristan, reportedly aided by the absence of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and a minimal presence of Afghan National Police (ANP) at the district level. This security vacuum is made worse by the absence of a functional legal system in Nuristan to resolve the disputes. As a result, disputes remain unaddressed or are resolved through *jirgas* or Taliban dispute resolution processes, which often perpetuate human rights violations and can aggravate further conflicts.

#### **Conflict between pro-Government and anti-Government elements**

Nuristan's porous border with Pakistan's volatile north-western region has contributed to the continuing conflict between pro-Government and Anti-Government Elements (AGEs -including the Taliban, Pakistani Taliban under Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, and Hizb-e-Islami). Allegedly, due to the absence of international military forces (IMF) and ANSF in Nuristan, anti-Government elements (AGEs) use the province as a "safe haven" and foreign fighters (including Arabs and Al-Qaida members) use it as a training ground. Some participants also viewed Nuristan as a base for AGE incursions into other provinces, including Badakhshan, Kapisa and Laghman,

aimed at destabilising the Government. Communities also stated that AGEs have directed attacks against local community members, targeting individuals, killing livestock and burning down the homes of persons accused of supporting the Government.

Some participants additionally reported mistrust between local communities and Afghan Local and National Police which also contributed to anti-Government sentiments in the province. This was attributed to growing public resentment at the corruption and abuses committed by some ALP and ANP members. An Imam reported that ANP members sell large quantities of the fuel that they are issued each month for their personal profit. Complaining of impunity of abuses committed by ANP, a civil society representative provided the following example:

*“In Nurgaram district of Nuristan, an ANP officer killed a poor person over a personal dispute. The incident occurred within 40 metres of the ANP headquarters. The ANP officer was arrested and held for two days, but he escaped taking 12 guns and joined the Taliban. The Government later invited him to join the peace and reintegration process. He returned and now he is an ANP officer again.”*

### **Drivers of the conflict**

Community members from Nuristan identified a range of drivers of the conflict, including **poverty, a lack of infrastructure and limited access to essential services, corruption, impunity, non-functional State institutions and ineffective peace process**. While common to most of Afghanistan, these drivers have a particularly acute impact in Nuristan due to its geographic remoteness and topography, and its reported neglect by the Government and the international community.

An influential tribal elder explained the impact of the Nuristan’s geography as follows:

*“When a resident of Du Ab district wants to go to Parun – the capital of Nuristan – they need to pass through three provinces (Laghman, Nangarhar and Kunar) and more than 15 districts. It takes days.”*

### **Underdevelopment, limited access to essential services**

The lack of access to and within Nuristan has had a crippling effect on development, including on education and access to health services.

According to participants, most children are educated in *madrassas* in Pakistan due to a shortage of functioning schools and teachers in the province. Participants reported that reliance on Pakistani *madrassas* has resulted in the radicalisation of some students, who return as AGE or AGE sympathisers. In the words of a tribal elder, students become radicalised and “bring the insurgency back with them.” Others remain uneducated, sustaining the high illiteracy rate. A lack of clinics and hospitals also requires Nuristanis to travel to neighbouring provinces for medical care and treatment, with patients dying on the way to Kunar and Nangarhar, according to an Imam.

Nuristan’s geography has also resulted in an unequal distribution of development aid. People complained that development projects are implemented in the accessible districts, such as Nurgaram district, while more remote districts – often those most in need – are neglected.

A local journalist from Nurgaram district stated:

*“There is no development investment in Nuristan. It has been isolated for many years. Instead, it is [the Government’s] enemies that pay special attention to Nuristan.”*

### **Corruption, poor governance, ineffective security institutions**

Participants viewed corruption as one of the major causes of mistrust of the Government. Significantly, participants accused provincial officials of fueling and exploiting insecurity in Nuristan for their own benefit.

A representative of a civil society organisation from Wama district stated:

*“Most of the current officials don’t want peace in Nuristan. If there was peace and security in Nuristan, then delegations from Kabul would be able to assess easily the province and would inhibit our officials from pursuing their personal interests... A delegation from Kabul, led by the Head of the Complaints Commission of the Upper House of Parliament, visited Nuristan. Many people complained to him that the Chief of Police was corrupt and taking one thousand Afghani from each ANP member’s monthly salary. It was promised that these concerns would be raised with national level officials but no action was taken yet.”*

Nuristan’s geography and prevailing insecurity have also impacted on governance. Many Provincial Council members are based in Nangarhar province and rarely travel to Nuristan, disconnecting them from their

constituent communities. Participants further reported that Government funds allocated to the development of infrastructure, including roads, have been lost to corruption.

Nuristan residents also complained of the absence of ANSF and a sparse police presence in the province, which they argued allowed criminal gangs to operate freely, engaging in kidnapping, robbery, and the smuggling of precious stones

People also raised concerns about the professionalism of ANSF, including the ANP, citing irregularities in its membership, poor performance, corruption and misconduct by ANP members. They reported that some ANP members had left and joined AGE because they had not been paid salaries for more than six months.

A cleric from Nurgaram district stated:

*“The ANP structure is very complicated in Nuristan. Many ANP officers have been replaced without corrections being made to the original Tashkeel [which lists the number and identity of individual ANP officers]. Sometimes when an ANP is killed, his parents or relatives come to the Chief of Police and discover that he is not listed on the Tashkeel, sometimes because the original Tashkeel has been changed many times by local commanders without these updates being reported to [the Ministry of Interior in] Kabul.”*

Participants further linked the conflict in Nuristan to the lack of protection of the border with Pakistan, and the absence of ANSF in the province, which have reportedly enabled insurgents to enter Afghanistan and to equip and train before launching attacks in neighbouring provinces, such as in Badakhshan.

A Mullah Imam from Kamdesh stated:

*“Nuristan has around 25 large roads and small routes connecting it with Pakistan, none of which are patrolled or controlled by ANSF... In the past, only Kamdesh and Barg-e-Matal districts were insecure. Now the insecurity has also shifted to the central and western parts of Nuristan. The main cause of this is the central Government’s lack of attention to Nuristan during the last ten years. There is no ANA in Nuristan. When they [ANSF] do come, they come for a short period of time and leave.”*

### **Civilian casualties**

Civilian casualties as a result of military operations in Nuristan cause further resentment of communities and have driven anti-Government sentiments. Some community members expressed anger at airstrikes conducted by IMF, which have caused civilian casualties in Nuristan.

### **Ineffective peace process**

Participants also pointed to the failings of the peace processes as a factor contributing to the conflict in Nuristan. Most members of Nuristan's Peace Council operate remotely, being based in Nangarhar province, the consequence is that the Council is largely unrepresented in the province, particularly at the district level. One district in which participants identified successful efforts in reconciling AGEs was Nurgaram district, which has a Peace Council office.

A journalist explained the shortcomings of the Nuristan's Peace Council:

*"Generally, the Provincial Peace Council's efforts have failed. Most members cannot travel to Nuristan to sit with local people to hear their concerns or to invite AGEs to join the peace process."*

A member of the Provincial Peace Council also conceded that the body's efforts had largely failed, stating:

*"The main reason for its [Provincial Peace Council's] failure is that it is a project rather than a process. The Council doesn't have contact with local ulemas and elders. It doesn't have a public awareness policy."*

He also highlighted the lack of incentives to encourage AGEs to join the peace process as an obstacle to the Peace Council's work.

### **Personal and tribal enmities**

Some participants also identified continuing personal and tribal enmities as a driver of the conflict in Nuristan. Government inaction combined with the absence of formal dispute resolution and justice mechanisms has enabled disputes to spread and grow. Participants particularly pointed to the tensions that have arisen in eastern Nuristan (Kamdesh and Barg-e-Matal) between the Koshtuz and Kamdesh villages over land and water resources, which reportedly fueled the conflict. These disputes are further complicated by their occasional split down pro-Government and anti-

Government lines or the use of such groups by influential individuals to protect their own interests.

A tribal elder from Kamdesh provided the below explanation:

*“The dispute between the Koshtuz and Kamdesh villages has existed since the pre-Taliban era but it has not yet been resolved. On one occasion, the people of Kamdesh set fire to Koshtuz village and the entire village was burnt. These days, most of Koshtuz’s residents have relocated to other parts of the country. The dispute should be resolved forever as most AGE activities and conflicts in eastern Nuristan have arisen from this dispute.”*

#### **IV. Road Map for Peace**

##### ***Improving Security and tackling insurgency: improving border control and strengthening ANSF***

To reduce AGEs infiltration from Pakistan, Nuristani participants called on the Government to patrol and secure the border, specifically the main arterial roads and routes frequented by insurgents. Participants also considered strengthened engagement by the Government and international community essential to countering the insurgency. They called for ANSF clean-up operations and the establishment of permanent check posts in strategic parts of the province that are under AGE control and which are linked to neighbouring provinces.

A religious leader from Kamdesh district stated:

*“The first and most important way to achieve peace is through securing the border. The Government should increase the number of border outposts and deploy more security forces to the main routes used by AGEs. Over the last eight years, Bari Kot in Nari district of Kunar, which leads to Kamdesh and Barg-e-Matal districts of Nuristan, has been blocked and controlled by AGEs. The Government should conduct clean-up operations and deploy security forces to open that route by any means.”*

According to the Head of the Provincial Council in Nuristan, the Ministry of Defense has approved the deployment of an ANA battalion to Nuristan, but it remained stationed in Laghman province (at the time of the consultations). Participants argued that this is a clear example of the Government’s wavering commitment to countering the insurgency in Nuristan. Further, in order to address shortcomings in the ANP such as

poor performance, corruption and misconduct by ANP members, participants called for greater Government oversight of the ANP and monitoring of the activities of its members.

### ***Investing in Nuristan: Government presence and civil society support***

Participants reported that Nuristan is starved of Government support and services. Most Government institutions and provincial authorities operate out of neighbouring Kunar, Laghman and Nangarhar provinces. The provincial officials that are based in Nuristan are largely in the western Nurgaram district, which is disconnected from Parun and the central and eastern valleys. Therefore, participants asserted that having a physical Government and political presence in Nuristan is an essential step to supporting development and investment in the province.

Participants called on both the Government and the international community to hold the provincial government accountable (including through performance reviews). They also called for an increased support to civil society organisations, few of which are active in Nuristan, in order to improve transparency and accountability of the local government.

A youth representative from Nurgaram district stated:

*“CSOs [civil society organisations] can play a good role in ensuring transparency and accountability of Government officials. They can monitor the situation in Nuristan and help to develop good solutions for the Government and international community to implement. CSOs can also close the gap between the people of Nuristan and the Afghan Government.”*

### ***Ensuring access: humanitarian assistance and regional coordination***

Poor roads, mountain ranges, heavy snow, AGE and criminal activity and occasional ANSF road blocks collectively make the transport of essential goods and the delivery of humanitarian assistance to and within Nuristan exceptionally difficult. This has a significant impact upon local communities, reflected in the high mortality rates for women and children. Participants therefore called for investment in primary health care in Nuristan and for a coordinated response to ensure greater access of Nuristan’s residents to medical facilities in Kunar and Laghman. This could include the mobilisation of ANSF to secure the routes connecting Nuristan to its neighbours, and improving the capacity of medical facilities to accept and treat additional patients transported from Nuristan.

### ***Education and social and economic development***

The accessibility obstacles introduced above have also impacted upon access to education, requiring many children to travel to Pakistan for their schooling, mostly for attending madrassas. Investment in schools and teachers in Nuristan was therefore identified as both a means to improving opportunities for youth while also reducing their recruitment to anti-Government and extremist groups. Further, the provision of vocational training was proposed as a means of rehabilitating and providing opportunities to youths that have returned from Pakistan with anti-Government links.

Participants further called for improvement of the economic development in Nuristan to discourage community members joining the AGEs groups. Nuristan is a province rich in natural resources: timber, mineral mines, gems and water. The opening of the province through secure transit routes and the harvesting of natural resources through official processes – rather than criminal networks – were viewed as means of raising capital to invest in local development.

### ***Countering corruption and supporting the rule of law***

Participants viewed corruption and impunity as one of the major causes of people turning against the Government. Accordingly, communities called for steps to be taken to counter corruption and ensure the equal and fair application of the law as integral to the achievement of a durable peace.

As a measure to counter corruption and reduce nepotism, participants further proposed that provincial officials in Nuristan are appointed from other provinces.

### ***Resolving tribal disputes***

Participants emphasised on the importance of resolving tribal disputes and personal enmities, such as those in eastern Nuristan (Kamdesh and Barg-e-Matal) arisen between villages of natural resources, including land and water. ***Strengthening the peace process***

Participants criticised the Provincial Peace Council's activities as a 'project' rather than a 'process'. They called on Peace Council members to leave their offices and visit the districts and villages and to raise public awareness about their work. They also criticised the politicised nature of appointments to the Peace Council accusing some members of bias and allegiance to

AGEs, and urged for revision of the appointed Council members to ensure impartiality and credibility.

## **V. People's Recommendations**

Participants offered the following recommendations to the Government with the view of strengthening peace and security in Nuristan:

### ***Improve security and tackle insurgency: better border control and strengthen ANSF***

- ANSF must patrol and secure the border with Pakistan, specifically the main arterial roads and routes frequented by insurgents;
- ANSF must conduct regular clean-up operations and establish permanent check posts in strategic parts of Nuristan that are under AGE control and which are linked to neighbouring provinces (Badakhshan, Kunar, Laghman and Panjsher).

### ***Improve governance, transparency and accountability***

- Ensure a physical Government and political presence in Nuristan (not in neighbouring provinces) – it is an essential step to support development and investment, improve security, ensure accountability and representing the people;
- The Government and the international community must hold provincial government officials accountable, including by conducting periodic performance reviews;
- Civil society organisations inside Nuristan must be provided with greater support. Civil society organisations outside Nuristan must be given greater access to the province.

### ***Ensure better access: humanitarian assistance and regional coordination***

- The Government and the international community must invest in primary health care in Nuristan;
- Ensure a coordinated national level response to enable Nuristanis greater access to medical facilities in Kunar and Laghman. This could include the mobilisation of ANSF to secure the routes connecting Nuristan to its neighbours, and improving the capacity of medical facilities to accept and treat additional patients transported from Nuristan.

### ***Invest in education and improve social and economic development***

- The Government must invest in education in Nuristan by building more schools and securing quality teachers as a means to reduce radicalization and recruitment of youth to AGEs;
- Vocational training should be used as a means of rehabilitating and providing opportunities to youths that have returned from Pakistan with anti-Government links;
- Development aid must be distributed to all parts of Nuristan, with priority given to the areas and districts most in need;
- Investment should be made into the harvesting of natural resources through legal means and in a sustainable way, with the profits used to invest in local development.

### ***Counter corruption and support the rule of law***

- Provincial officials in Nuristan should be appointed from other provinces. This would help to reduce nepotism and reliance on local and community networks to support corrupt activities;
- Formal justice mechanisms must be strengthened to guarantee the resolution of tribal disputes and personal enmities.

### ***Improve the peace process***

- Ensure impartiality of the Provincial Peace Council and outreach to communities. Provincial Peace Council members must be prepared to travel to districts and villages to raise public awareness about their work and encourage AGE to join the peace process.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace  
Badakhshan Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial road map for peace represents a summary of key findings and issues raised by the citizens of Badakhshan province as part of Phase II of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace (hereafter “People’s Dialogue”), a nationwide programme initiated by 11 civil society networks and the AIHRC to consult over 4,500 ordinary Afghans across the country, with a view to developing 34 local road maps for peace – one for each Afghan province.

In Badakhshan province, ten focus-group discussions were conducted, including in conflict-affected areas such as the districts of Wardoj and Jurm. Overall, 244 Afghans including 69 women, participated. People from different walks of life took part: community elders, villagers, teachers, government employees, police officers, religious elders, housewives, students, ethnic and religious minority representatives, farmers, university professors, civil society activists, women’s rights activists, prosecutors, labourers, drivers, *shura* representatives and others.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Population, Ethnic Composition and Political Context**

Badakhshan is located in the northeastern part of Afghanistan and borders the provinces of Takhar, Nuristan and Panjsher. It is also the only province in Afghanistan to share international borders with three countries: China, Tajikistan and Pakistan. Badakhshan has an area of 44,059 square kilometres and is almost entirely (98.8%) mountainous, encompassing the Hindu Kush and Pamir mountain ranges, rising up to an altitude of 7,485 metres above sea level. It is one of the most remote and least developed provinces owing to its geography, and parts of the province are inaccessible during most of the year due to terrain, weather and road conditions. The province is divided into 28 districts, including the provincial capital, Faizabad. The border with Tajikistan is demarcated by the Pyanzh, a tributary of the River Amu.

Badakhshan’s population is estimated to be about one million. Faizabad is the provincial capital, with roughly 100,000 inhabitants. Tajiks make up the vast majority of the population (up to 80%). Of these, about 20 percent are Ismailis (Shi’a), concentrated in the eastern border areas of the province. The districts of Wakhan, Ishkashem, Sheghnan, Zibak and some parts of Darwaz, Yamgan and Kuran-wa-Menjan constitute one of the main concentrations of Ismailis in Afghanistan. Uzbeks represent 10 to 15 per cent of the population and are largely found in the Argu and Khash districts.

In addition, there are 1,400 Kyrgyz that live in the Pamir highlands of Wakhan district. Other ethnic minorities are Hazaras, Pashtuns and Baloch.

Badakhshan has been a breeding ground for various political movements and has produced national political personalities. In 1996 when the Taliban captured Kabul, the then mujahideen-led government of the Islamic State of Afghanistan was relocated to Badakhshan and the province was the base for the Northern Alliance until 2001. That is why the politics of the province continue to be dominated by members of the former Northern Alliance who are presently in key Government positions.

Provincial political dynamics though are largely dominated by factions of the Jamiat-e-Islami. Factional loyalties overrule any party allegiances among political actors. Hizb-e-Islami is strong in some pockets in central Badakhshan, while pro-Tajik nationalist parties like Kangre-e-Milli and Azadagan have their constituencies, too.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

Types of conflict identified by inhabitants of Badakhshan province included the Taliban-led insurgency, political rivalry between the Jamiat-e-Islami and Hizb-e-Islami parties, conflicts related to opium production and trafficking, disputes over the route of the Silk Road and disputes over mineral resources, as well as conflict fuelled by corruption, absence of the rule of law, poverty and other social factors.

All of the participants were of the view that in Badakhshan province the insurgency by anti-government elements (AGEs) started only in 2011 or 2012. Participants especially from Wardoj and Jurm districts said that Taliban-led insurgency was one of the conflict drivers in their districts. Residents from Wardoj district claimed that strongly ideological fighters found sanctuary in the deeply conservative environment and exploited the discontent of currently unemployed former junior mujahideen commanders. One of participants from Wardoj district explained:

*“I know many ex-jihadists from Wardoj district who are unemployed and are living a miserable life. One of them joined the Taliban to because of financial incentives. This is because most former Jihadi fighters are unemployed and live in poverty.”*

Participants said that initially there were only around 20 insurgents operating in a few villages of Wardoj district, but the figure grew to 400 or

450. They alleged that there was a wider insurgent strategy to control vital roads to and from the province and to establish safe transit routes in the province to cross over into Central Asian states. Jurm district, which neighbours Wardoj district, is also infiltrated by AGEs. Farghamonj, Kiev, Kateo, Khostak and other small villages of Jurm district are under the control of AGEs.

People also said that political parties' rivalries, particularly between Jamiat-e-Islami and Hizb-e-Islami, had been a driver of conflict and cited several examples of situations when this rivalry affected the stability of the province considerably. Almost all participants of the focus-group discussions said that Jamiat-e-Islami and Hizb-e-Islami had a long tradition of conflict in Badakhshan. People claimed that tensions between Jamiat-e-Islami and Hizb-e-Islami again surfaced in 2012. One participant from Argu district described the public unrest, undermining security in the district, sparked by the replacement of two prominent Hizb-e-Islami figures holding government posts:

*"When a Hizb-e-Islami figure was transferred from Argu, his followers, who were more than five hundred, demonstrated in front of the district governor's office and did not allow the governor to enter. This blockade continued for weeks. It was chaotic and people were concerned that armed conflict would break out between the two opposing parties."*

All participants pointed toward clashes of economic interests with neighbouring provinces and countries, usually related to trade along the New Silk Road. They believed that these differences encouraged AGE activities to sabotage the nascent route's infrastructure connecting Badakhshan to Tajikistan and China. They asserted that Badakhshan's powerful stakeholders, especially those serving as members of parliament, had a vested interest in destabilizing certain districts and diverting the course of construction to pass through their areas of influence instead, bringing trade opportunities to those districts. According to participants, a typical tactic is to destabilize a neighbouring district in order to shift road construction to one's own area. People claimed that politicians from Panjsher province also were involved in enflaming conflict in Wardoj to force the road to take a southern route through the Panjsher valley, through the Badakhshan districts of Kuran-wa-Munjan and Zebak. Lastly, people of Badakhshan asserted that even Pakistan was involved in

destabilizing Badakhshan: if the New Silk Road became functional, trade along the Karakoram Highway from Pakistan to China would be affected.

Participants agreed that Badakhshan province had been facing a chronic conflict over mines, especially lapis lazuli mines, ever since the Soviet invasion (1979). Over the years, Nuristani, Panjsheri and Badakhshi power-brokers fought each other over control of these mines. People noted that the Government had failed to centralize legality and control over the extraction of minerals in Badakhshan. Instead, local power-brokers, including MPs, were involved in the business and were detested by local inhabitants for getting wealthy while they lived below the poverty-line and suffered from a lack of health care, education, roads and other services.

People provided an additional example of a gold mine in Raghistan district, reportedly controlled by an MP who also created an illegal armed group, prompting his opponents to set up their own militias in the district, referred as “Taliban”. Participants claimed that more than 300 armed men were involved in mining operations. A participant from Ishkashem district said:

*“Last year about six young men from Ishkashem district were killed in the area of the Gharan ruby mine by armed men involved in extracting rubies from that site. The slain men had found a precious piece of stone and were killed for it.”*

Participants from Jurm district also claimed that disputes in their district over lapis lazuli mines stretched back three decades. In 2004, one MP created a Mine Protection Unit in the police department and appointed his brother as head of that unit, thus gaining control over the mine.

All participants expressed concern about the performance of the provincial government, claiming the damaging influence of self-interested officials. They said that, although most AGEs in Badakhshan were not ideologically close to the Taliban, Government corruption and injustice had prompted ordinary people to join AGEs to take revenge on their opponents.

In addition, all participants raised the issue of opium poppy cultivation and drug trafficking as a major cause of insecurity in Badakhshan. They said that cultivation was taking place primarily in the rain-fed areas of Drayem – the centre of poppy cultivation – as well as in Kishem, Teshkan and Argu. People blamed high-ranking officials and politically influential persons for involvement in opium cultivation and drug trafficking. A male participant from Faizabad said:

*“I know many high-ranking officials who are involved in drug trafficking, but I cannot name them because I might be targeted. These people have a vested interest in opium production and drug trafficking. It has destroyed the younger generation of Badakhshan, but no one can say their names.”*

Some participants also mentioned illiteracy, as well as lack of livelihood opportunities, electricity, schools, drinking water and road infrastructure as drivers of conflict in certain parts of Badakhshan.

#### **IV. Road Map for Peace**

During the focus-group discussions, people presented a comprehensive overview of the nature of conflicts in Badakhshan. They mentioned internal and external drivers of conflict in the province and listed political, economic, drug-related, governance and social factors that influence conflict dynamics. As a result, people put forward a local road map for peace and stability in Badakhshan, focusing on the following four interrelated thematic areas.

##### ***Strengthen Local Government Institutions***

Participants in the discussions were of the view that government administration at the provincial level was very weak, ineffective and politicized. People complained that political rivalries between Hizb-e-Islami and Jamiat-e-Islami were affecting the lives of ordinary people negatively by fostering what is commonly called an insurgency, but in fact comprise violent rivalries between political groups. The participants urged the provincial government to remind political parties to respect each other's programmes and not escalate their disputes to a level where they create security problems for the province in pursuing their differing agendas. One of participants from Khombak village in Kishem district stated:

*“I know that Hizb-e-Islami and Jamiat-e-Islami are independent political parties. But they have to consider local people's interest, as well. Last year, a pro-Government militia commander was killed during a suicide attack. He was killed because he was affiliated with Jamiat-e-Islami, his rivals were Hizb-e-Islami.”*

Participants pointed out that Badakhshan was rich in mineral wealth, but that weak and ineffective government at provincial level had allowed local power-brokers to exploit these resources selfishly, halting local economic

development. People believed that these coveted resources had created a negative situation in which local power-brokers illegally exploit the minerals without providing employment to local inhabitants and without spending any of the revenue from these mines for local development. Some participants asserted that this situation had created further mistrust between Government and citizens, which played into the hands of local power-brokers. A community elder from Jurm district said:

*“Natural resources, for example lapis lazuli, are situated in the land of the people. People give the state the authority to exploit it legally. We have seen that these natural resources are extracted illegally for the power-brokers’ personal profit. The local community is not given jobs and no money is spent for the development of the local community. In the near future people will take a stand against this illegal extraction and stop it, creating a new conflict in the province.”*

People noted that the Silk Road was one of the oldest trade routes connecting them with China, and that the Government had taken steps to revitalize it. They were concerned that it had become one of the reasons for conflict in Badakhshan. They demanded that the provincial government take steps to improve security in the province and stop outside infiltration. A community elder from Wardoj expressed his views in these words:

*“I know that some of our fellow citizens are not happy with a Silk Road that goes through the Wardoj valley. These people give arms and support financially the so-called Taliban in Wardoj district. Their aim is to divert the Silk Road from Wardoj to take another route. They think only of their interest and exploit our rights. This is not good.”*

People also viewed opium production and drug trafficking as among the main challenges for the provincial government in Badakhshan. They alleged that the involvement of powerful personalities, as well as insecurity and poverty, had complicated the issue, as farmers opted for opium cultivation because it provides a greater source of income than other crops. The solution would lie in making the Counter-Narcotics Police effective at the provincial level. They also suggested launching a robust awareness-raising

campaign on the detrimental impact of drug trafficking on both the producers and their children. A father from Shahr-e-Buzorg district said:

*“My son was jobless. He did not have any skills to earn money for himself and his family. He was compelled to transport a few kilogrammes of heroin from Afghanistan to Tajikistan. He was arrested and imprisoned for many years. There are many poor people like my son. The Government should stop the production of opium and arrest the big dealers. But I know that cannot be done because many powerful persons are involved in this. Only sons of poor people are arrested because they are the ones who traffic the drugs to earn money for their families.”*

### **Promoting Human Rights, Rule of Law and Ending Impunity**

Participants jointly complained about the absence of the rule of law and said that every power-broker had established his own territory and rules. People were deprived of their basic human rights and there was no effective law to protect them. A school teacher from Raghistan district said:

*“There is anarchy in the district. One MP has his own militia and extracts gold from mines in the district. His opponent, who also mines for gold, has created his own militia under the name of Taliban and has areas under his control. Such is their game of interests. State institutions are influenced by these men. There is no rule of law, but the rule of a few powerful persons. No ordinary citizen can exercise full rights.”*

Participants expressed a concern that the vetting of reintegrees<sup>129</sup> by the provincial governor’s office, NDS and the police was not satisfactory and could lead to impunity for serious crimes committed by some of the reintegrees. Besides, no civil society and human rights organizations were

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<sup>129</sup> A term created to describe ex-combatants, former AGE members, who cease fighting and rejoin their communities with the help of programmes such as the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP). According to the APRP, ex-combatants who renounce violence, accept the Afghan Constitution, live by the rule of law and cease support for and ties to AGEs, will be reintegrated into their communities, as well as provided assistance with education and vocational training and with protection and security. See National Security Council, D&R Commission, Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP), July 2010, available at:

[https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/AFG/00060777\\_00060777\\_APRP\\_National%20Programme%20Document%202010%2006%2001.pdf](https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/AFG/00060777_00060777_APRP_National%20Programme%20Document%202010%2006%2001.pdf).

active at district level to identify war criminals and object to their reintegration. As a result, they added that any anti-government elements could easily join the peace process and receive benefits from the APRP reintegration programme. Ordinary people might be unaware and end up collaborating with an undisclosed war criminal who has been reintegrated. Participants suggested that a great need existed to raise public awareness about combating impunity at the village level. An Argu district school teacher said:

*“People see justice when the criminal is punished for his crime. Impunity should end and people should stand against those criminals who have committed crimes in the past. Impunity has bad consequences; it will give moral support to the perpetrator to commit his crime again. If he is punished then no one will dare to commit the crime.”*

### **Strengthening Social and Economic Development**

People stressed that education gave people knowledge about their rights and responsibilities, as well as allowing them to find jobs and earn money. A man from Yawan district said:

*“Education gives enlightenment to the people and allows them to learn a trade to earn for their families. In the villages, thousands of young men are unemployed. They do not have any activity to occupy them. They either go to ANSF or AGEs for financial benefits. The government should provide technical and professional skills to these young men: mechanics, tailoring and other trades would give them an opportunity to earn money by themselves.”*

### **Support Inclusiveness of Peace and Reconciliation Process**

All participants expressed their view that the peace process in Badakhshan had ambiguous effects on ordinary citizens. People were aware that the Provincial Peace Council had personnel, but were not satisfied with their activities. People called for steps to be taken to ensure an effective and inclusive peace process. A woman teacher in Faizabad said:

*“We know that the PPC [Provincial Peace Council] has an office and staff working. But we do not remember when they have been to the districts and campaigned for peace at district level. In Wardoj district, they went with government officials a few times.”*

*The PPC should have its own initiatives and go and meet with the Taliban in the districts. Most PPC members are religious clerics who enjoy prestige among the Taliban, as both had been mujahideen in the past. They [religious clerics] can bring the Taliban to the peace process, but they are not effective.”*

## **V. People’s Recommendations:**

People who participated in the focus-group discussions in Badakhshan had the following recommendations to end conflict in the province:

### ***Strengthen Local Government Institutions:***

- i. Reform local government institutions to eradicate corruption and guarantee that all decisions are taken according to the interests of the province and its people, not a specific political party.
- ii. Institute a merit-based system in government recruitment and development activities, ensuring decisions are not made based on party or ethnic biases, or under the influence of power-brokers.
- iii. The Government should take concrete steps to eradicate opium production and drug trafficking, by strengthening the Counter-Narcotics Police and ensuring that they are effective and efficient. Strict actions should be taken against involvement of government employees in drug production and trafficking.
- iv. Corrupt officers must be removed from their positions. The Government should have zero tolerance for corruption and should give exemplary punishment to corrupt officials.

### ***Promoting Human Rights, Rule of Law and Tackling Impunity:***

- i. Public-awareness programmes on human rights should be conducted in villages and districts.
- ii. Religious leaders, community elders, women, political party members, youth and government servants should be invited to these public-awareness programmes to enhance their knowledge and capacity to promote human rights and take an active part in decision-making processes.
- iii. Civil society and human rights organizations must extend their activities to the most remote villages.

- iv. Women should be given a chance to participate in decision-making at the district and village level.
- v. End impunity: ensure vetting of reintegrees who have committed serious crimes in the armed conflict.

***Strengthen Social and Economic Development:***

- i. Children must have access to schools in all villages of Badakhshan; professional teachers should be appointed to these schools.
- ii. The Government should set up programmes, with the help of donors, to provide technical education to unemployed youths. This will ensure that they become independent, rather than being a burden on the Government.
- iii. The least developed areas of the province should be considered in development plans.
- iv. The exploitation of all natural resources should be transparently and fairly awarded to lawful contractors. Mining companies should hire local people and should spend some their profits on the development of the area (roads, clinics, schools).

***Support Inclusiveness of Peace and Reconciliation Process:***

Women, youth, ethnic and religious minorities are marginalized by the Government in the peace process. Their views and suggestions should be included to achieve an inclusive and therefore effective peace process.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Takhar Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial roadmap for peace represents a summary of key findings based on the views and concerns shared by people who participated in focus-group discussions, individual interviews and opinion surveys carried out in Takhar province. The consultations were held as part of Phase II of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace (hereinafter “People’s Dialogue”), a nationwide programme initiated by 11 civil society networks to consult over 4,500 ordinary Afghans across the country with a view to developing 34 local road maps for peace – one for each Afghan province.

In Takhar province, ten focus-group discussions were held with the participation of 221 people (107 male and 114 female). Participants were from various walks of life, including housewives, human rights defenders, women’s rights activists, shopkeepers, teachers, students, farmers, community elders, religious scholars, war victims, detainees and prisoners, the disabled, community elders, district *shura* members, health personnel and drivers.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Takhar covers an area of 12,376 square kilometres, with 17 districts including the provincial capital, Taloqan. The province was established in 1964 when the then-Kataghan province was divided into three to form the provinces of Baghlan, Kunduz and Takhar. More than half of the province (56.8 per cent) is mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain, while more than one-third of the area is made up of flat land (36.7 per cent).

The population of Takhar is estimated at about 901,900 people<sup>130</sup> which ranks the province as one of the most populated in the northeastern region and ninth nationally. Around 86 per cent of the population of Takhar lives in rural districts, while 14 per cent is settled in urban areas. Uzbeks (44 per cent) and Tajiks (42 per cent) dominate in the province, while Pashtuns (10 per cent), Hazaras, Baloches, Pashais and Gujurs represent ethnic minorities. Rivalry between the two dominant ethnic groups, Tajik and Uzbeks, has emerged in the past. Takhar is relatively peaceful compared to other provinces in the region. However, districts like Rustaq, Chah Ab, Hazar Sumuch and Farkhar have been chronically affected by destabilizing factional conflicts.<sup>131</sup> Local commanders generally cooperate with the

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<sup>130</sup> According to the Central Statistics Office, 2011 Takhar profile.

governmental authorities, but try to maintain their influence in the province.

Takhar was a leading province at the national level with respect to achievements in the Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) programme. Disarmament initiatives were welcomed and authorities and communities contributed significantly: since 2001 to the time of the consultations in 2013, local commanders, acting with unprecedented enthusiasm, had handed over around 3,000 light and heavy weapons, plus 100 tons of ammunition. But the quality of weapons, in particular those surrendered for the last two years, remained questionable. As of November 2009, nine districts had been announced 'weapon free'. In reality, some commanders are still suspected of possessing functional weapons. Commanders in Rustaq surrendered only an estimated 10 per cent of their weapons in 2006, refusing further handover. Since mid-2009, the programme has been put on hold due to the growing insecurity in neighbouring Kunduz and throughout the country, but the insurgents joining the Government handover their weapons through the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP).<sup>132</sup>

Two conservative political parties – Jamiat-e-Milli Islami Afghanistan (Jamiat-e-Islami or Jamiat), representing largely the Tajik ethnic population, and Junbesh-e-Milli Islami Afghanistan (Junbesh), representing mostly the Uzbek ethnic population – dominate the political landscape in the province. They are reminiscent of military-political organizations formed mainly along ethnic lines rather than fully-fledged and sustainable political organizations. Both are confronted with challenges of a different nature: Jamiat commanders strongly oppose the growth of Junbesh influence in Takhar (especially visible during the 2004-2005 and 2009 elections), while Junbesh is more concerned with maintaining dominance over the Uzbek population, which is politically divided (50% support Junbesh, 30% Jamiat, 10% Shura-e Adalat and 10% Kongre-e Milli).

As of February 2013, 104 reintegrees<sup>133</sup> had been registered. However allegations emerged that some of the reintegrated supposedly ex-

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<sup>132</sup> According to the APRP, ex-combatants who renounce violence, accept the Afghan Constitution, live by the rule of law and cease support for and ties with AGEs, will be reintegrated into their communities. See *National Security Council, D&R Commission, Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP)*, July 2010, available at: [https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/AFG/00060777\\_00060777\\_APRP\\_National%20Programme%20Document%202010%2006%2001.pdf](https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/AFG/00060777_00060777_APRP_National%20Programme%20Document%202010%2006%2001.pdf)

<sup>133</sup> Former combatants, reintegrated through the APRP programme.

combatants did not fit the requirements of the programme. Cases of corruption in identifying the beneficiaries have even surfaced. Doubts in security guarantees offered by the Government have also been raised. Public opinion has reservations regarding the sustainability of the APRP program, indicating a reluctance to accept and reintegrate former insurgents.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

#### **Types of Conflict**

People in Takhar consulted during the People's Dialogue identified the Taliban-led insurgency, political tensions, inter-rivalry between political parties, drug trade/trafficking, ethnic tension, presence of pro-government militia, impunity, powerbrokers and warlords as some of the prime causes of conflict affecting peace and stability in the province.

Although at the time of the consultations, people were happy with the overall security situation in Takhar province, they still considered the Taliban-led insurgency as the main cause of instability. Takhar province is considered the most stable province in the northeast, however insurgents are active in the Ishkamesh district of Takhar.<sup>134</sup>

A human rights defender from Taloqan city, Takhar commented on the security conditions: *"The security in Takhar province is not bad, except in some areas in which there are still anti-government elements. For example, some parts of the Ishkamesh district, Takhar."*

Participants believed that the Taliban-led insurgency was being supported by narco-cash, which has been gaining momentum recently. They added that the local population in some areas still supported the Taliban in view of the trust deficit between the Government and the people. Participants stressed that some people tried not to spoil their relations with the Taliban, as they were sceptical about the current Government and feared that the Taliban might re-emerge.

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<sup>134</sup> In 2015, Takhar's previous relative stability was affected by the deteriorating security situation in neighbouring Kunduz province. Anti-government elements expanded their activities in the districts of Darqad, Khwaja Bahauddin, Yangi Qala, Ishkamish and Khwaja Ghar in the province.

A woman from Taloqan commented:

*“The main cause of the continuation of war is insurgency, sympathies of people with the insurgents, trust deficit between Government and its citizens. Ordinary Afghan citizens have to support the insurgents reluctantly as they do not trust the Afghan Government would protect them from the Taliban.”*

The other type of conflict people identified arise from ethnic tensions between the Tajik and Uzbek groups, but they believed these ethnic tensions were politically driven. Some were of the opinion that ethnic tensions would make Takhar a more unstable province, so in this regard they did not consider Taliban-led insurgency as the prime cause of conflict. Uzbeks claim to be in majority in Takhar province, although some participants complained that, despite being in the majority, Uzbeks had been marginalized and were not proportionally represented in the local government administration.

A male participant said:

*“Ethnic tensions in Takhar can escalate into a major conflict at any stage and there are indicators of incipient ethnic tensions. The majority residents of Takhar have been marginalized and they need to be given enough representation in the local government and their grievance needs to be redressed. Otherwise, ethnic tensions could start at any time in Takhar and a conflict is then imminent.”*

Another male participant commented:

*“Although Pashtuns have all the legal documents of the land, Uzbeks still have appropriated their land. The local Government must implement the decision of the judicial organs and return the land to the Pashtuns who are indigenous to the area. If Government fails to intervene, the issue would exacerbate.”*

### **Drivers of Conflict**

Participants of Takhar were of the view that the following were the main drivers of conflict in Takhar province: Taliban insurgency, local powerbrokers, land mafia, drugs trade/trafficking, pro-government militia, political rivals, impunity, Afghan National Police, lack of employment opportunities, corruption, poor rule of law and illiterate youth.

### **Local powerbrokers**

People claimed the local powerbrokers exploited the population for their own vested interests and did anything to get what they want. People further believed that the local powerbrokers did not want peace and stability in Takhar because that could imperil their interests and profits.

A female student from Taloqan city explained:

*“There are local powerbrokers who see their prosperity and gains in antagonizing the local population on ethnic grounds. We say in our own words that they make the clean water muddier so that they could catch the fish. It is the local powerbrokers that make people fight.”*

People also claimed the drugs trade and trafficking in Takhar were important drivers in destabilizing the province, as some of the proceeds were funnelled to the insurgents. They asserted that 60 per cent of the drugs transiting northern Afghanistan passed through four districts in Takhar (Yangi Qala, Khawaja Bahauddin, Darqad and Cha Aab).

A male participants from Darqad district complained:

*“There is a mafia that is involved in drugs trade and trafficking. The drugs trafficking is not possible without the support of the insurgents and it is a lucrative business for the insurgents. Drugs trade has the potential to make Takhar an unstable province.”*

### **Corrupt and unprofessional ANP**

As another driver of the conflict, people pointed to the Afghan National Police (ANP) in Takhar, claiming that they were unprofessional, corrupt and not well-trained. Participants were of the view that the drugs trade would not be possible without the tacit support of the police, so police corruption was allowing the trade to continue uninterrupted.

A female participant from Taloqan city said *“Police (Afghan National Police) in Takhar province are incapable, corrupt and unprofessional. They need proper training. Since they are corrupt, they turn blind eyes to the trade of drugs.”*

A community elder from Farkhar district complained:

*“Police take heavy bribes and then allow the trade of drugs. Although Takhar is poppy-free cultivation area, the transit of narcotics continues via and within Takhar simply because the police are involved and are corrupt. The police also take bribes in other civil cases and even during arrests.”*

### ***Weak rule of law and corruption within the judiciary***

Participants believed that the failure to apply the law equally to all citizens had exacerbated the security situation. Participants were critical of the judicial organs in Takhar and condemned the judiciary for being involved in corruption.

A defence lawyer in Taloqan city commented *“The main internal factor which brought instability in Takhar is a weak judicial system, as people do not trust the current judicial system, simply because of its incompetency and corruption.”*

### ***Pro-government militias***

Participants believed that pro-government militias were virtually above the law and held themselves accountable only to those commanding them.

A male participant from Khawaja Ghar said:

*“These armed militias have been regularly harassing and intimidating people. The Government has to restrain them in time. Otherwise, it could challenge the legitimacy of the Government and would pose a serious threat to the Government.”*

### ***Land disputes***

People claimed land mafias in Takhar were driving the province into conflict. The land mafias have seized people’s properties and since the legitimate owners see no solutions materializing, they may resort to violence.

A male participant from Taloqan city said:

*“There are land mafias that have occupied people’s properties. The Government must return the land to the owners. If the Government fail to do so, the real owners would do desperately whatever they can and even resorting to violence in order to regain their properties back.”*

### ***Illiteracy***

People believed that illiterate youth could pose a serious threat to the stability in Takhar, citing examples of recent protests in Taloqan city where most of the protestors were illiterate youth who turned to violence during the protests and damaged local properties. Participants believed that these illiterate and volatile youth could be easily manipulated by interested parties into taking part in violent activities to destabilize the province.

### ***Failed peace and reintegration***

People were critical of the role of Provincial Peace Council (PPC) and APRP. Participants indicated their disappointment with the PPC, as they believed its members were not independent, but influenced by local powerbrokers and the authorities in their decisions. Participants also said that PPC members had not been able so far to include the general public in the peace process. In addition, participants criticized the false promises the PPC makes to reintegrees.

A male prisoner in Taloqan prison said:

*“We cannot have peace in Takhar because every police, prosecutor, judge and other authorities do what suit them. None of them decide as per the constitution law. For example, PPC in Takhar calls insurgents and promised them that any insurgents who join peace process and hand over weapons would be forgiven. When some Taliban joined the peace process, then police, prosecutors and judges charged them with several cases and they were incriminated. If the practice continues like this, no one will join the peace process.”*

### ***Harmful traditional practices***

Some participants viewed harmful traditional practices as deeply rooted in the diverse ethnic societies in Takhar. They believe that harmful traditional practices, especially forced marriage and violence against women, could affect stability in Takhar as they can often lead to violent disputes within or between communities.

#### **IV. The Road Map for Peace**

The aforementioned causes of the conflict identified by people in Takhar are locally-driven and hence addressing them would be effective in bringing stability and peace in the area. People called for strengthening and bringing reform to local government institutions; banning the drugs trade; ensuring the independence of the judiciary; an independent and impartial peace and reconciliation process; resolving ethnic tensions; curbing corruption; disarming the illegal armed groups; strengthening rule of law; merit and competency-based recruitment in Government institutions; ending impunity; promoting human rights; and concrete efforts to improve social and economic development. The suggestions proposed by the participants have been summarized under the following thematic areas.

##### ***Strengthening governance, security and stability***

People called on the Government to extend its role even to the most remote areas of Takhar to curb local powerbrokers challenging the Government's legitimacy.

A male participant from Farkhar district urged:

*"There are local powerbrokers who often challenge the writ of the Government and they have their own armed militias to achieve their interests. Therefore the local Government must take concrete efforts to extend the writ of the Government."*

People advised better equipping ANSF, reinvigorating local institutions and reducing Government's reliance on local powerbrokers. They added that civil society and community elders could be instrumental in bridging the gap between the people and local government.

A female participant from Baharak district said:

*"Civil society in Takhar province is active; however, the Government has not used it. The Government must seek help from the civil society in bridging the gap between the people and the local government."*

People were critical of the Afghan National Police (ANP) in Takhar province, claiming that they were corrupt, unprofessional and incapable. Participants proposed that the ANP must be well-trained and professionalized so that the corruption in the police, which facilitates drug-trafficking, could end.

They also suggested a robust oversight of the police, especially for ANP deployed along transit routes for drug-trafficking.

People were generally satisfied with the ANA, but criticised the Afghan Local Police (ALP) in Takhar province, as they believed it was dominated by armed commanders and warlords. Participants argue that the ALP does not represent the local population in places where they have been deployed. They asked for reforms in the ALP recruitment programme to make it more representative and inclusive. People demanded that the ALP be held accountable when they commit crimes.

People demanded the continuation of the Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) programme in Takhar province, but insisted that the DIAG must be more robust and not merely nominal. They believed disarming illegal and pro-government militias would bring stability and peace to the province.

A female prisoner in Taloqan women prison saw the solution in disarming all the militias:

*“There are parallel local-defence initiatives that could easily destabilize the province. The government must disarm all militia whether they are good or bad. There are not bad or good militias, but all are the root cause of the conflict.”*

### ***Resolving ethnic tensions through impartial local fora***

As outlined above, people unanimously asserted that the main driver of conflict in Takhar province was growing ethnic tensions. They claimed that lack of political will, rivalries between political parties, intolerance towards other’s political views and the lack of enlightened citizenship were fuelling ethnic tensions and escalating conflict.

A women’s rights activist in Taloqan city pointed out: *“People support warlords from their areas simply on ethnic grounds no matter whatever the respective warlords do. This trend further aggravates the situation and the result is continuation of war.”*

Uzbek participants demanded more government positions in Takhar province to address their lack of adequate representation in the government administration. Participants overall agreed that sincere efforts could address the issue through local mediators who are neutral and impartial.

A male participant from Farkhar expressed his view:

*“There are ethnic tensions between Uzbeks and Tajiks and they can be solved by constituting an external body composed of impartial people such as the members of the civil society and community elders from other ethnic groups so that they could bring both Uzbeks and Tajiks together and find an acceptable peaceful solution. The issue cannot be resolved when the negotiation is led by an Uzbek provincial governor, because he would not maintain his impartiality.”*

Furthermore, some Tajik participants suggested that the Government must conduct a new census in the province, as it was using data from a very old census, to verify the claim that Uzbeks were in the majority.

A Tajik participant from Taloqan said:

*“I think the Tajiks are in majority and the Uzbeks have not been underrepresented in the Government positions. A new census must be conducted in Takhar province so as to find out the accurate number of the local population. This could cure many problems.”*

### **Promoting human rights and the rule of law and ending impunity**

People in Takhar were supportive of promoting human rights, the rule of law and end of impunity. They believed human rights were vital for bringing peace and stability in the area.

A woman participant from Taloqan city described the importance of human rights in these words:

*“Protecting and promoting human rights would resolve many miseries of ordinary Afghans. When the Government respects and promotes human rights, ordinary Afghan will appreciate that they are being treated as human beings.”*

People supported transitional justice and believed that those found guilty of egregious human rights abuse must be prosecuted. Peace cannot prevail without transitional justice.

A shopkeeper in Taloqan sees transitional justice as a prerequisite to lasting peace and stability:

*“When warlords and other people who are involved in past crime are brought to justice, it would bring peace. Ordinary citizens, in*

*general, and women and children, in particular, would feel that they are immune from these criminals and warlords and they can no more pose threats to them.”*

Female war-victims also wanted transitional justice, citing their suffering due to the past crimes by warlords and human rights abusers.

A female war-victim in Taloqan city said:

*“I am disabled and my disability reminds me every day what I went through. Nothing can cure my wounds, but only transitional justice. I want the human rights abusers to be accountable for what they did to me and to others. Their crimes should not go unpunished.”*

People overall commended the efforts of UNAMA in facilitating a forum for the voices of ordinary Afghans to be heard, both at the national and international level. They appreciated being consulted about peace efforts.

A male prisoner in Takhar prison lamented:

*“Local authorities and others even do not consider that we are human beings. They even do not realize that we are entitled to human rights because we are human beings. UNAMA invited me to share my view about peace and human rights and this is the first time in the last six years that my view is being asked about the peace process of my country and I felt that I am a human being. By participating in this People’s Dialogue discussion, I was able to express my view about peace. One day, I will go out of the prison so I want a peaceful Afghanistan which would respect human rights of me and all.”*

Participants saw raising awareness about women’s rights from the Islamic and human rights perspectives as important steps in reducing violence against women and eliminating harmful traditional practices, as well as to prevent potential violent conflicts in the communities ignited by these practices.

A female prisoner in Takhar prison said:

*“Violence against women and harmful traditional practices debar one part of the society which is women from taking active part in bringing peace and stability in Takhar. These traditional practices are repugnant to Islamic principles.”*

There was general consensus that impunity must end and that those involved in serious human rights abuses must be prosecuted. Participants stressed that bringing perpetrators to justice would be possible only through a strong, transparent and independent judiciary.

A female employee of the Independent Electoral Commission in Takhar said:

*“Protecting human rights and eliminating impunity will result in stability and everlasting peace. Human rights are universal, so once they are respected the society would become more egalitarian and that would lead to peace. Culture of impunity must end in Takhar, as the warlords and criminals are being emboldened by the legacy of impunity. Once they know that there is no impunity, they can no longer commit new crime and they will have the feeling that they would be prosecuted for the past crime. To sum it up, respecting and fulfilling human rights and ending impunity would contribute to great extent to bringing peace to Takhar province.”*

Rule of law and transparency and independence of the judiciary were viewed as inextricably linked. According to the participants, all citizens must be equal before law and the judiciary must curb corruption. They were critical of the widespread corruption in the judiciary sector in Takhar.

A male prisoner at Taloqan prison complained:

*“In past, community elders were able to resolve very difficult and complex matters through negotiations, but now the community elders are not allowed to resolve issues. The Government says that the cases must be referred to the prosecution office and courts in Takhar. Most of the judges and prosecutors are corrupt. They take bribes from both the parties and the cases remain pending for years. Corruption is one of the main causes which prevents peace.”*

People in Takhar proposed making the judiciary more independent, introducing reforms and employing competent people as effective remedies for the problem. Some participants emphasized the induction of women into the judiciary and other sectors, in addition to providing more job opportunities for women in the government sector generally, as they considered women to be less corrupt.

A male university student from Taloqan city said, *“Women should be part of all departments. They should join politics and government offices as they love peace and could be less corrupt.”*

### ***Reforms in the PPC and the APRP programme***

Participants were critical of what the PPC had been doing and their achievements in Takhar, in addition to the overall APRP programme. People in Takhar suggested that the APRP programme needed to be reformed and made more independent, so that many insurgents would join the peace process and that those who join did not defraud the process.

A female school teacher from Taloqan city said:

*“People are disappointed with the Provincial Peace Council as the members of the PPC in Takhar act upon what the powerful people tell them. They do not act without the order of the local powerbrokers of the province. The PPC members must be independent in their jobs.”*

### ***Achieving social and economic development***

During the consultative process, people believed that providing employment opportunities, improving and extending the education network and developing the province were important factors for bringing peace to Takhar.

Highlighting the importance of employment opportunities, a housewife from Baharak district said *“The youth join insurgency simply because they do not have any jobs. If they were provided with employment opportunities, they would never join the insurgency.”*

Participants strongly believed that poverty must be eradicated and that one possible way of achieving this was by developing the province through local income-generating projects. They demanded that investment and employment opportunities be provided for the people, in general, and for women and youth, in particular.

### ***Engaging local actors for peace***

People in Takhar suggested that local mechanisms and actors could be useful in bringing sustainable peace and stability to the province. They emphasized that community elders, civil society members, religious scholars and teachers could play extremely important roles in bridging the gap between the Government and the people, allowing peace to prevail in

the province through confidence-building measures. Participants argued that the peace process must be locally driven and that important local actors must be a part of the entire process. People also suggested involving minorities in the peace process in Takhar.

A male participant from Khawaja Bahauddin district said *“We have an old tradition of solving the issues through local mechanisms. Government should include all people when there are talks and efforts about peace.”*

## **V. People’s Recommendations**

During the focus-group discussion in Takhar, people made a series of recommendations to bring about peace and stability in Takhar province, which are summarized below.

### **Disarmament of all armed groups and strengthening of ANSF**

- i. Government must disarm all armed groups, whether pro-government or illegal. The DIAG process must continue. The disarmament exercise should not be nominal, but must be robust and all-inclusive. No militia commander and his group should remain armed.
- ii. Local government must not rely on local powerbrokers and warlords to bring security to the area. The Government must effectively extend its writ to all parts of Takhar.
- iii. Efforts must be taken to curb corruption within the ANP and prosecute those involved. Accountability for the ALP should be ensured.
- iv. Ensure robust oversight of the ANP, especially those deployed at transit routes for drug-trafficking.

### **Strengthening rule of law and curbing corruption**

- i. The judiciary sector must be independent and protected from the influence of local powerbrokers.
- ii. Corruption in the judiciary sector must end. An external and independent oversight mechanism is needed so that those who are involved are prosecuted.

### **Solving ethnic and political tensions**

- i. Efforts must be taken to resolve ethnic tensions that are politically driven.

- ii. Land disputes in Takhar must be addressed, with the view to resolving ethnic disputes.
- iii. Minorities must be given meaningful due representation in local government.

#### **Reforms at PPC and the overall APRP programme**

- i. PPC needs to be reformed and the council must be made more independent from Government influence.
- ii. The PPC must be autonomous and free of any influence from local powerbrokers and must carry on its work in accordance with its mandate.
- iii. Reintegreees must not be given false promises that raise their expectations to a level that cannot be fulfilled.
- iv. The APRP process must be reformed to prevent reintegreees from defrauding the process.

#### **Promoting human rights and the rule of law and ending impunity**

- i. The Government must strengthen the rule of law and apply the law equally to all citizens, without discrimination or bias, and regardless of the position of the perpetrator.
- ii. Impunity must end and all those who have committed crimes must be brought to justice.
- iii. Transitional justice must be implemented.
- iv. Human rights must be promoted through public-awareness campaigns. Harmful traditional practices need to be eliminated.
- v. Women must be provided with more job opportunities in the government sector and the judiciary.

#### **Strengthening social and economic development**

- i. Reintegreees must be provided employment opportunities and insurgency-prone areas must be developed.
- ii. Minorities must be taken into consideration during development projects.

More schools need to be opened and the quality of the education must improve.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Baghlan Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial road map for peace is a summary of key findings from the consultations held in Baghlan province, as part of the Phase II of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace (hereinafter “People’s Dialogue”), a nationwide programme initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult over 4,500 ordinary Afghans across the country with a view to developing 34 provincial road maps for peace.

In Baghlan, around 208 individuals expressed their views and concerns through seven focus-group discussions, survey of opinions and structured interviews with experts, local authorities and NGO representatives active in the area of peace and reconciliation. The consultations were conducted by the Civil Society Development Centre (CSDC) in Baghlan with participants representing diverse strata of the society, including tribal elders, religious scholars, reintegrees (former Hizb-e-Islami and Taliban fighters), civil society actors, lawyers, farmers, high school and university students, teachers, housewives, people with disabilities and representatives of an ethnic minority (Gujar) based in Baghlan province.

This local road map for peace aims to provide a realistic analysis of the local drivers of conflicts in Baghlan and to identify suitable solutions contributing to sustainable peace and stability in the province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Baghlan province is located in Afghanistan’s northeastern region, with 17,109 square kilometres, connecting the central, northern and northeastern regions. With Pul-e-Khumri as its provincial centre, there are 15 districts in the province: Baghlan-e-Jadid, Nahrin, Khowst, Dushi, Tala-wa-Barfak, Dehana-e-Ghori, Burka, Khinjan, Fereng, Pul-e Hesar, Banu, Deh Salah, Jelga and Guzargah-e-Noor.

The population of Baghlan is estimated to be around one-million. The provincial centre in Pul-e-Khumri has roughly 150,000 residents. Tajiks make up a majority of the population at around 59 per cent, while Pashtuns form the largest minority with some 20 per cent. Hazaras (Shiites, including Ismailis) comprise 14-15 per cent and Uzbeks some 5-6 per cent. Tajiks are scattered all around the province, but most of the Pashtuns are in Baghlan-e-Jadid district and Hazaras live primarily in Dushi and Tala-wa-Barfak districts. The Uzbek population can be found primarily in Burka district. Baghlan is the second province in the northeast after Badakhshan to

harbour a large number of Ismailis (about 40,000 individuals) and a small number from the Gujur minority (about 4,000 individuals).

### **Political and security trends**

The nature of insecurity in Baghlan varies from district to district. Pashtun-populated areas (Baghlan-e-Jadid district, plus the Dand-e-Ghori and Dand-e-Shabuddin areas of Pul-e-Khumri district) have been affected by anti-government activities since 2009-2010 when the Taliban infiltrated into those areas, partly due to the growing discontentment with the Government of disarmed and unemployed Hezb-e-Islami commanders. Following some successful operations by the international military forces, some of the anti-government elements (AGE) were eliminated. Afghan Local Police (ALP) were then formed and took control of some of those areas, mostly in the volatile Baghlan-e-Jadid and Dehana-e-Ghori districts.<sup>135</sup> The situation remains volatile in Uzbek-populated Burka district, where the main spoilers are small armed groups of the radical Jundallah movement who receive support from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The main security threats in the Tajik-populated areas, such as the districts in the Andarab Valley, Nahrin and Jelga stem from illegal armed groups (IAG). Many of the IAG commanders in those districts have established alternative systems that challenge state institutions. State legitimacy is further weakened by the perceived impunity granted to criminals and their connections to local district police officers. Baghlan continues to face challenges as a corridor for drug-trafficking to Tajikistan. Due to provincial authorities' inability or unwillingness to address the problem effectively, they are often accused of being involved in the trade.

The political context in Baghlan reflects the ethnic composition of the province: most political parties run on ethnic lines, a trend also common in other parts of the country. Jamiat-e-Islami is seen as the strongest political party in the province, drawing its members and supporters primarily from the Tajik majority that dominates local government structures and occupies key political and security positions in the province. Hizb-e-Islami is popular in Pashtun-populated areas, such as Baghlan-e-Jadid district, and has had a long history of rivalry with the dominant Jamiat-e-Islami party. The Paiwand-e-Milli political party, representing the Tajik-Ismaili minority,

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<sup>135</sup> In 2015, the overall security situation in Baghlan province was negatively affected by the developments in neighbouring Kunduz province. Particularly intense conflicts erupted in Pul-e-Khumri, Baghlan-e-Jadid and Tala-wa-Barfak districts, while Burka district remains a stronghold of anti-government elements.

active mostly in Ismailia-populated Dushi district, as well as Junbesh-e-Milli, which is influential mostly in the Uzbek-populated Burka district, are also assessed as relatively active political parties in the province.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

#### **Types of Conflict**

During the focus-group discussion, participants emphasized four main types of conflict in the province: the Taliban-led insurgency, ethnic conflict between Tajiks and Pashtuns, political disputes between Jamiat -e-Islami and Hizb-e-Islami and communal disputes.

#### ***Taliban-led insurgency***

During the consultations, participants viewed the Taliban-led insurgency as the most violent actor in the province, followed by Hizb-e-Islami and Jundallah. Participants in the People's Dialogue in Baghlan-e-Jadid district pointed to the interference from the neighbouring countries in destabilizing the highways connecting the northeast and south, as well as the use of the route then for ISAF logistics supply, as the main reasons for conflict. The Taliban are seen as advancing toward highways connecting Pul-e-Khumri with Kabul and Kunduz, where ANSF convoys are increasingly becoming their targets. They have significantly disrupted security in Burka, Baghlan-e-Jadid, Dahna-e-Ghori, Tala-wa-Barfak and Dushi districts. People also noted that the infiltration of AGEs/Taliban in certain districts had also caused increased insecurity.

A community elder stated:

*“Burka district comprises four regions - centre of Burka, Falol, Hazar-Qaq and Tangi Murch, but people are only able to commute to the centre of Burka, while in the other areas people feel threatened. AGEs in those areas have limited the freedom of movement of the local populations and have warned them not to go outside of their residences after the Isha prayers and not to carry torches while going outside.”*

#### ***Ethnic conflict***

People raised concerns about the chronic rivalry between the province's largest ethnic groups (Tajiks and Pashtuns) that broadly led to insecurity. As was noticed through the discussions with people from different strata of society, the province has been witnessing chronic discord/mistrust between

these two ethnic groups. Prominent Tajik figures consider Pashtun-populated communities as widely supporting and cooperating with the AGEs, therefore most of Pashtun-dominated districts are perceived as strongholds for insurgents. Moreover, high-profile Tajik leaders allege the involvement of some Pashtun politicians in the targeted killings of influential Tajik figures in the province. On the other hand, Pashtuns are seen by some participants as being intentionally marginalized, arguing that key provincial security and political positions are being occupied by Tajiks who are somehow trying to disregard the Pashtun and undermine their role in local government. In such an atmosphere of mistrust, such ethnic tensions can escalate conflict and further disrupt security.

A Tajik community elder said:

*“Whenever there is any terrorist incident, such as IED or assassination against pro-Northern Alliance figures or members of Jamiat-e-Islami party, it is believed that insurgents would not have been able to conduct their terrorist act without the support from Pashtun prominent figures.”*

During the consultations, participants also expressed the view that shifting the provincial capital from the mainly Pashtun-populated Baghlan-e-Jaded district to the Tajik-dominated Pul-e-Khumri district about two decades ago because of increasing insecurity in the former had been another reason for the continuation of ethnic conflict between Pashtuns and Tajiks.

A prominent Pashtun community elder from Baghlan-e-Jaded district who opposed this move stated:

*“At the time of President Dr Najibullah, the centre of the province was shifted temporarily to Pul-e-Khumri due to some security reasons. However, due to interference of some powerbrokers, no one responded to our demand [to restore Baghlan-e-Jaded as the capital of the province], thus we will continue our struggles, until we can achieve our demand.”*

### **Political rivalry**

Political disputes between the Tajik-dominated Jamiat-e-Islami and the Pashtun-dominated Hezb-e-Islami were viewed as a major type of conflict prevalent in the province. The parties were involved in a long-term armed conflict against each other during the *Jihad* against the former Soviet Union’s occupation (1979-1989) and later during the *Mujahideen* era

(1992–1996). Participants added that, after the collapse of the Taliban regime (2001), the power vacuum in Baghlan province was filled by Jamiat-e-Islami, which gradually extended its control over the area, occupying key government positions at the provincial and district levels. Hizb-e-Islami, which was marginalized from power, reportedly sought to establish contact with insurgents to destabilize the province and create challenges for the Jamiat-e-Islami ruling party at the local level.

A journalist from Pul-i-Khumri said:

*“The long rivalry between Jamiat and Hizb-e-Islami interrupted the security and further destabilized the province. High-ranking government officials (mostly with Jamiat background) monopolized the local governmental structure and meanwhile they are trying to pave the way for the further hegemony of the party over the leading political and security institutions in the province.”*

#### **Pervasiveness of illegal armed groups**

Participants also largely pointed to the increased presence of illegal armed groups (IAGs) as a main threat to peace and security in Baghlan. They expressed concerns that the IAG presence was becoming alarming in some districts, particularly Bano, Pul-e-Hesar, Deh Salah, Khinjan, Pul-e-Khumri, Khowst wa Fereng, Nahrin and Baghlan-e-Jadid. Noting the increasing control of IAGs over relatively calm districts as creating a serious type of conflict, participants proposed that the central Government needed to take a firm decision on disarming them.

A teacher from Deh Salah District of Baghlan explained:

*“Illegal armed groups are the biggest headache for the Baghlan residents; their presence is notable in the entire Baghlan, particularly in Andarab Valley. They are supported by high-ranking Government official and some other wealthy and influential figures at the provincial level, which enables them to act with relative impunity. IAGs even established their own structures that undermine the state-run institutions, however surprisingly they enjoy support from local officials.”*

#### **Drivers of conflict**

Throughout the People’s Dialogue consultations in Baghlan, participants consistently talked about tensions originating from the time of the civil war and ensuing conflicts between Taliban and Northern Alliance-affiliates in

the province. Meanwhile, the incapability of state institutions to ensure justice, promote development and provide a remedy for the legitimate grievances of the people was another notable issue raised frequently by the participants. They also considered the Taliban-led insurgency, illegal armed groups, ALP, lack of employment opportunities for the young generation, impunity and ethnic tensions as the main root causes of insecurity in Baghlan.

Participants asserted that unemployment was a huge problem further threatening security in the province, as mostly youths were being recruited by AGEs/IAGs that were taking the opportunity to recruit such jobless people. Participants also deemed the ALP another threat and also a perpetrator of human rights violations in some instances. A women's rights activist in Puli-e- Khumri also noted that:

*"The ALP members in Pul-e-Khumri are involved in human rights violations, especially in some abductions, extorting ushr [illegal taxation] from the people, beating and harassing the public. These issues are fuelling conflict and increase mistrust among the population in the ALP, particularly among those who are subjected to violence by the ALP."*

People also stated that bribery and embezzlement in law-enforcement and judicial organs were another driver of insecurity and increased the gap between the people and local government institutions. They pointed that such practices had increased and even gradually become widespread among Government officials, particularly within the police and prosecutor's offices.

A District Development Shura member claimed:

*"There is corruption and nepotism in the judicial organs in Dahna-e-Ghori district. If you have a case with the Prosecutor's Office or the court, you must pay bribe, or otherwise they will not address the problem."*

Participants also demanded that perpetrators of general and human rights crimes be brought to justice and punished, in particular those involved in the killing of civilians, looting of civilian property and harassing the public. They expressed condemnation at alleged perpetrators still occupying key Government positions and continuing to enjoy impunity.

A housewife from Khinjan district noted:

*“My 23-year-old young son was killed during fighting by jihadi commanders in Khinjan district, and I still remember that day. Although I know the perpetrator, I cannot do anything; therefore, I request the Government to prosecute them.”*

In addition, people narrated tragic incidents of violence against women, mostly in remote areas (such as Nahrin and Burka districts), as another main reason fuelling social friction and conflict in the communities.

People in Baghlan province also criticized the current Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP), responsible for reconciliation and reintegration of former combatants, as ineffective for maintaining peace and reconciliation. They particularly questioned the impartiality of the Provincial Peace Council (PPC), claiming that the majority of PPC members were themselves part of the armed conflict during the Mujahideen and Taliban eras.

A tribal elder in Baghlan-e-Jadid district mentioned:

*“Peace process is presently being run in the province by those who have been part of the conflict for long time in Afghanistan, and this is not acceptable to the Taliban. Therefore, it is required that peace negotiators must be impartial, particularly comprised of individuals who have not been part of the conflict and hostilities in our province.”*

People also stated that the peace process initiatives in Baghlan are mostly run inconsistently, with its guidelines developed by the High Peace Council (HPC).

A journalist stated that:

*“The focus of the PPC members is rather on dealing with illegal armed groups, instead of actual insurgents. If we assess the number of people who have joined the peace process so far, are they mostly IAGs rather than AGEs or Taliban? I had a report that an IAG commander based in Andarab Valley joined the APRP<sup>136</sup>*

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<sup>136</sup> As part of the APRP, ex-combatants who renounce violence, accept the Afghan Constitution, live by the rule of law and cease support for and ties with AGEs, will be reintegrated into their communities and provided assistance with education and vocational training, as well as protection and security. See *National Security Council, D&R Commission, Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP)*, July 2010, available at:

*reintegration three times. After receiving the financial package [by the APRP], once again [the IAG commander] became hostile to the Government.”*

The participants also maintained that Baghlan had been a corridor for drug-smuggling to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, another contributing factor to insecurity. They held local officials and provincial powerbrokers responsible for supporting such smugglers. People in Dushi district also criticized private security companies as spoilers of security and stability on the highway between Pul-e-Khumri and Kabul.

A tribal elder said:

*“Widespread presence of IAGs, private security companies and narcotic/drug smugglers are the main actors for the deterioration of security and escalation of conflicts in Dushi district.”*

#### **IV. The Road Map for Peace**

Throughout the focus-group discussions in Baghlan province, people proposed context-specific, locally-driven peacebuilding initiatives aimed at addressing root causes of the conflict including strengthening governance and security institutions; disarming illegal armed groups (IAGs); reforming and expanding the peace and reconciliation process; promoting human rights and providing a remedy to women’s rights violations; resolving ethnic tensions, particularly between Tajiks and Pashtuns; and improving economic and development opportunities.

##### ***Strengthening Governance and Security Institutions***

As people pointed out, the weakness of government institutions and security organs in particular had resulted in non-delivery of basic services. Although the main factor for this has been identified as growing insecurity and presence of IAGs, people also expected the central Government to address the issue. In Baghlan, many of the IAG commanders, particularly in the Andarab Valley, have established alternative systems that challenge state institutions. State legitimacy is further weakened by the perceived impunity granted to criminals and their connections to local district police officers and district governors.

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[https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/AFG/00060777\\_00060777\\_APRP\\_National%20Programme%20Document%202010%2006%2001.pdf](https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/AFG/00060777_00060777_APRP_National%20Programme%20Document%202010%2006%2001.pdf)

Participants believed that Government must strengthen the ANSF by equipping them with modern weapons. The ALP must be held accountable so that those ALP members who commit human rights violations and abuse their power are disarmed and prosecuted. They also urged that IAGs be disbanded, and that those implicated in past crimes be prosecuted. The reliance of local government on the IAGs must diminish, with Government instead relying more on the ANSF.

A teacher from Deh Salah district of Andarab Valley noted that:

*“It has been two years that the construction of a bridge in our district Arzangan has been stopped by a local IAG commander because he was asking money from the construction company. Although the district officials are in the picture, but they couldn’t do anything.”*

A community elder from Dand-e-Shahabuddin area of Pul-e-Khumri said:

*“The main reason for insecurity in most parts of Puli-Khumri district, including its villages, is weak governance of the local executive institutions and nepotism within judicial organs. Initially people hoped that with the new Government their problems will be addressed and the living conditions will improve, but their aspirations did not come true. The main problem always remains the illegal armed groups.”*

### **Disarming IAGs in the Province**

Considering the deteriorating security of the Andarab Valley and IAGs’ reported involvement in abuse against the local population by impeding development projects and frequently blocking roads for the purpose of robbery, the participants proposed the disarmament of IAGs. To tackle the issue, some participants suggested strengthening the ANSF, reinforcing the rule of law and implementation of transitional justice to bring the criminals and perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice.

A participant from Dehsalah district (Andarab Valley) demanded: *“The Government should conduct a clean-up operation to disarm IAGs who are involved in intimidating people, violating human rights and preventing projects to be implemented in the area.”*

### **Promoting Human Rights**

Human rights activists, female teachers and students strongly urged for the need to address increasing human rights violations, in general, and

systematic women's rights violations, in particular. They expressed alarm that violations of human rights and gender-based discrimination were widespread and common in Baghlan, constituting main obstacles to peace and stability in the province.

A female teacher from Baghlan-i-Jadid district emphasized the need to ensure human rights:

*The women's rights must be promoted and as a result a peaceful environment will replace the current violent conditions for women: through disarmament of IAGs who have been involved in human rights violations and intimidations and humiliation of women; through inclusion of religious figures and community elders in some specific programmes and trainings addressing human rights related issues and women's matters in the local context; through strong observation of international agencies working for the protection and promotion of women's rights; and finally through involvement of women in significant political and social processes at the local level - such as peace process, elections and governance."*

Participants believed that good governance based on institutional capacity-building comprised a key factor in promoting human rights, thereby encouraging people's trust in local government and bringing an end to discontent and conflict arising from poor service delivery and corruption. People called on the local government to promote and protect human rights, in addition to providing a secure environment for women to contribute to peace and stability.

A journalist from Pul-i-Khumri said:

*"In order to strengthen peace and stability in the province, following steps should be taken: a) disarming IAGs, b) ensuring human rights, c) eliminating corruption within the governmental institutions, and d) raising people's awareness about their entitled rights, including human rights."*

### **Addressing ethnic tension between Tajik and Pashtun**

Participants called on the Government to take urgent measures to resolve the ethnic tensions between Tajiks and Pashtuns in Baghlan, as these conflicts had become increasingly visible in the province. They further said that a considerable number of ex-jihadi Tajik commanders who had been involved in the resistance against the Taliban movement in 1990s looked at

the APRP as a mechanism paving the way for their ethnic opponents and traditional foes to influence local government. They also considered the Pashtun-backed insurgency in the province to be behind almost all targeted assassinations of influential Tajik figures.

Pashtun participants, on the other hand, criticized Tajiks for marginalizing minorities from occupying key Government positions at the local level. They also blamed a number of Tajik figures for sheltering violators and criminals who had been involved in systematic criminal and other disruptive activities. They asserted that a number of the IAGs frequently challenging the legitimacy of the Government at the local level (Andarab Valley) were being supported by key influential Tajik powerbrokers. For all the mentioned alleged factors, participants proposed a number of suggestions, insisting on social justice and a political settlement appropriate to address of these ethnic tensions.

A community elder from Baghlan-e-Jadid said:

*“Unfortunately most of armed thieves and criminals are being supported by IAG commanders based in Andarab Valley, they (Tajik IAGs) are behind all disorder and offences”.*

### **Reforming the PPC Structure**

A considerable number of participants raised concerns over the impartiality of Provincial Peace Committee (PPC) members, arguing that most were ex-Northern Alliance commanders engaged in the resistance against the Taliban regime in late 1990s. Participants stressed that the Taliban-led insurgency would not trust their traditional foes who are currently leading the peace process in the province.

In this regard a community elder from Baghlan-e-Jadid said:

*“The peace talk process is being led by former Northern Alliance commanders who have a long history of hostility with Taliban. So I don’t think they could be trusted by the AGEs. Therefore, most of the so-called ‘reintegrees’ are considered to be opportunist IAGs rather than conservative Taliban members. From my point of view, the local Government should reform the structure of the PPC and impartial as well as influential community elders have to replace these opportunist gangsters.”*

### ***Including the ulema, community elders and civil society in local decision-making***

A number of participants emphasized the need for the inclusion of the *ulema*, community elders and civil society in local government decision-making processes and requested the provincial government to take into account their inputs and insights on various matters concerning peace and security. The reason for the escalation of violence and conflict is believed to be the exclusion of prominent religious figures (*ulema*) and community elders, as well as civil society, from significant political processes, such as the peace talks at the local level.

A teacher from Doshi district said:

*“For strengthening peace and stability, the provincial government should seek cooperation of religious figures and community elders who can influence spoilers of peace and security in the area.”*

### ***Achieving social and economic development***

People unanimously said that bringing changes and improving social and economic development in Baghlan would create an environment conducive to establishing peace and stability in the province. They asserted that employment opportunities, eradicating poverty and better education facilities would play key role in stabilizing the province and debarring the youth from joining the insurgency.

A religious scholar in Puli-e-Khumri, supporting the idea of providing employment opportunities for youth, said *“Different parties to the conflict, including IAGs and AGEs, are taking the advantage of hiring our unemployed youths. We have a proverb that Satan employs unemployed people.”*

## **V. People’s Recommendations**

During the consultations, Afghan men, women and youth throughout Baghlan province formulated some general and context-specific recommendations to bring durable peace and stability to their province. Below is an attempt to capture them under some main thematic areas.

### **Reform the Provincial Peace Council (PPC)**

- i. Since most of the current PPC members are alleged former Northern Alliance commanders and not considered neutral, participants proposed that they must be replaced with impartial

and influential figures who were not involved in the armed conflict with the Taliban in late 1990s.

- ii. Include religious scholars, women and civil society actors in the peace process, as these actors can certainly play a vital role in reaching a durable peace in the country.

### **Good Governance**

- i. Improve the rule of law and strengthen state institutions in delivering services to the people as a factor contributing to peace.
- ii. Implement merit-based recruitment in Government positions in an effort to reduce corruption and nepotism.
- iii. Address ethnic tensions (between Tajik and Pashtun) to build the needed unity among the diverse ethnic groups living in the province and to prevent the exploitation of such tensions by insurgents.
- iv. Conduct free and fair elections, ensuring equal participation and representation of ethnic groups.

### **Improve Equipment for ANSF**

- i. Better equipment for the Afghan National Security Forces (ANA, ANP and NDS) can contribute to their effectiveness and therefore improve peace and stability in the province.
- ii. Government should stop relying on IAGs and instead strengthen the ANSF.

### **Disarmament of IAGs**

- Disarm the illegal armed groups that have disrupted security in most relatively calm districts and challenged the legitimacy of the Government.

### **Promoting Human Rights and Justice**

- i. Promote human rights to eliminate violations, especially violence against women, and create a peaceful environment where women can contribute to peace and stability.
- ii. Implement transitional justice mechanisms and bring to justice perpetrators of human rights violations to ensure that criminals and violators do not enjoy impunity.

ALP and IAG members must be held accountable so that those who commit human rights violations and abuse their power are disarmed and prosecuted.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace  
Kunduz Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This local road map for peace is based on the views shared by 263 citizens of Kunduz province who participated in focus-group discussions, individual interviews and surveys of opinion carried out in Kunduz during a consultative process. The consultations in Kunduz are part of Phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace (hereinafter "People's Dialogue"), a nationwide programme initiated by 11 civil society networks, including the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult over 4,500 ordinary Afghans across the country with a view to developing 34 local road maps for peace – one for each Afghan province.

In Kunduz, ten focus-group discussions were held which engaged 178 male and 85 female participants. Participants represented various walks of life and were comprised of civil society activists, housewives, human rights defenders, women's rights activists, shopkeepers, teachers, students, farmers, community elders, religious scholars, internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugee returnees, district *shura* members, health personnel and drivers. Focus-group discussions were held in five of the seven districts throughout Kunduz. At the time of the consultations in 2013, Dasht-e-Archi and Chahardara districts were inaccessible due to prevailing insecurity, so citizens from those two districts were invited to participate in focus-group discussions held in Kunduz city. Accordingly, voices from all seven Kunduz districts were represented in the consultative People's Dialogue process.<sup>137</sup>

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Kunduz province is strategically located in the northeast region of Afghanistan and serves as a gateway to Takhar and Badakhshan provinces, as well as to markets in Central Asia by way of its border with Tajikistan. Kunduz also borders Baghlan, Takhar, Balkh and Samangan provinces. With fertile agricultural land, Kunduz was once considered the core of the northeast region. It covers an area of 7,287 square kilometres, three-quarters of which are made up of flat land, with approximately 10 per cent mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain. Kunduz province is divided into seven districts, including the provincial centre, Kunduz city.

The population of Kunduz is estimated to be more than one-million people. Kunduz city, with roughly 300,000 inhabitants, is the provincial centre. The

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<sup>137</sup> This road map was produced prior the Kunduz crisis following Taliban's brief capture of the city between 28 September and 13 October 2015

major ethnic groups living in Kunduz province are Pashtuns (34%) and Tajiks (20%), followed by Uzbeks (18%), Turkmens (17%), Hazaras (10%) and others (1%). Approximately 69 per cent of the population resides in rural areas, while 31 per cent are settled in urban centres. Major tribes present in the province include the Tajik, Aimaq, Sujani, Sadaat (Hazara), Shikh Ali, Ismaili, Omarkhil, Ibrahimkhil, Ahmadzai, Uzbek, Qarluq, Toghli, Arab, Kuchi and Baluch. Kunduz also has a sizeable population of Kuchi nomads, who vary from 45,570 in the summer to 88,208 (60 communities) during the winter. According to UNHCR, Kunduz has the largest Kuchi presence in the northeast region and ranks fourth in Afghanistan for Kuchi migration. From March 2002 to December 2013, of a total 106,893 Kuchi families who migrated to the northeast region, 50,268 families settled temporarily in Kunduz.

Kunduz had been occupied by the Taliban in 1997, and remained so until the ouster of the Taliban regime in 2001. While parties from the Afghanistan's *Jihad*-era (1979-1992), remain influential in Kunduz politics, they have failed to transform their political-military structures into political entities, so they have been unable to position themselves as democratic representatives. *Jihadi* parties in Kunduz have also lost some of the population's trust. Jamiat-e-Islami, which draws its members and supporters mostly from the Tajik population, remains the most influential *jihadi* party in the province, and many key Governmental posts are occupied by Jamiat adherents.

In early 2013, armed groups returned to Dasht-e-Archi, Chahardara and Imam Saheb districts, as well as to some parts of Khanabad district which caused destabilization in these areas. Armed groups in Dasht-e-Archi district were concentrated in the west and southwest, whereas in Chahardara armed groups were more scattered across the district. During 2013, armed groups managed to destabilize some areas in the north of Imam Saheb district.

In Khanabad, after armed groups were forcefully removed by military operation from problematic areas in Aqtash area in 2009, the area became increasingly volatile due to a rise in factionalism by pro-government militias who held influence over local powerbrokers. The proliferation of informal security structures, as well as an attendant lack of accountability to the Afghan National Police (ANP), or to any other Governmental authority for that matter, has since become increasingly problematic. Numerous allegations have been received by monitoring groups that some of the

militias also cooperate at times with the insurgency, or engage in predatory behaviour against local communities, both of which foster resentment. This situation is further aggravated by the complex ethnic makeup of the area; a sizeable number of Pashtuns as well as smaller numbers of Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks live side-by-side. The other two districts, namely Aliabad and Qala-e-Zal, are for the moment calm. However, in Qala-e-Zal, around 300 former members of the Critical Infrastructure Protection Project (CIP), a community-defence militia,<sup>138</sup> whose *Tashkil* was abolished in September 2012, are active in the area with the financial support of local communities. Authorities failed to disarm or convert the disbanded CIP to the Afghan Local Police (ALP), and these individuals have since been a burden on local communities who are unable to pay them money for their maintenance.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

#### **Types of Conflict**

Residents of Kunduz identified various elements and actors that have affected peace or have the potential to act as peace spoilers. As the prime causes affecting peace and stability in Kunduz, they identified the Taliban-led insurgency, presence of pro-government militia, the ALP, a legacy of impunity, lack of oversight on governance affairs and ongoing rivalries between militia commanders and criminal elements.

Participants believed that the Taliban-led insurgency posed a grave threat to peace and stability in the province. The Taliban are present in Dasht-e-Archi and Chahardara districts, as well as in some areas of Kunduz centre. Dasht-e-Archi is considered the most unstable district in Kunduz, with some areas inaccessible even to Government authorities. One of the main reasons for the strength of insurgency in Dasht-e-Archi is due to the support and sympathies offered to the insurgency by the local population there.

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<sup>138</sup> The Critical Infrastructure Protection Programme (CIP) - a local security initiative designed to protect areas where neither the ALP nor the regular ANSF have been deployed - was initiated in 2011 by ISAF and ANSF, in parts of Kunduz, Balkh and Faryab provinces in northern Afghanistan. On 25 December 2011, the then President Karzai ordered the disbandment of the CIP. As of 31 December 2012, ISAF/ISAF Special Forces had disbanded all community-based local defence initiatives, transitioning most to ALP. In the northeast and north regions, five CIP groups were disbanded with 900 men converted to ALP, see UNAMA 2012 Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, p 45, [http://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2012\\_annual\\_report\\_eng\\_0.pdf](http://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2012_annual_report_eng_0.pdf)

A community elder from Dasht-e-Archi commented:

*“Some of the local people have sympathies with the insurgents and provide them with food and safe haven. Some people have to support the insurgents, while others do it out of a desire to gain better social status in their areas.”*

Participants did not mention political rivalries in Kunduz as a major threat to stability. Similarly, ethnic tensions do not serve to threaten peace in Kunduz at the moment, or at least not at any level that would escalate into conflict. Citizens are able to co-exist peacefully, a fact referred to by participants who called Kunduz “a mini-Afghanistan” where, for the most part, people of various ethnicities live harmoniously.

One man from Dasht-e-Archi district commented:

*“Local people from various ethnicities live peacefully, just like brothers and sisters. It is usually the authorities that try to provoke ethnic tensions.”*

However, some participants believed that the marginalization of Pashtuns from the ALP Tashkil, along with the presence of predominantly Tajik militias in Khanabad district, might lead to the provocation of ethnic tensions and, in turn, to conflict.

Participants complained that family and personal disputes, especially cases of women and girls who runaway (“attempted *zina*”), forced marriage and *baad* (giving a woman as restitution for a crime to achieve peace and harmony between families) often leads to communal disputes if not addressed by the local community and/or authorities soon enough. Problems mostly arise when a girl elopes with a boy from another ethnic group: the girl’s family often requests her return, the refusal of which results in intra-communal disputes. Although cases of honour-killings are kept discreet due to social stigma, participants reported runaway cases in which either the girl or the couple had been killed in an effort to restore family honour.

Participants also pointed out conflicts related to resources and unequal development assistance. They believed that some areas had received more development assistance, whereas others had been completely marginalized. Afghan men and women complained that development aid throughout Kunduz is directed mostly to areas not affected by armed

conflict. This form of corruption stems from the desires of influential individuals at the Kabul-level.

A community elder from Qala-e-Zal district complained:

*“Development assistance mostly goes to Imam Sahib district, simply because people from that district are representatives in the Parliament (in Kabul). For example, there is a shortest route from Kunduz city to Imam Sahib district, but development of that route has been totally ignored while another, longer road was paved. This happened because powerbrokers from Imam Sahib—who wish the price of their land to go up—own land near the longer road.”*

Participants from Dasht-e-Archi and Chahardara districts asserted that development assistance must not hinge on the existence of armed conflict. They believed that conflict had affected their infrastructure, and therefore prevailing insecurity should not be a pretext for the allowance or denial of assistance.

A community elder from Dasht-e-Arch district explained:

*“It is not our fault that our district is unstable. Our district does not receive any development assistance simply because it is unstable. We suffer doubly because, first, we have instability in our district and, second, we do not receive development assistance. There must be aid directed to unstable districts. Everyone can work for the development of a stable district, but efforts must be taken to develop an unstable district.”*

People also stated that disputes over land had the potential to boil over into conflict, although with the caveat that land disputes in Kunduz were not as bad as those in other provinces. Problems stem from control over pastures, an influx of returnees, unmarked Government land and *naqaleen* (internal migrants who were brought to Kunduz from eastern provinces decades back). Participants narrated cases of both appropriation and expropriation which could also trigger conflict. In a land dispute in Asqalan village, Kunduz district, the Department of Returnees and Refugees sought to construct a township for returnees and refugees to settle. However, Pashtun and Aimaq residents in the area protested, claiming to be the true owners of the area. The issue was resolved through an informal conflict-resolution mechanism.

A community elder from Kunduz claimed:

*“The Government needs to take concrete steps to address the issue of land disputes and also the pastures. There are pastures in Qala-e-Zal and other parts of Kunduz. One tribe thinks they own the pasture and that only their animals can graze there, while others believe it is theirs. The Government must not compromise, and must develop a formal mechanism to resolve land disputes.”*

Participants also noted that, since Kunduz is an agrarian province, water distribution remained a major bone of contention, especially during the warmer and drier spring and summer seasons. They claimed that farmers’ crops simply withered due to poor and irregular irrigation (distribution of water). They believed that local powerful individuals appropriated the lion’s share of water for themselves. Additionally, a poor canalization system has contributed to making it more difficult for water to reach farmers in remote areas. Participants speculated that, since the majority of people in Kunduz are farmers, improper distribution of water could also result in conflict.

A farmer from Chahardara district pointed out:

*“We have a saying here that the poor who live at or near the opening of the canal are richer than those who live at the end of the canal. In other words, those living near the area where the canal starts get the most water, while those who live near the end get less. This could create conflict as several people’s lands are not being cultivated. Another major issue is over-irrigation, as some farmers do not know how much water to use. Rainfall is sparse and farmers depend on the canal and its proper and equal distribution.”*

### **Drivers of Conflict**

Participants said that the Taliban, ALP, pro-government militias, former CIP, local powerbrokers, impunity, lack of employment opportunities, rampant corruption and lack of adequate education facilities had been the main drivers of conflict in Kunduz. The foremost driver of conflict in Kunduz was said to be the Taliban-led insurgency, which has posed a serious threat to peace and stability. Participants noted that armed groups dole out severe punishments to local people, even for minor offences.

A community elder from Dasht-e-Archi district noted:

*“The armed groups punish people severely. There are several examples of summary executions where armed groups have killed people based on the suspicion that those people were informants for the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Women have been killed simply because they were accused of running away from their homes. Even some minor infraction could result in severe punishment. The armed groups here make arbitrary decisions. They simultaneously act as both witness and judge – they do not allow us to have a fair trial.”*

Armed groups in Kunduz were said regularly to threaten and force people to give them food and sanctuary, and even to buy them weapons. The denial of these requests often resulted in harsh reprisals.

A teacher from Chahardara district explained:

*“Armed groups come to people’s houses, sometimes even during the night. You have to entertain them, to give them food and safe haven. If not, your house will be blown up the next day. People are wary of armed groups and have to give them food and shelter. We are always facing the dilemma of whether to accept their demands or await their reprisal. Both options have detrimental consequences.”*

Participants were critical of armed groups, including the Taliban, as they have limited people’s freedom of movement. Those who work as Government officials or for NGOs have better salaries than others and so have been forced to give money to armed groups, to buy clothes or shoes for them or even to supply them with weapons.

A community elder from Kunduz said:

*“People in some areas cannot go to their fields at night, and some not even out of their homes. Armed groups have imposed a night curfew. They also force salaried people and those who are well-off to buy shoes, clothes and weapons for them. They often extort ushr (illegal taxation) and most of the time the local population must comply and pay the ushr twice – once to the armed group, and again to a pro-government militia or the ALP!”*

Another major threat to stability in Kunduz was said to be the presence of pro-government militias. Participants asserted that pro-government militias

engage in harassment and intimidation, extract *ushr*, rob, torture, loot humanitarian aid, impede development projects and even murder the local population in Khanabad district and Kunduz centre. Participants believed that these militias operated autonomously, but reported to Government officials, and that powerbrokers in control of armed men were able to embed their forces in Government ranks. People asserted that militias had increased both in number and power, as a consequence operating virtually above the law. Participants believed that militia commanders had strong connections with provincial officials at the central (Kabul) level. These intimate links are often a result of the fact that commanders and provincial officials fought under the same leader during Afghanistan's *Jihad*-era (1979-1992). Participants expressed the belief that these notorious militia commanders enjoyed direct or tacit support from higher-level echelons in Kabul on whom they could rely for their own vested interests and to maintain local hegemony.

A female teacher in Khanabad district noted:

*"These militia groups are well-connected. Some are even untouchable. There are several local power brokers in Khanabad district and every militia commander controls specific territory. These militias are earmarked for the vested interests of the warlords and powerbrokers."*

Participants from Kunduz, Khanabad and Dasht-e-Archi districts complained that the presence of pro-government militia had made their districts increasingly unstable. Although there are fewer militias based in Dasht-e-Archi district, militias from the other districts have easy access to Dasht-e-Archi. Participants also alleged that members of armed militias changed their allegiances and joined the insurgency at any time that suited their convenience. Participants believed that the presence of militias had spread fear among communities and even fuelled vendetta.

A community elder in Khanabad complained that:

*"Greenery brings birds and beauty to areas in other parts of the world, but in Kunduz, greenery brings pro-government militias or insurgents. The former extract ushr in fertile areas and the latter hide behind the green scenery."*

Aqtash is a fertile area in Khanabad district where, according to participants, the local population lives at the complete mercy of militias.

The fertility of the area provides an incentive for armed militias. A community elder lamented the situation, stating:

*“We cannot even marry our daughters or sons without the prior consent of militia commanders, as marrying our children to a militia commander could provoke his rival commander. Also, we have to seek the commanders’ approval during land dealings, and the commander ends up taking the lion’s share.”*

Participants expressed their views about abuses perpetrated by the ALP and noted with concern that the ALP had not alleviated their problems, but rather contributed to them. ALP are deployed throughout Kunduz in a number of districts. People criticized the vetting process for the ALP and alleged that those with records of criminal and human rights violations had been given a clean slate and recruited into the its ranks. According to participants, the ALP were neither properly vetted nor trained, and they committed heinous crimes and egregious human rights abuses in Dasht-Archi, Imam Sahib and Chahardara districts, as well as in Kunduz centre. Participants expressed frustration that the ALP had harassed, intimidated, tortured, arrested, wounded and killed civilians.

A teacher from Dasht-e-Archi went on:

*“The ALP process was hijacked by local warlords and other influential individuals. They recruited people who were the least liked in the communities and who were involved in terrible crimes and past human rights abuses. We, local people, were never consulted. What can one expect from a gang of thugs? They were criminals in the past and by recruiting them into the ALP, their actions were implicitly legitimized.”*

People explained another reason fuelling insecurity in Kunduz as being ANSF operations, especially since the security transition from international military forces to ANSF when Kunduz moved toward insecurity. Overall, participants did not complain about the Afghan National Army (ANA), although those from Chahardara district said that crossfire during ANA ground engagements had caused civilian casualties. Rather, systematic abuse was reported as having been perpetrated by the ALP, ANP as well as pro-government militias during search operations. Residents of Dasht-e-Archi district and some villages in Kunduz threatened that if ANSF continue conducting operations in a way that harasses the local population, they will either move or join the insurgency. People also complained about the use

of pro-Government militias in Kunduz during search operations and noted how they had gone on looting sprees. If this trend continued, participants said circumstances would compel ordinary civilians to join the insurgency as a tit-for-tat measure.

A victim of a raid operation from Dasht-e-Archi recalled:

*“My entire house was looted by pro-government militiamen during a search operation. The ANP and ANA were simply spectators; we were looted in presence of them. My son was severely beaten and the jewellery and clothes of the women in my home were taken. My cash and motorbikes were confiscated. Why does the Government use armed militias during search operations instead of ANSF? My family has been disgraced – I am thinking about joining the Taliban ranks, at least to take revenge.”*

Another local cause of insecurity is the widespread perception in Kunduz that the Pashtun population is associated with the insurgency. Pashtun participants alleged that they had been paying for the crimes of insurgents and, simply because they and the insurgents share the same ethnicity, local Pashtuns bear the brunt of ANSF operations and arrests. This has widened the gap in trust between the provincial government and local Pashtuns.

A community elder from Dasht-e-Archi said:

*“Whenever an IED explodes or Taliban attack a check-post, the ANP and ALP come and search entire villages where Pashtuns live, and arrest all Pashtuns. They accuse us of being Taliban or their sympathizers. Pashtuns pay for the crimes of the Taliban.”*

People in Kunduz also blamed the National Directorate of Security (NDS) for creating pro-government militias and supplying them with weapons sans oversight. People in Khanabad district and Kunduz centre alleged that the NDS had deliberately reactivated militias during Jamiat-e-Islami rule so they could fight against the insurgents.

A community elder from Kunduz noted:

*“It was NDS that provided weapons to all these militias so that they could drive the insurgents out of the area. The NDS still uses them to protect against possible insurgent attacks. In practice, NDS has done little or nothing to disarm these militias.”*

Participants also agreed on unemployment as being a major driver of the conflict in Kunduz and believed that, once people were employed, they would no longer have time to spoil the peace. Participants trusted that employed individuals would witness prosperity in stability and peace, so they would never join or rejoin the insurgency. They longed for more employment opportunities to be provided by their Government and/or the private sector.

A community elder from Aliabad district pointed out:

*“We have a common maxim that the mind of an unemployed person is the nursery of Satan. The crux of the problem is unemployment, and unemployment is the main reason that people, especially unemployed youth, join the insurgency.”*

Most participants also noted corruption as a major driver of the conflict in Kunduz province. They asserted that corruption had brought with it many miseries and disappointments. Participants stated that corruption had been so deeply rooted in Kunduz that they had to pay bribes for even the most minor services. According to men, women and youth from Kunduz province, red tape has further paved the way for corruption, as people desire fast service-delivery and have to offer bribes to receive those services.

A community elder from Kunduz alleged:

*“Corruption is prevalent in Kunduz in almost every Government department. Government officials are adamant bribe-takers. Clients have to bribe them even for minor services or work. The worst part is that they shamelessly ask you to pay them a bribe. No bribe, no work. At least it was better during the Taliban regime, as then there wasn’t any corruption.”*

Participants were also of the view that a lack of educational facilities had remained a major driver of the conflict in Kunduz. They explained that schools were fewer and classes overcrowded. They urged that more schools should be opened and accessible in rural areas, and said that schools and all other educational institutions needed to be well-equipped, not only by providing proper buildings, laboratories and libraries, but also enough chairs to accommodate the number of students. One of the main drivers of the conflict they pointed to was an insufficient number of madrasas in Kunduz city. There are a few, but they are not well-equipped and some are not even registered with the Government. People have to send their youth to Pakistan to study in madrasas, which allegedly exposes children to

potential indoctrination by extremists. Upon returning to Kunduz, these youth can create instability in the area by importing radical views. Participants sought more madrasas based on modern education to be opened in Kunduz.

A female student of Kunduz University said:

*“Students would not to go to neighbouring countries such as Pakistan if we had enough and well-equipped madrasas here. There must be no compromise on quality of education that is being offered. Schools, universities and madrasas are places where youth are trained and if the quality of education is good, we would have peace-loving youth. However, some madrasas which are not registered in Kunduz need to be registered, as this could pose a threat to the stability of the province. The curriculum must also be approved by the Government.”*

#### **IV. The Road Map for Peace**

Dialogue participants in Kunduz province identified several locally-driven factors whose alleviation they believed would remedy instability and bring peace to the area. Solutions for durable peace included strengthening and bringing reforms to local government institutions; a robust exercise of disarming militias; curbing corruption; holding the ALP accountable; strengthening the rule of law; ensuring that recruitment in Government institutions is merit and competency-based; ending the legacy and culture of impunity; upholding human rights; minimizing the gap between people and the Government; and taking concrete steps to improve social and economic development. Participants’ suggestions have been summarized in the following, non-exhaustive themes.

##### **Strengthening governance and ANSF and Government authority**

People in Kunduz asserted that peace and security in Kunduz were viable, however, the Government would have to do more to maintain control over the province. Participants questioned the legitimacy of the Government and said that the Government does not exercise authority beyond the district centres in Kunduz. They alleged that there were “states within the state” and that local powerbrokers, commanders of armed militias and warlords had challenged the legitimacy of the Government.

A man from Aliabad district highlighted the issue:

*“There are powerbrokers and warlords whose sole objectives are their own vested interests. They are creating conflict and fighting to get money and make their groups famous. They do not have any specific agenda for peace, but they do have influence in some areas because the local population is terrified and the Government does not have authority there. The powerbrokers and warlords benefit by deepening and extending the conflict.”*

Participants insisted on the existence of proxy powerbrokers in Kunduz who had challenged security. These powerbrokers have their own militias and even the local government has used them to combat insurgent activity. Participants urged the Government to sever ties with these militia commanders and instead work on equipping the ANSF so that the Government need not rely on irregular armed militias.

A university student from Kunduz pointed out:

*“The Government does not want to stop supporting these abusive militias because they can be used against the insurgents. They are not paid and have their own weapons, so it is much more economical for the Government to use them, rather than funding the ANSF.”*

Participants expressed overall satisfaction with the ANA and stressed that ANSF must be part of search operations, while pro-government militias must cease taking part in search operations. Search operations led by pro-government militias would further fuel the insurgency as they harass, intimidate and loot civilians. They also urged the local government not to rely on pro-government militias and CIP to conduct search operations.

The general consensus of participants was that a transparent, accountable, efficient and easily approachable local government was vitally important to address the issue of Government legitimacy, both in the districts as well as in remote areas. People are hired into Governmental positions on arbitrary grounds such as political affiliation, ethnicity and nepotism. Participants unanimously suggested that merit and competency-based recruitment must be the norm.

### **Bridging the widening gap between the people and the Government**

Participants from various districts throughout Kunduz province complained about the widening gap between the people and their Government,

especially at the provincial level. They wished they could meet their provincial officials to share their views on problems and propose solutions; however, they recalled difficulties in being able to set up meetings. On the other hand, participants from many districts said they found insurgents easily approachable.

A community elder from Dasht-e-Archi lamented:

*“We, the community elders of Dasht-e-Archi, have been trying to meet the Kunduz provincial governor for the past five months, but could not. How is it then possible to cooperate with the Government and share ideas when you cannot meet your own governor? The provincial governor has not visited Dasht-e-Archi since he was appointed, although he travels abroad more than five times every year. If our authorities do not listen to us, and do not redress our grievances, then it is impossible for us to support our Government to bring security and stability in the area.”*

Some participants appreciated the Government’s efforts towards creating ‘Police-e-Mardoumi’ (‘People’s/Local Police’) in Kunduz, which was aimed at better liaison and cooperation between people and police. However, they considered the *Police-e-Mardoumi* still to be in a nascent stage. Participants suggested that local authorities create platforms whereby community elders, religious scholars and people from all walks of life could easily meet with *Police-e-Mardoumi* to share their problems and offer both positive and negative feedback. Such interaction could also be achieved by frequent visits of the provincial governor to the districts, which participants believed would pave the way for the population to be heard.

Participants also complained about rampant corruption and abuse of authority, which they considered to be root causes of insecurity. They believed an accountable and transparent local government with an external oversight body could curb these problems, and that such efforts would bring peace and stability.

A man from Chahardara district said:

*“Corruption is the crux of all the problems in Government institutions, especially in the judiciary. People opt to refer their cases to Taliban courts because there is no corruption [in those courts]. The Government should curb corruption if they want people to refer their cases to their system.”*

### **Promotion of human rights, rule of law and ending impunity**

Participants believed that the promotion of human rights was conducive to durable peace and security. While a few participants were of the view that human rights activists only speak about women's rights and ignore men, most participants were in strong favour of human rights. A female student from Kunduz University highlighted the importance of human rights in the peace process by stating:

*"It is wrong to say that insecurity comes only from insurgency. There are also other factors that fuel insurgency, one of them being human rights abuses."*

A community elder in Imam Sahib District emphasized the importance of human rights vis-à-vis transitional justice by saying:

*"We can reach peace when there is transitional justice, rule of law and freedom of expression."*

Participants criticized the ALP and said that the ALP were involved in egregious human rights abuses, noting the ALP underwent minimal vetting and were barely trained. They reasoned that if the ALP were to respect the rights of ordinary Afghans, people would be more willing to cooperate with them which, in turn, would effectively contribute to bringing peace and stability to the area.

Participants from Khanabad district and Kunduz centre demanded that the deployment of ALP in Khanabad district be accompanied by a proper vetting mechanism so that ALP could replace the armed militias. The ALP have played a key role in other parts of the country, including in neighbouring Baghlan province. Nonetheless, people were wary that the ALP recruitment process in Khanabad might be hijacked by notorious armed militia commanders and that the same militia would then be recruited to the ALP without any proper vetting process. This, participants feared, would exacerbate the situation and have severe implications for civilians.

A development *shura* member in Khanabad noted:

*"Khanabad badly needs ALP; however, if there is no proper vetting process, the same notorious and powerful militia [operating in Khanabad] will make their way into the ALP. They will then have a license to harass and intimidate the local population by saying that they have been appointed by the Government of Afghanistan."*

Participants felt the solution to the problems experienced with the ALP centred on proper vetting, human rights training, defining clear rules of engagement and robust oversight and accountability. They stressed that the ALP must be held accountable for human rights abuses.

A majority of Afghans in Kunduz also believed that lack of accountability and proper oversight perpetuated a culture of impunity. They unanimously stressed that perpetrators of human rights violations must be brought to justice so that others would be discouraged from violating human rights. They rehearsed numerous cases in which the same ALP members and armed militia in Kunduz had repeatedly violated and abused human rights, simply because they knew they enjoyed impunity for their actions. If there was no longer impunity, these ALP members would not dare commit such heinous crimes. Participants in Kunduz believed that the remedy was stronger rule of law and preventing interference by local powerbrokers.

A male university student in Kunduz said:

*“The ALP and other armed militias have supportive links with high-ranking officials and have realized that they will not be prosecuted, no matter what crimes they commit. This culture of impunity has emboldened them to abuse human rights with the knowledge they will avoid prosecution.”*

Many cases concerning violations of human rights are solved through the informal justice system, as corruption within the judiciary stops people from approaching the formal justice system.

A male participant from Qala-e-Zal said:

*“The level of corruption is very high here in Kunduz. People who apply for jobs at education departments are asked to pay a bribe. Serious cases, such as cases of murder, are being mediated and solved by local community elders; these cases never go through courts because people know the judicial system is corrupt. Corruption must stop but so far nothing has been done in this regard.”*

### **Preventing marginalization of certain ethnic groups**

Local Pashtuns reportedly bear the brunt of ANSF operations and arrests. Pashtun participants from Dasht-e-Archi and Chahardara districts were dismayed that the Pashtun population there was accused of being associated with insurgents, and alleged they had been paying for crimes

committed by insurgents. This has widened the gap between the Government and the local Pashtuns. Pashtun participants proposed a general message to the ANSF: crime is a personal issue, and one cannot be arrested because he shares the same ethnicity and language as the criminal.

A student from Chahardara district said:

*“If you want to bring peace and stability, do not look at all Pashtuns and Taliban with one eye. All Pashtuns are not Taliban, and the Government must differentiate and know that there are good and bad people in every ethnic group.”*

Pashtun participants from Dasht-e-Archi and Turkmen participants from Qala-e-Zal districts complained that they had been marginalized in Government positions in their respective districts.

A Turkmen community elder from Qala-e-Zal district said:

*“About 80 per cent of residents of Qala-e-Zal are Turkmen, however, Government officials such as the district governor, judges and others have been recruited from other ethnicities.”*

A Pashtun community elder from Dasht-e-Archi echoed the community elder of Qala-e-Zal:

*“Pashtuns are the majority in Dasht-e-Archi district; however, there are no more than two Pashtun Government officials. All the rest are from other ethnic groups and Pashtuns have been marginalized.”*

Participants saw the solution as an all-inclusive, merit-based recruitment system so that neither majority communities, nor any others, would be marginalized.

### **Disarmament of armed militias and former CIP**

Throughout the consultative process, participants emphasized that the disarmament of illegal armed groups, pro-government militias and CIP was an important step towards reducing the Government’s reliance on local powerbrokers and warlords. This measure would also reduce the influence of these groups over local government institutions, thereby strengthening peace and stability at the district-level. People demanded the disarmament of all armed groups, whether illegal or pro-government.

An Uzbek community elder from Chahardara said:

*“If the Government wants peace, all armed militias must be disarmed. The disarmament exercise must not just be in name, as it was in past.”*

Some participants were of the view that armed militias posed the most serious threat to peace and stability, and ranked the Taliban as second. A *shura* member in Khanabad said:

*“Disarm all the militias and I can guarantee you that peace will prevail in Kunduz province.”*

Participants in Qalal-e-Zal district praised the role the CIP had played in bringing security to their district, while those from other districts believed the CIP would continue to pose a serious threat even after they were disbanded. They demanded that the CIP either be disarmed or recruited into the ranks of the ALP or ANP. A man from Kunduz city said:

*“The CIP needs income for their survival and they know how important they are. They can easily overrun the Government in Qala-e-Zal. They harass people and change their predators from time to time.”*

### **Achieving social and economic development**

Dasht-e-Archi district remains one of the least developed districts in Kunduz province. Although participants appreciated some improvement in social and economic development, they unanimously demanded the eradication of poverty, implementation of development projects, provision of employment opportunities and the opening of more schools and madrasas.

A woman from Imam Sahib district said, *“Poverty brings all the miseries; people join the insurgency because they are poor.”*

Participants also stressed that the Government must build more madrasas so that the people of Kunduz will not have to send their children to be educated in Pakistan’s madrasas, where children were allegedly indoctrinated with extremism and later join the insurgency.

Participants strongly believed that social and economic development was pivotal to bringing peace and security throughout the province. They said that, although Kunduz appears on the list of Afghanistan’s ‘Rank 1 Provinces’, less has been done than in other areas to develop it. A teacher from Qala-e-Zal district said:

*“Qala-e-Zal district has not witnessed any major development. Although electricity poles pass through Qala-e-Zal, it still doesn’t have electricity! The district is very stable, yet even its main road has not been asphalted.”*

### **Extending and reforming the network for the peace process**

Some participants were critical of the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) process and alleged that certain low-level insurgents had joined the process. They suggested making the APRP process more robust, ramping up efforts to eliminate fraud. Otherwise, they warned, men and youth will join the insurgency to receive the benefits it offers (e.g., money and status). Participants also suggested extending the network for the peace process (APRP) to the districts, along with awareness-raising campaigns.

A male student from Imam Sahib district said:

*“People do not have awareness about peace as they have not been well informed about the peace efforts that the Government has undertaken. Moreover, such peace efforts should be extended to the district level.”*

Participants also came down hard on the Provincial Peace Council (PPC) and said that ordinary people, especially religious scholars, who could play a key role in convincing insurgents to join the peace process, had not been consulted.

A male participant from Chahardara district said:

*“The Government must make the peace process a more inclusive one. They should consult ordinary Afghans, too, and collaborate with them to bring peace. Ordinary people such as community elders, mullahs, religious scholars and others should be consulted about the peace process.”*

### **V. People’s Recommendations**

During focus-group discussions, Afghan men, women and youth throughout Kunduz province formulated both general and context-specific recommendations to bring durable peace and stability to their province, summarized below.

### **Disarm all militias and strengthen the ANSF**

- 1) The Government must disarm all militias whether pro-government or otherwise. The disarmament exercise cannot be nominal: it must be robust and all-inclusive and neither militia commanders nor their militiamen should remain armed. The Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) process must continue, but in a more effective manner.
- 2) Local government must not rely on pro-government militias and must sever all relations with them. At the Kabul-level, the Government must strengthen the ANP, ANA and ALP to fight insurgents, but must not use pro-government militias against insurgents. More effort and resources must be directed towards strengthening the ANSF.
- 3) The Government must only use ANSF during search operations, while pro-government militias and other proxies must not take part in search operations.
- 4) The ALP must be properly vetted and trained. ALP recruits must go through a democratic vetting mechanism with the involvement and consultation of local-community elders.

### **Oversight and accountability of ANSF**

- 1) The Government must rigorously oversee ANSF actions, particularly those of the ALP. The ALP must be held accountable for crimes they have committed and must not avoid prosecution.
- 2) ANP and ANA who cause civilian casualties must be prosecuted and punished if found guilty. The military prosecutor must be supported and encouraged to initiate investigations and prosecute alleged perpetrators.

### **Reducing the gap between the Government and the local people**

- 1) Efforts must be taken to reduce the widening gap between the people and their Government. There must exist fora where ordinary people can express their views and easily approach their Government institutions.
- 2) Religious scholars must be consulted as they could play a pivotal role in bringing the Government and people together.
- 3) The provincial governor of Kunduz should conduct frequent visits to the districts and meet the local populations so that they may be heard.

### **Promoting human rights, rule of law and ending impunity**

- 1) The Government must strengthen the rule of law and it must be applied equally to all citizens.
- 2) The prevailing culture of impunity must end and all those who have committed crimes must be brought to justice. Pro-government militia commanders, their members and the ALP who have been accused of egregious human rights abuses must be prosecuted.
- 3) Impunity for perpetrators of violence against women must end and the perpetrators brought to justice.
- 4) Human rights must be promoted by arranging awareness-raising campaigns which incorporate people from various social strata, including religious scholars, youth, the illiterate and community elders, as well as Government officials.

### **Extending and reforming the peace process**

- 1) The APRP must be improved, making the process more robust and ramping up efforts to eliminate fraud. The reach of the peace process (APRP) must be extended to the districts, along with awareness-raising campaigns.
- 2) Religious scholars must be included in the peace process, as they could play a key role in convincing insurgents to join the peace process.

### **Improving social and economic development**

- 1) Both rural and urban areas must be developed, plus development aid must be distributed equally. Districts affected by the armed conflict must be developed on a priority basis.
- 2) The national formal education system must be strengthened and more madrasas, based on modern education, should be opened so that students from Kunduz do not have to study in Pakistan.
- 3) Reintegrees must enjoy employment opportunities to prevent them from rejoining armed groups.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace  
Samangan Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial road map for peace summarizes key findings and issues raised by around 150 male and female ordinary Afghan citizens of Samangan province. The Afghanistan Civil Society Forum (ACSF), supported by the UNAMA Human Rights Unit, conducted five focus-group discussions in Samangan province in June and November 2013. Participants in the focus-group discussions represented diverse social and political backgrounds, including public-sector employees, community elders, farmers, teachers, religious scholars, reintegrees (former anti-government fighters)<sup>139</sup> and representatives of civil society. The consultations took place as part of Phase II of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace (hereinafter “People’s Dialogue”), a nationwide programme initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghanistan Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult over 4,500 ordinary Afghans across the country to develop 34 local road maps for peace – one for each Afghan province.

This local road map for peace intends to provide as comprehensive an analysis as possible of local drivers of conflict and identify appropriate feasible solutions to help consolidate and sustain peace and stability in Samangan province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Samangan province is situated 310 kilometres north of Kabul in the northern region of Afghanistan, bordering the provinces of Balkh to the west, Baghlan to the east, Kunduz to the northeast, Bamyán to the south and Sari Pul to the southwest. Its capital is Aybak city.

Samangan has a population of approximately 350,400 persons. Tajiks are the dominant ethnic group in the province, comprising 40-43 per cent of the population, followed by Uzbeks (30-35%) and Hazaras (15-20%). Other minority groups make up the remainder of the population, including pockets of Tatars, Pashtuns and Arabs.

Agriculture is the main source of economic activity, with almost 95 per cent of the population dependent on it. Farming (animal husbandry), small trade and horticulture are the main sources of income for the people. Wheat,

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<sup>139</sup> Ex-combatant former anti-government elements who ceased fighting and joined their communities with the help of reintegration programmes such as the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP).

maize, potatoes and fruits (including almonds, grapes and melons) are the main agricultural products.

The province is reportedly rich in mineral and natural resources. There are coal mines in Dari Suf Bala, Dari Suf Payin and Ruyi Du Ab districts. A number of private entrepreneurs and businessmen are engaged in coal-mining projects to extract the resources in the absence of a proper coal-extraction policy. The province is also rich in marble and many businessmen are also involved in quarrying it for shipment to the other parts of the country.

The political environment in Samangan is not of an ideological nature, but is rather centred on individual personalities and ethnicity. In most cases, the support of people for a leader is determined on the basis of ethnic affiliation. In view of the lack of a vibrant civil society, there is a low level of overt political activity. The relatively positive security situation and low crime rate in the province are deceptive from a political perspective, in that they conceal a strong degree of self-censorship. Although there are several representatives of various parties not belonging to the mainstream, they keep a low profile.

Consistent with the rest of Afghanistan's northern region, Samangan's politics are largely dominated by the former *jihadi* parties. Following the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979, a number of opposition political parties emerged in the province, namely Jamiat-e-Islami, Hizb-e Islami, Hizb-e Harakat-e-Islami, Hizb-e Wahdat-e-Islami and Harakat-e-Inqilab-e Islami. Two major political parties – Junbesh Milli Islami Afghanistan (Junbesh), supported mainly by the Uzbek ethnic group, and Jamiat-e-Milli Islami Afghanistan (Jamiat), supported by the Tajik ethnic group – currently dominate the political landscape of Samangan. After the ousting of the Taliban regime in 2001, Junbesh succeeded in establishing its dominance throughout the province, through influential Junbesh Commander and MP Ahmad Khan Samangani (killed in a suicide attack in July 2012), as reflected in the 2005 election where the party won most of the seats in the provincial council and lower house of the Afghan parliament. Subsequently, the province witnessed the resurgence of Jamiat-e Islami, which secured most of the seats in the provincial council in the 2009 election. Many analysts suggest that Jamiat's increase in popularity in the province is attributable to the rift between the two Junbesh leaders - late MP Ahmad Khan Samangani and General Abdul Rashid Dostum.

In the 2009 presidential elections, Mr Karzai secured more votes in the province than Dr Abdullah, the former reportedly receiving the majority of the Uzbek, Pashtun and Hazara votes, in addition to some Tajik votes. In the past, Junbesh had absolute control over the provincial council, but that is no longer the case. Jamiat has been moving very steadily ahead with a systematic political strategy to attract voters, while Junbesh has been attempting to open district and village councils to increase the level of its influence. So far, the National Front, Wahdat Mohaqiq's party, and the wing of Jamiat-e Islami party allied with the National Front do not have offices in Samangan. Only the Junbesh party has a provincial office and has recently opened offices in some other districts.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

#### **Types and Drivers of Conflict**

Residents of Samangan consulted during the People's Dialogue identified a wide range of interconnected factors fuelling conflict and local disputes in the province that affect peace and stability in their areas, including the Taliban-led insurgency; illegal armed groups; unemployment; spread of radicalization by religious leaders trained in madrasas in Pakistan; corruption; political rivalries among factions of the former Northern Alliance; inter-ethnic conflict; and inter and intra-communal disputes.

#### ***i. Insurgency in Samangan Province***

Insurgency is one of the major armed conflicts jeopardizing peace and stability in almost every province in Afghanistan, including Samangan. Participants in most of the focus-group discussions confirmed that insurgent groups threatened the everyday life of the people in some parts of Samangan province, especially in areas bordering Baghlan province:

*"There are no operational insurgent groups in Samangan province. However, when ANSF conduct military operations against AGE [anti-government elements] groups in Baghlan province, AGE fighters run into (the neighbouring areas) in Samangan."<sup>140</sup>*

The participants provided one particular example of an occasion when local AGEs in Baghlan province sought safe havens in the east of Samangan province:

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<sup>140</sup> Lecturer at Institute of Higher Education, Aybak city, Samangan province.

*“ANSF conducted an operation against the AGEs in neighbouring Baghlan province a while ago. AGE groups ran away to Tai-Khunak area in Aybak district, Samangan province. Then, ANSF in Samangan and Baghlan province coordinated a joint operation against the AGE groups and cleaned the area of AGE presence.”<sup>141</sup>*

Participants claimed that Taliban had sought safe heaven and support in the Pashtun areas in Samangan bordering on Baghlan province, such as Bisaqal village. In Tai-Khunak, an Uzbek-dominated residential area in the east of Samangan province, AGE fighters from Baghlan province have reportedly used the Pashtun communities there to seek protection, particularly in the Gaw Dara area. Pashtun sympathy and support in Samangan for AGE groups from Baghlan province may be the result of the ethnic deprivation from which many Pashtun communities in the area feel they suffer.

In addition, participants raised concerns that local individuals who had been trained in madrasas in Pakistan were commonly hired as imams or mudares (teachers) at local mosques or informal religious schools in the area, where they preach an interpretation of Islamic values that motivate support for insurgency:

*“Most of Taliban supporters and well-wishers are leaders of religious madrasas, who train local populations to support Taliban fighters. Most of these leaders of religious madrasas go to Pakistan and receive trainings. Then, they come back to Samangan and teach at religious madrasas.”<sup>142</sup>*

Participants in focus-group discussions acknowledged that while certain insurgent groups were not ideologically motivated to fight the Government or were linked to the Taliban, Hizb-e-Islami or any other organized armed group in Afghanistan, their aim was to undermine the presence and sovereign power of the Government in order to achieve their own objectives, including wielding power over communities to collect *ushr* (illegal taxation) and one-tenth of the local harvests. When such armed groups are not disbanded or disarmed, they gain more power and dominance. These groups are weak and not well-organized until the Taliban or other organized insurgent groups incorporate them into a larger, well-structured regional insurgent group.

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<sup>141</sup> Community elder, Aybak district, Samangan province.

<sup>142</sup> Community elder, Khoram-u-Sarbagh District, Samangan province.

*"[...] Mostly locals come out at nights and commit robberies as a result of poverty and unemployment. They are not Taliban, but when Taliban get to know of such criminal groups, Taliban try to recruit them. Such criminal groups prefer to join the AGEs; they will be paid with weapons, ammunition and cash. Besides, they will be more powerful. Therefore, their impunity is guaranteed, especially when they join the APRP [Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme]."*<sup>143</sup>

In addition, local former commanders, who are not recognized by the local government authorities and are not favoured in disputes, often turn against the Government in an effort to claim what they pretend was "rightfully" theirs. In doing so, they too contribute to the insurgency in Samangan province. However, when their demands are fulfilled, they would join the APRP and reintegrate<sup>144</sup> in their communities of origin:

*"A few years ago, a local jihadi commander went to the mountains in Samangan province with a group of his men and fought the ANSF in Khuram-wa-Sarbagh district of Samangan province. His group was not strong enough to resist ANSF in battlefields. Therefore, they were always on the run. I heard they also organized a few terrorist activities at Samangan province after Taliban from Quetta-Shura had supplied them with explosives. Then, his cousin approached the provincial authorities and made a deal with the Government. The local commander's cousin was appointed as Khuram-wa-Sarbagh district chief of police. Then, he [the commander] joined the APRP."*<sup>145</sup>

According to the participants, some political parties and political figures also either politically support established criminal armed groups or themselves establish criminal groups to undermine the control and sovereign power of the Government in certain areas for their own political

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<sup>143</sup> Local villager, Hazrate Sultan district, Samangan province.

<sup>144</sup> According to the APRP, ex-combatants who renounce violence, accept the Afghan Constitution, live by the rule of law and cease support for and ties with AGEs will be reintegrated into their communities and provided assistance with education and vocational training, as well as protection and security. See *National Security Council, D&R Commission, Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP)*, July 2010, available at: [https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/AFG/00060777\\_00060777\\_APRP\\_National%20Programme%20Document%202010%2006%2001.pdf](https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/AFG/00060777_00060777_APRP_National%20Programme%20Document%202010%2006%2001.pdf)

<sup>145</sup> Local high school teacher, Khuram-wu-Sarbagh district, Samangan province.

aims. Certain temporary events drive such support to criminal armed groups that end up known as insurgent groups:

*“Those who lead political movements and organizations in Afghanistan use ethnic, linguistic and regional differences to achieve their political objectives. Programmes that end up in the name of Taliban (or AGEs) are organized by such political leaders to undermine the security situation – especially prior to elections – in Samangan province and other areas in Afghanistan for their political gains. Everything is planned and organized in Kabul and community elders and villagers are being used to implement such programmes.”<sup>146</sup>*

*“Prior to the previous parliamentary elections [held on 18 September 2010], certain insurgent groups were established in Ziraki area, Lower Daray-i-Sofe district, Samangan province - to worsen the security environment. Makhdum Muhebullā, a local Parliament candidate, took up the responsibility to secure voting centres. As a result, he secured for himself the highest number of votes from this area. He was a candidate in the first parliamentary elections [18 September 2005] too, but then he lost.”<sup>147</sup>*

## **ii. Unemployment**

Unemployment, which is increasing in Samangan, was identified as another driver of insurgency. Thousands of young boys and girls graduate from high schools, institutes of higher education and universities, but are unable to enter the job market due to a lack of employment opportunities. The situation is reportedly exacerbated by the local government’s tendency to hire employees from other provinces rather than locally. Furthermore, most of the population is dependent on unmechanized agriculture that is unable to provide a sufficient harvest. As the salary provided by Taliban is more than that distributed to ANP personnel, many villagers prefer to join the insurgency for financial reasons:

*“Some villagers work on small plots of land that they possess for three months a year. Then, they are jobless and soon they ran out of money. In order to financially support their families, they have no other choice but to join the Taliban and fight ANSF in different areas in the north. Besides, unemployment is a major reason for increase*

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<sup>146</sup> Community elder, Aybak city, Samangan province.

<sup>147</sup> Female civil society activist, Aybak city, Samangan province.

*of criminality rate in every society. I would rather rob a house than to see my children suffer from hunger. Nobody was ever born as a criminal. It is the society and the harshness of life that makes one a criminal.*"<sup>148</sup>

**iii. Lack of Good Governance and Rule of Law: Political Rivalries among Factions of the Northern Alliance and Ethnic Conflicts**

Samangan has three major political parties – Jamiat-e-Milli Islami Afghanistan (Jamiat), Hizb-e Wahdat-e Islami Mardum Afghanistan (Party of Islamic Unity of the People of Afghanistan) (Wahdat) and Junbesh Milli Islami Afghanistan (Junbesh) – and one political group (comprised of Ahmad Khan’s supporters) that are especially involved in local disputes. These political parties function along ethnic lines, with Tajiks supporting Jamiat, Uzbeks supporting Junbesh and Hazaras supporting Wahdat. Political parties in Samangan impose their influence and power via former *jihadi* commanders, community elders and influential religious leaders. In recent decades, the province has suffered ethnic-based disputes and even armed conflict resulting in continuing ethnic grievances in many sections of its population. Political party representatives manipulate these ethnic grievances to mobilize local populations to support them, protect their influence and increase the geographical scope of their power:

*“Junbesh, Jamiat and Ahmad Khan’s supporters are equally influential in Aybak city and its surrounding areas; Wahdat is influential in Roy-e-Do Aab and Daray-i-Sofe Bala districts. These political parties have ethnic bases in Samangan province. The population in Samangan is comprised of three major ethnic groups: Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras. Government employees support party to the dispute based on his/her ethnic group or political alliance. Therefore tensions always grow between the population and the local authorities in Samangan. There are no ALP [Afghan Local Police] personnel in Samangan province. However, there are pro-government militia (PGM) commanders affiliated to one or the other political party in the province. PGM commanders are armed, but they do not use their weapons to fight insurgency or each other. They claim to have kept their arms for their own protection. PGM commanders manipulate disputes to gain their political objectives.*

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<sup>148</sup> Local villager, Aybak city, Samangan province.

*They always try to increase their influence amongst the population by intensifying ethnic or religious differences.*<sup>149</sup>

PGM commanders do not usually get involved in hostilities against AGE groups, however they do typically possess weapons and have access to armed support for their own protection. They can therefore threaten community members, who are then unable to resist the instructions or decisions made by such commanders. At the local level, there are three groups of persons who have the power to make decisions on behalf of the entire community: (i) rich locals (i.e. landlords, herd-owners and wealthy businessmen), who are mostly known as the Arbabs or community elders; (ii) former jihadi commanders (for example, PGM commanders); and (iii) local religious leaders (i.e., mullahs and imams from the mosques). These groups are powerbrokers in remote areas and are often approached by provincial, regional and national political parties and political figures for support. Ethnic biases are known to be key factors in mobilizing local populations on different occasions and for various political objectives:

*“Powerbrokers use ethnic differences for their political purposes in Samangan province.”*<sup>150</sup>

Elections were seen as a temporary driver of political rivalries and ethnic tensions in Samangan:

*“Political leaders use these local PGM commanders to increase gaps between different communities, using the ethnic, language and religious differences, to gain political objectives such as winning support for their nominated provincial council, parliament and presidential candidates. To these leaders, political rights of the locals (i.e., right to vote, create associations, conduct demonstrations and protests, etc.) are acceptable as long as they don’t threaten their leaders’ political benefits.”*<sup>151</sup>

Participants of the focus-group discussions observed that, while elections eventually end, ethnic grievances in the local communities persist and increase each day. They considered ethnic tensions to be one of the main and long-lasting sources of dispute in their communities:

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<sup>149</sup> Local community elder, Upper Daray-i-Sofe district, Samangan province.

<sup>150</sup> High school student, Aybak city, Samangan province.

<sup>151</sup> A male lecturer from local Institute of Higher Education, Aybak city, Samangan province.

*“Political parties increase ethnic gaps among the ethnic groups in Samangan province especially when elections are ahead. Then local commanders and community elders use ethnic tensions between two villages or inside the population in one village to mobilize voters to vote for one or another candidate.”*

According to the participants in the focus-group discussions, loyalty and partiality of high-ranking Government officials in favour of their political parties and political supporters is another driver of ethnic disputes and political party rivalries. Government officials, such as the provincial governor, district governors, ANP at district and provincial levels, and directors of provincial and district government departments are appointed by political parties and backed by those political parties, as well as national powerbrokers. Consequently, such Government officials perform their duties to favour the political party supporting them and, as political parties have an ethnic base, Government officials also protect the members of those ethnic groups:

*“Most of the key Government officials in Samangan are appointed by one or another political party. Therefore these Government officials have to positively respond to the demands of the respective political parties. In addition, Government employees are appointed as per their ethnicity and political affiliation. With services Government officials provide to their political party members in return, political parties win more support in the elections.”<sup>152</sup>*

As a result, local populations are sceptical about respect for the rule of law or the functional impartiality of local government. They therefore tend to approach Government officials from their respective ethnic groups to resolve legal or civil disputes. Accordingly, the level of corruption in Samangan province purportedly grows every day. Participants believed that the local population could not influence the political parties because of the great amount of support they receive from the Government in Samangan. As a corollary, participants added that the local population could not expect good governance, rule of law or protection and fulfilment of human rights because Government officials abused their authority to ensure that their political parties obtain their political objectives.

*“It is difficult for local communities to influence the political parties and their leaders, especially when Government authorities are*

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<sup>152</sup> Civil society activist, Aybak city, Samangan province.

*appointed by these political parties. For instance, the provincial governor in Samangan is appointed by General Dostum. In addition, General Dostum has appointed the heads of several provincial departments in Samangan province. All the seats at provincial government level are divided as per the political parties influence. Therefore, we cannot expect the officials to apply good governance standards, rule of law and human rights.*<sup>153</sup>

In particular, participants complained that local government officials did not seek durable resolutions to disputes, but instead employed temporary and non-legal approaches to address long-lasting disputes. As a result of their political affinities, Government officials, especially the provincial governor, often appoint commissions to resolve disputes, despite the existence of various provincial government institutions with specific mandates to address such disputes.

*“Government officials, who too are affiliated to one or another political party, try to resolve disputes that exist between different communities. Such Government officials are more interested in their own political and financial gains. They rarely think of the local people’s benefits. In addition, they come up with temporary solutions. For instance, in regards to the dispute of the villagers in Piroz Naqshir district, Samangan province and Charkent and Marmul districts of Balkh province, Government officials held meetings; discussed the issue and left the village. The delegation met with local people and tried to reconcile them. Yes, sure people say they are in peace during such meetings, but was the problem resolved? No, the conflict still remains. The solution was temporary.”*<sup>154</sup>

#### **iv. Abuses by Armed Groups**

Participants further believed that the political bias of Government officials strengthened the immunity of local PGM commanders affiliated with the respective political parties and led to impunity for criminal groups. Although there is no active insurgency in Samangan itself for PGM commanders to fight against, they still maintain their arms and armed groups. Government officials have not disarmed these commanders and

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<sup>153</sup> Elder from Aybak city, Samangan province.

<sup>154</sup> Community elder from Piroz Naqshir District, Samangan province.

they remain a threat to the local population, who are unable to object to their decisions:

*“There are no ALP personnel in our province. There are local PGM commanders, who are not very powerful by themselves. They say they use their weapons for their own safety and security. However, their weapons can always be a threat to the local population. The Government does not disarm these local PGM commanders. They do not fight the Taliban, though.”<sup>155</sup>*

Additionally, local government officials reportedly either do not arrest criminal groups, or release them after high-ranking Government officials intervene, contributing to increased criminal activity in the province:

*“Impunity is also the result of corruption and political affiliations in the Government. When a criminal group is arrested or identified, many powerbrokers in Kabul and Samangan would intervene and prevent the arrest of the accused members of the criminal group.”<sup>156</sup>*

#### **v. Unlawful and Unregulated Extraction of Natural Resources**

Samangan is rich in mineral resources, including two of the biggest coal mines in Afghanistan, located in Daray-e Suf-e Bala and Ruy-e Do Ab districts. Control over these two mines has caused conflict and rivalry amongst the political parties and their respective local militia commanders for the last four decades.

*“Two villages had a dispute over agricultural lands and coal mines in Daray-e Sofe Bala district, Samangan province. In March 2008, the communities in Shabashak and Sheikh-ha villages claimed access and use of lands located in both villages and fought each other with shovels and axes. As a result, five persons were seriously wounded. Then the community representatives from both villages approached the district governor’s office in Darah-e Sof-e Balla district. Samangan provincial council members and parliament members from Samangan province held a meeting with the representatives of both communities. The meeting decided that the coal mine should be divided in halves for the both villages. Since*

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<sup>155</sup> A male student of Institute of Higher Education and civil society member, Aybak city, Samangan province.

<sup>156</sup> Community elder, Daray-i-Sofe Bala district, Samangan province.

*then, each village uses its own share and there has not been any other physical fight between them.*<sup>157</sup>

These mines have been continuously exploited using illegal and unprofessional extraction methods. Such unregulated methods seriously threaten the rights of the local population as contractors hire them, including young children who can be paid a lower wage, to dig in the mines for them. Medical experts do not monitor the risks or impact of working in the mines, nor do the local communities ever complain:

*“The PGM commanders, community elders and their political leaders that control the excavation of the mines do not take into consideration the safety and well-being of the labourers. Besides, the labourers are paid with very low wages for their long hours of hard work at the mines.”*<sup>158</sup>

Certain local powerbrokers, who are also high-ranking Government officials, control excavation of the coal mines in Samangan province:

*“These powerbrokers and their agents have very little or no respect to the rights of the labourers in these mines. The labourers suffer from deadly diseases that are the result of mines. A few months ago an incident at the coal mine in Ruy-e Du Ab district of Samangan province caused death of several labourers and injured many more. The Government did not investigate the incident, nor did they prosecute anybody for this.”*<sup>159</sup>

The extracted coal is transported to other provinces in Afghanistan through Aybak city or Mazar-e-Sharif and Balkh provinces.

#### **vi. Inter and Intra-Communal Disputes**

Participants identified several specific community-based disputes, some of which involved two or more communities. Recurrent sources of dispute include irrigation and drinking water, land and “family honour”. Traditional values were seen as major drivers of communal conflicts. When two families are involved in disputes related to their female family members, they often turn to violence and commit criminal acts. Most of these criminal acts remain concealed in remote communities. Families of victims do not tend to complain against the perpetrators to the Government

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<sup>157</sup> Community elder, Daray-i-Sofe Bala district, Samangan province.

<sup>158</sup> Community elder, Daray-i-Sofe Bala district, Samangan province.

<sup>159</sup> Civil society activist, Aybak city, Samangan province.

because vengeance is seen as a tool to restore lost pride and honour. These disputes are likely to last longer and often involve two or several communities.

*“For instance, a while ago, a young boy had an affair with a young girl in Zawabi village, Aybak district, Samangan province. The boy was a school student. After some years, the girl was married to another man. Later, the boy began calling his ex-girlfriend’s husband and informing him of his wife’s affair with him before their marriage. The boy was missing for some days. Later, he was found dead and buried in a farmland. He was stabbed eighty times. The case has not been investigated, nor have the perpetrators been arrested. The family of the deceased alleges the deceased’s ex-girlfriend and her husband of the killing. The deceased’s family and relatives most probably would avenge their son’s death as is common in every village in Afghanistan.”<sup>160</sup>*

According to the participants, disputes over land were also a cause of major communal disputes. The borders between districts in Samangan and the neighbouring provinces, such as Balkh, Baghlan and others are not determined or clearly demarcated. Communities in several neighbouring districts therefore often have disputes related to pastureland. Some local commanders supported by the Wahdat Political Party in Charkent district of Balkh province took control of some pastureland and then denied the population in Piroz Naqshir district the right to graze their sheep and cattle in the area. Local people from Piroz Naqshir district have to pay the Wahdat Political Party commanders with sheep or goats if their herds graze in the area. The community members in Piroz Naqshir recently lodged a complaint about the situation with the Samangan provincial governor’s office.

*“ANSF led by the Samangan ANP launched an investigation [into the abovementioned case], but the commanders in Charkent resisted. Therefore, an armed conflict ensued lasting for almost two hours. The Samangan ANP managed to arrest seven armed men, but due to interventions by the government authorities in Balkh and Kabul, they were released within one week. Local government authorities in Balkh and Samangan provinces composed a delegation to investigate the case which visited the disputed areas.”<sup>161</sup>*

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<sup>160</sup> A female member of civil society in Aybak city, Samangan province.

<sup>161</sup> Local villager, Firoz Naqshir district, Samangan province.

Political party representatives or powerbrokers have also had control over other natural resources.

People in the Piroz Naqshir district of Samangan and in the Charkent and Marmul districts of neighbouring Balkh are also engaged in a long-term dispute over border-related issues. There is pastureland in areas between these districts and local people from all three of these districts have herds of sheep and goats that they graze in the area. Local people, usually former commanders and Arbabs,<sup>162</sup> get into disputes over the use of such pastureland.

*“We have official deeds for the lands we claim. They are all our legal property, but because their (the locals from Charkent and Marmul districts of Balkh province) supporters are more powerful and influential, they have grabbed our lands. Around five months ago, as a result of an armed clash, one of their villagers was killed. Investigations and reports disclose that the deceased was killed by his own people from Charkent and Marmul districts of Balkh province. The Government did not arrest anybody in connection to the killing. The Government is weak and has not been able to resolve this dispute.”<sup>163</sup>*

### **vii. Displacement**

Displacement is viewed as another driver of conflict in Samangan, particularly fuelling land disputes that are often amplified by ethnic differences and political affiliations. In addition, participants claimed that local powerbrokers had attempted to manipulate the situation and use it for their own political purposes. For example, Tajiks, seen as the original population of the area, and Hazaras, the so-called newcomers to the area, were in a dispute over land in Khuramu Sarbagh district. A local inhabitant stated:

*“A group of Hazaras have been displaced from Badakhshan province to Khuramu Sarbagh district of Samangan province. They have grabbed our lands. Around three months ago, the tensions rose and the Hazaras beat a pregnant woman; her child was born dead. In addition, they beat four – five of our local villagers. But unfortunately, either of the Hazara leaders, Karim Khalili [Hizb-e Wahdat-e Islami (Party of Islamic Unity)] or Mohammed Muhaqiq [Hizb-e Wahdat-e Islami Mardum Afghanistan*

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<sup>162</sup> Major landlords and wealthy herd-owners.

<sup>163</sup> Community elder from Piroz Naqshir district, Samangan province.

(Party of Islamic Unity of the People of Afghanistan)] *support these Hazaras.*<sup>164</sup>

According to another participant, also from Khuramu Sarbagh district, the district chief of police was informed of the clash when it was happening, but did not respond quickly. The villager said:

*“We told the chief of police to come and respond to the clash between the two groups of people, he said that the ANP did not have any fuel for their vehicles. The clash erupted at around 15:00 and the ANP arrived in the crime scene at 08:00 on the next day. The Government is weak and the failure of authorities to respond to disputes adds to insecurity and instability in the area.”*<sup>165</sup>

#### **IV. The Road Map for Peace**

Participants in the focus-group discussions suggested several concrete solutions to the conflicts and disputes discussed above, primarily focusing on the key areas outlined below.

They proposed that professionalism and the possession of requisite qualifications should be key concerns when appointing Government officials:

*“Government employees should be appointed as per their ability and professionalism – not based on their political and ethnic affiliation – this is particularly important for government offices, such as prosecution and justice departments and the judges at courts. Government positions should not be sold for money because when individuals pay to get appointed in a certain government position, he sells his services too. Then, corruption is an irresistible factor in law-enforcing and judicial organs. Once Government officials in development and political positions are appointed not just based on their political affiliation, but on their competence and qualifications as well, they would serve the local population. Only then the local communities will enjoy political and development achievements which each political party member delivers.”*<sup>166</sup>

Participants further suggested that mineral resources should also be professionally extracted:

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<sup>164</sup> Local elder, Khuramu Sarbagh district, Samangan province.

<sup>165</sup> Local villager, Khuramu Sarbagh district, Samangan province.

<sup>166</sup> Male lecturer at Institute of Higher Education, Aybak city, Samangan province.

*“There are many mineral resources in Samangan province. Currently all these mines are unprofessionally excavated. If the Government excavates these mines properly, many more Afghans shall be recruited. Therefore, many jobless Afghans would find means of income.”<sup>167</sup>*

In terms of the high level of unemployment in the province, participants proposed that the Government and private companies should construct factories to create employment opportunities for the local population:

*“The Government is the first most responsible institution to eliminate unemployment in Afghanistan. In order to create more job opportunities, the Government should build more factories and encourage private sectors to build more factories in Samangan. When there are more factories, there are more job opportunities. When people are employed and they have a source of income to financially support their families, they would support the Government. There is a poem that says: ‘God gives sovereignty to a nation that writes its faith with its own hands.’ When we have food, clothes and home, we can think about politics and wellbeing of our nation. We need jobs.”<sup>168</sup>*

In addition, the Government should not waste money on failing projects and programmes, but instead spend resources on enforcing the rule of law:

*“The Government currently spends a lot of money on the APRP that increases impunity in the communities. On the contrary, the Government should spend this money to fight criminality in Afghanistan. If the ANP arrests criminal groups and if they are prosecuted and punished for their crimes, the local population would no longer fear these criminal groups. Henceforth, these criminal groups will not be able to join AGEs and increase insurgency in Samangan province.”<sup>169</sup>*

*“I am sure there are laws on land-grabbing in Afghanistan. There are Government institutions that are specially designed to fight land-grabbing. Officials from such Government institutions should*

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<sup>167</sup> Village elder, Upper part of Daray-e Sofe district, Samangan province.

<sup>168</sup> Civil society activist in Aybak city, Samangan province.

<sup>169</sup> Local villager, Hazrat-e Sultan district, Samangan province.

*investigate the dispute and identify who owns the land. Criminals should be prosecuted for grabbing the property of other people.”<sup>170</sup>*

## **V. Recommendations of the People**

During focus-group discussions, Afghan men, women and youth throughout Samangan province provided the following key recommendations to bring durable peace and stability to their province.

- Ensure functional impartiality of the local government: employment of Government officials should be based on possession of relevant qualifications and professionalism, without bias towards ethnicity, political parties or other affiliations.
- Institute proper regulation of the extraction of mineral resources and respect for the rights of workers, including by monitoring the impact of working in the mines on the health and well-being of mineworkers.
- Invest in the construction of factories as one means of providing employment opportunities to the local population, which will ultimately have an impact on dissuading people from joining the AGEs.
- Implement and enforce full respect for the rule of law.
- Disarm illegal armed groups and ensure that their members joining the APRP are not granted immunity.
- Effectively prosecute and punish perpetrators and members of the various criminal groups.
- Ensure that mosques and madrasas are not used for spreading radicalism and motivating people to join the insurgency.
- Authorities should respond to disputes effectively and in a timely manner, regardless of the ethnicity or political affiliation of the parties involved.
- Resolve disputes involving the use of land and irrigation resources, including by the clear demarcation of borders in disputed areas that create conflict.

Address cases involving disputes based on traditional values resolve them and prevent communal conflict.

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<sup>170</sup> Local villager, Feroz Naqchir district, Samangan province.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Balkh Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial road map for peace represents a summary of key findings and issues raised by the citizens of Balkh province as part of Phase II of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace (hereinafter: “People’s Dialogue”), a nationwide programme initiated by 11 civil society networks, including the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult over 4,500 ordinary Afghans across the country to develop 34 local road maps for peace – one for each Afghan province.

Focus-group discussions, individual interviews and opinion surveys were carried out during the Balkh consultation process with approximately 200 ordinary Afghan citizens residing in Balkh province. Dialogue participants represented diverse social and political backgrounds, including public-sector employees, community elders, farmers, teachers, representatives of civil society, religious scholars and reintegrees (ex-Taliban).<sup>171</sup>

This local road map for peace intends to provide as comprehensive as possible an analysis of the local drivers of conflict, as well as to identify actionable solutions to help build and sustain peace and stability in Balkh province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Balkh province is located in the northern part of Afghanistan, with an area of 16,840 square kilometres bordering Kunduz and Samangan provinces to the east, Jawzjan province to the west and Sar-i-Pul province to the southwest. Divided into 15 administrative districts, the province also shares borders with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north. Mazar-i-Sharif is its provincial capital.

The Provincial Statistics Office and the National Directorate for Security (NDS) estimate that around 3,052,000 persons, equivalent to 9 per cent of the total estimated population of the country, reside in Balkh province.

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<sup>171</sup> Ex-combatant former anti-government elements (AGEs), who ceased fighting and joined their communities with the help of reintegration programmes such as the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP). According to the APRP, ex-combatants who renounce violence, accept the Afghan Constitution, live by the rule of law and cease support for and ties to AGEs, will be reintegrated into their communities and provided assistance with education and vocational training, as well as with protection and security. See fuller details at:

[https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/AFG/00060777\\_00060777\\_APRP\\_National%20Programme%20Document%202010%2006%2001.pdf](https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/AFG/00060777_00060777_APRP_National%20Programme%20Document%202010%2006%2001.pdf)

Mazar-i-Sharif is the most populated district of the province, with 1,800,000 inhabitants, followed by the districts of Dehdadi (180,000), Balkh (150,000), Chimtal and Dawlatabad (both around 130,000), Kaldar and Marmol (both with fewer than 27,000). Balkh province is diverse in terms of ethnic composition, with 46 per cent Tajik, 15 per cent Turkmen, 10 per cent Uzbek, 12 per cent Hazara, 10 per cent Pashtun and 7 per cent Arab.

Balkh province has a quite complex political landscape. Mostly driven by and divided around ethnic considerations, Jamiat-e Islami, Junbesh-e Milli Islami, Wahdat-e Islami, Harakat-e Islami and Hezb-e Islami have been the main political parties in Balkh. Jamiat-e Islami is currently dominant over other political groups as a result of its strong grip on the provincial government. The province benefits from the presence of a vibrant and fast-growing civil society that makes significant contributions to political stability, rule of law, human rights and development. Despite the deteriorating situation in other parts of the country, Balkh province has continued to maintain a relatively high level of security and stability owing much to its governor's political dominance and ability to maintain a balance among a wide spectrum of rival political forces present in the province.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

#### **Types of Conflict**

Residents of Balkh province consulted during the People's Dialogue identified a wide range of interconnected conflict and local-dispute scenarios that affect peace and stability in their areas, including the Taliban-led insurgency, political rivalries among factions of the Northern Alliance – then fighting the Taliban during 1990s – and inter-ethnic conflict and inter and intra-communal disputes.

People generally identified the Taliban-led insurgency, which has continued to infiltrate into many districts in recent years, as the major threat to peace and stability in Balkh province. Although limited in number and varied in terms of motivations, the insurgent groups have developed into a vast network maintaining a permanent presence in at least three of the province's 15 districts. People reported that Chahar Bolak, Chemtal and Sholgara districts were considered Taliban strongholds, from which they carry out occasional attacks against pro-Government targets in other districts. In contrast with other parts of the country, the insurgency's momentum in Balkh has declined in the aftermath of the transition of security responsibilities to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in

Balkh province. A member of Chahar Bolack district development council noted:

*“Now there is relatively good security in our district and people can freely move around and do their business. The Taliban cannot establish check points to kill, arrest or harass ordinary people and our children can also go to school.”*

Similar sentiments were reflected by people from other insecure districts, as well. Participants attributed this improvement in security to targeted airstrikes (locally called *chopa*) by international forces, military operations by the ANSF and the increased presence of the Afghan Local Police (ALP) and other pro-Government militia forces. A reintegree from Chemtal district explained:

*“The Taliban doesn’t stay in a particular house or village because they are afraid of airstrikes and night operations. They also can’t frequently move during the day inside villages as there are a lot of ALP around.”*

Coming in the form of reinstatement into positions in government or the ALP and economic opportunities, the peace-offerings offered to ex-combatants of the AGEs through the APRP have not been transparent and accountable. On the other hand, they have lured some commanders and foot-soldiers of insurgent groups operating in Balkh towards reconciliation with the Government, thereby weakening the insurgency’s capacity to keep its non-ideologically motivated local recruits. Still, Balkh residents raised serious concerns over the poor management of the APRP programme, which they believed actually contributed to aggravation of the conflict in Balkh (see below under *Drivers of Conflict*).

Closely linked to the insurgency-related conflict in Balkh is what people called “negative political rivalries”, driven by memories of past animosity and competition over power and resources between factions of the former Northern Alliance. These have seriously endangered peace and stability, as well as resulted in death and injury to ordinary people. A member of the Balkh Provincial Peace Council noted:

*“I think the biggest problem in this province is the factional infighting and negative political rivalries between political groups who fought one another and the Taliban during 1990s. Between 2003 and 2004 we witnessed a large-scale military campaign on Pashtun communities, as well as factional fighting between Junbesh and Jamiat militias. Both*

*incidents led to a devastation of communities including killing and injury of innocent people.”*

Despite the fact that the trend of this armed factional fighting has de-escalated from large-scale armed clashes to local disputes between supporters of different factions, it remains a serious divisive force which, at the community level, has fuelled the Taliban-led insurgency. A member of Chahar Kint District Development Council pointed out:

*“In our district the major cause of conflict is long-standing factional animosity and fighting. This has divided our people. Some became pro-Government militia and others connected with the Taliban. There was severe fighting and many people were killed and injured as a result.”*

People explained that another facet of the factional conflict is the widening of the gap between ethnic minorities living in Balkh province, given that most of the political parties draw their constituencies from particular ethnic groups and operate on the basis of ethnic agendas, with some individual exceptions. Factional conflict does not, however, seem to have produced any severe ethnic segregation, at least at the social level. A female student of Balkh University highlighted:

*“Ethnic conflict exists at the political level only. Politicians are managing people by the divide and rule theory. They threaten ordinary people from other ethnic minorities. But at the social level people live in peace and harmony and this is evident from the fact that people of different backgrounds live in one community and also have inter-ethnic marriages.”*

People asserted that inter and intra-communal disputes were another major source of insecurity and instability in their areas. Although local communal disputes often arise around issues related to control of resources, including land, water and development assistance, as well as family and personal animosities, they possess the potential of triggering armed violence leading to death and injury. Disputes involving public pasture lands and private lands are widespread in Balkh province. A male participant from Chahar Kint district reflected:

*“Land conflicts are a major source of violence in our communities. Thousands of acres of private and public land have been forcefully and illegally confiscated in this province. We have a major land dispute with the people of Feroznakhjir district of Samangan province – as result of*

*which one person from our side was killed and many injured. This problem is spreading to other districts bordering Samangan province.”*

Disputes related to water, both for agriculture and drinking, have been a common type of communal dispute in Balkh province which, in many cases, serve to drive the armed conflict. People living downstream complained that they do not receive the amount of water they are entitled to, and as a consequence they not only lost their crops, but were also compelled to purchase water for drinking. A man from Dawlatabad district said:

*“We lost all of our crops this year because the people living upstream took all of our water and we still buy our drinking water. The government either is unwilling or unable to take action as those areas are insecure or they have support of the ALP. We can’t do anything because we are not armed.”*

People also complained that family and personal disputes, in particular those arising around forced marriages, often lead to communal disputes. If not properly addressed by the local authorities and community leaders, they end in violent clashes causing serious injury and sometimes claim the lives of those involved. A young student from Khulam district stated:

*“Forced marriages, giving girls as baad<sup>172</sup> to settle family disputes or forcing young girls into marriage against their will, all have very dangerous consequences. In my district, such cases have led to many communal disputes leading to armed clashes bringing death and injury to both parties.”*

### **Drivers of Conflict**

In discussing root causes of conflict throughout the phase II consultation process, people at the Balkh focus-group discussions identified two major categories of drivers of conflict: (1) structural causes of conflict, including widespread corruption and abuse of authority, entrenched impunity and lack of sustainable social and economic development; and (2) immediate causes of conflict, referring to processes, events and programmes that occur for a short period of time but have a long-lasting impact on conflict dynamics, such as the APRP and ALP. People believe that the above factors are the primary reasons for continuation of the conflict in Balkh, as well as

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<sup>172</sup> *Baad* is a pre-Islamic method of dispute settlement, still practised in certain areas, in which a woman or girl from the perpetrator’s family is given in compensation to the victim’s family as a servant or bride.

people's discontent and the weakening of both the rule of law and protection of human rights.

Discussing structural causes of conflict, people reported that the primary cause of insecurity and instability in Balkh province was the failure of local government to extend its control over its population and territory to protect people and establish rule of law. The government's poor functioning was attributed to a serious gap in legitimacy for its institutions, primarily resulting from widespread corruption and abuse of authority. People believed that corruption and abuse of authority was a system-wide problem in their government and society as a whole, with different facets from top to bottom. A community elder from Nahr-e Shayee district expressed the view that:

*"Corruption is like cancer and it has been accepted as a rule. I strongly believe, and I'm sure that everyone here agrees with me, that this unfortunate phenomenon is the biggest reason for continuation of conflict in our society."*

People reported that nepotism, bribery and embezzlement have become common practices in government institutions. The government institutions mandated to fight corruption are either unable or unwilling to take serious action against it. People reported that corruption also existed outside government at the social level. A female student from Balkh University stated:

*"Corruption is a common practice in our society. Nepotism and patronage politics are a common practice within the government. Almost all of the key positions in government are occupied by people who belong to a particular political party. You have to pay a bribe in any government office if you want to be heard. The government entities who are supposed to fight corruption are either not able to do anything or they are also complicit in this crime. How long will people have to live with these conditions?"*

People also asserted that impunity for crimes past or present had become the norm, creating a deep chasm between people and government and, in some cases, triggering acts of personal vendetta. People believed that institutions involving the police, judiciary and prosecution were primarily responsible for promoting impunity by letting perpetrators of crimes go unpunished. A community elder from Chahar Bolak district noted:

*“If you have a criminal case in the police, judiciary or prosecution departments and you pay a bribe or have a connection with powerful people they let you walk out free. Then the victim will have to do something about it if they have the power to take up arms. Many people who are siding with the Taliban are there to pursue their personal vendettas or criminals trying to force the government to offer them amnesty for joining the peace process.”*

People reported that lack of development, both social and economic, was a critical source of conflict in Balkh province. Participants generally stated that low literacy and lack of employment opportunities had undermined their confidence in government and resulted in inter and intra-community conflicts. In addition, Balkh residents believed that lack of a strong educational system was a serious problem in their province. They argued that uneducated people could easily be manipulated by insurgent groups and that, in the absence of an efficient educational system, people tended to send their children to religious schools in Pakistan where they learned a radical interpretation of Islam. A female researcher from Balkh University stressed:

*“Lack of literacy among the population living in the districts is a serious problem in Balkh province. A large number of young people do not attend school and those who go to school do not receive quality education. People also still send their kids to Pakistan to attend religious schools.”*

Extreme conditions of poverty and lack of employment opportunities were reported as another important underlying cause of conflict in Balkh province. People stressed that marginalized communities with large numbers of unemployed individuals were prone to the insurgency’s infiltration. A female high-school teacher stated:

*“Poor communities and unemployed young people can easily be manipulated by the Taliban. Most of the people fighting alongside the Taliban are there to have a considerable share in communal resources or to earn some money to feed themselves and their families.”*

With regard to the immediate causes of conflict in Balkh province, people strongly asserted that the APRP had served to exacerbate conflict rather than provide a solution. They believed the APRP to be led by people with vested interests in the continuation of conflict for their own personal gain. A former Jihadi commander pointedly said:

*“I don’t believe in the current peace process as it is led by people who have been part of the conflict in the past, and they have a lot to lose if peace comes.”*

People raised serious concerns about the fact that, contrary to its mandate, the APRP had become a government-led project. They were also particularly concerned that the heavy involvement in and control of the process by security institutions had rendered the programme more of a counterinsurgency tool, undermining the meaningful participation of ordinary people in bringing peace to their province. One community elder from Nahr-e-Shahi district stated:

*“The peace process has not been effective because it is not led by the people. We are not aware what is going on there and who the people who join the peace process are; the peace deals are always made by the NDS and police with insurgent commanders.”*

People stressed that these economic opportunities, amnesties and reinstatement into positions of power, such as recruitment of reintegrees into the ALP and APRP’s outreach and development projects, have perpetuated the insurgency-led conflict by encouraging a vast group of people with various motives to take up arms against the government. A female civil society activist pointed out that:

*“The peace process is a major cause of conflict in this province. Many people join the Taliban to benefit from the money they would receive when they make peace with the government and criminals exploit the process to get a pardon after joining the peace process. Warlords also use the peace process to strengthen their control over communities.”*

People highlighted that the APRP’s failure to address the situation of reintegrees adequately, including by ensuring their security and providing employment opportunities, had forced several ex-combatants to rejoin the insurgency and left a large number of interested and pro-peace insurgents undecided, thereby securing the strength of the insurgency’s network in Balkh province. A terrible example was provided by a former Taliban soldier in Chintal district who was later killed on his way home from participating in the People’s Dialogue focus-group discussion held in Mazar-e-Sharif city in 2013 (though his death was unrelated to his participation in the People’s Dialogue). He had stated:

*“I regret having joined the peace process. I haven’t witnessed any changes in my life since I began cooperating with the Government. They*

*promised they would give me a job or hire me into the ranks of the Afghan Local Police, but none of them were honest, and now I cannot even go back to my village because I fear the Taliban's reprisal. The Government played me, and now I feel abandoned."*

People raised strong criticism of the role of the ALP in the conflict. They pointed to numerous incidents in which ALP commanders and soldiers had violated people's human rights, including incidents of killing, arbitrary arrest, extortion and illegal taxation. People also asserted that the ALP, contrary to its role and mandate, often got involved in inter and intra-communal disputes that lead the opposite party to join the Taliban to protect its interests. A student from Sholgara district stated:

*"The ALP itself is a problem in Sholgara district. I can give many examples of situations in which the ALP's behaviour has forced people to seek help from the Taliban."*

#### **IV. The Road Map for Peace**

Throughout the focus-group discussions in Balkh province, people almost unanimously identified a wide range of context-specific, locally driven and practical peacebuilding initiatives aimed at addressing root causes of conflict. These included strengthening and reforming local government institutions; increasing economic and social development programmes; empowering and enabling people-driven local-conflict and dispute-resolution mechanisms; promoting meaningful participation of ordinary people in the peace and reconciliation process; and addressing the challenge posed by spoilers of peace. People's concrete and practical proposals for long-lasting peace generally fell under the following four, inter-related themes:

##### ***Strengthening Governance, Security and Stability***

People generally believed that the key to establishing durable peace and stability in Balkh province lay in ensuring control and legitimacy of local government institutions. People attributed the lack of control and crisis in legitimacy to a deficiency in the capacity of state institutions to exercise force effectively, a central factor in asserting legitimate control over the population and addressing local conflicts peacefully. Participants also emphasized that the crisis of legitimacy in the government apparatus was driven mainly by pervasive corruption, abuse of authority and the influence

of local power-brokers and warlords over the government. A community elder from Nahr-e-Shahi district summed up the discussion:

*“The reason for continuation of conflict in our areas is that the government is not there to know what is going on in the villages . . . In some instances the government is aware of the problems but authorities either don’t want to do anything or are unable to take serious actions to solve the problem. Why are there Taliban in our areas? Because the government can’t or does not exist to arrest them.”*

Similarly, a female high-school teacher noted: *“In this province the government is accountable to the warlords, not to the people.”*

To address the problem of lack of effective control and legitimacy, people suggested that establishing and expanding functional government institutions, both in terms of infrastructure and professional human capital, must remain the common goal of the national and international actors involved in state-building programmes in Balkh province. The views of a male member of the Sholgara District Youth Council reflected people’s consensus:

*“I believe establishing a strong government, one well-equipped with the adequate resources and personnel, should be the most important task of the central Government and international community in order to ensure lasting peace in provinces like Balkh.”*

While stressing the independence of the civilian local government, in particular at the district-level, people generally agreed that enhancing the capacity of national security forces, including ANA, ANP and ALP, was critical to peace and stability. People reported some levels of confidence in ANA forces, but in most instances they complained about the ANP and ALP’s corrupt and abusive behaviour. On the other hand, people believed that a number of donor-funded programmes and people-led community peacebuilding initiatives, such as the GIZ’s<sup>173</sup> community-policing programme and village-level peace and development councils, had been instrumental in bridging the gap of trust between people and the ANP. People reported these initiatives had served as a public forum for bringing the problems with the ANP to the attention of the authorities and possessed the potential to be used as a community vetting mechanism for ALP appointments, as well.

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<sup>173</sup> The German overseas development agency - Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

*“We had a community council in Chahar Kint district where we would regularly meet with the district governor, district chief of police and representatives of civil society to discuss our problems. It was a very useful way of engaging people and authorities... Through this forum we were able to solve a lot of problems in our district.”*

Throughout the consultative process, Afghans emphasized that the disarmament of illegal armed groups and other pro-government militias was critical to tackling the influence of local power-brokers and warlords over local government institutions and strengthening peace and stability at the district level. People therefore strongly demanded continuation of the Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) programme in Balkh. As a female member of the Dehdadi District Development Council pointed out:

*“The DIAG process should be expanded and implemented as it is very important to building an independent government and national security forces in Balkh province.”*

Discussing the crisis of legitimacy, people commonly believed that an accountable, transparent and efficient local government was central to securing a sustainable peace in Balkh province. People globally stressed the need for successful implementation of local government-reform programmes, including measures for the removal of corrupt officials and ensuing merit-based appointment of local government employees. A female student of Balkh University summed up people’s views:

*“Bribery and nepotism are dangerous to the government...corruption affects legitimacy and destroys people’s trust in their government...comprehensive reform of the government is a prerequisite for restoring peace and stability in this province.”*

People asserted that boosting the capacity of the relevant governmental institutions, such as the High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption (HOOAC), prosecution department and judiciary, in addition to ensuring people’s oversight of government institutions, were vital to ending corruption and abuse of authority. A community elder from Mazar-e-Sharif city stated:

*“The only way to end corruption in this province is to have strong and honest governmental anti-corruption bodies...people should also be enabled to monitor activities of the government and non-governmental organizations in their areas.”*

### ***Promoting Human Rights, Rule of Law and Tackling Impunity***

Throughout the consultative process, people universally believed that promotion and protection of human rights, enhancing rule of law and tackling impunity should be the common goals of government, civil society and the international community for establishing sustainable peace and stability in Balkh. The views of a male member of Khulm District Youth Council summarized this consensus:

*“Why should people take up arms against their government if all of their human rights are fulfilled?... rule of law and ending impunity can save this nation from regressing into the dark era of 1990s.”*

People raised strong concerns about growing hostility towards the concept and notion of human rights because it is perceived as an imported Western concept in some respects contradictory to Islam and Afghan traditions. People asserted that such negative sentiments were driven by a narrow understanding of human rights. Afghans therefore advocated for an increase in the number and quality of human rights awareness programmes to introduce a conception of human rights and women’s human rights compatible with the Afghan context. A female participant from Dehdadi district stated:

*“Some people are against human rights because they believe it is against their values... the problem is not in human rights but in the way it is introduced... human rights is about education, food, employment, freedom of movement etc... provisions of the holy Quran is same as what human rights say about women’s rights.”*

People generally called for enhancing rule of law and ending impunity as a means to achieve long-lasting peace in Balkh province. By an overwhelming majority, people suggested that reform of law-enforcement and judiciary institutions should remain at the centre of efforts to establish transparent, accountable and efficient state system. Acknowledging positive achievements in the justice sector during the past ten years, particularly in terms of legal reform and the presence of justice institutions in remote areas, people still identified a number of concerns, such as the vetting and public scrutiny of key justice sector personnel in the province. A male participant from Chemtal district pointed out:

*“It is very important that the background of people nominated for positions in the prosecution department, judiciary and police is properly*

*checked so that people also know who they are and have a say on their appointment.”*

Finally, people highlighted that measures aimed at fighting corruption and abuse of authority within justice sector institutions, including developing comprehensive laws and making institutional and procedural adjustments, remained a critical factor in ensuring the independence of those institutions and thereby ending the prevailing culture of impunity in Balkh. A female teacher from Aishe Afghan High School observed:

*“Criminals easily escape justice because of corruption and abuse of power within justice sector and strong laws and procedures are needed to fight this problem in Balkh province.”*

### **Realizing Social and Economic Development**

Throughout the consultations, people universally believed that tangible progress in economic and social development was crucial to establishing sustainable peace in the province. Ways to accomplish this included strengthening education, creating employment opportunities and ensuring equitable access to development. A female university lecturer summarized people’s views with:

*“Strong investment in the education system, creation of jobs and equality in benefiting from development assistance will bring lasting peace in this province.”*

People generally pointed to the creation of a functioning and efficient education system, both in terms of infrastructure and content as a top priority for action by government and the international community. People asserted that adequate infrastructure would help in accommodating more students and tackling the problem of overcrowding in schools, while ensuring the quality of education would require building the capacity of teachers and adopting a suitable curriculum. A female student of law at Balkh University noted that:

*“Families tend to send their children to informal education offered at the mosque or religious schools in Pakistan where they become radicalized and can easily be manipulated by insurgents...people will not send their kids to Pakistan and schools will not teach three rounds during the day if there is enough space in the schools and a good curriculum.”*

A general consensus emerged that creation of employment opportunities, particularly for the younger generation, would have a lasting impact on

peace and stability in Balkh province. Participants pointed to its relative peace and security, key geographic location, good infrastructure and strong human capital as the providing the potential for Balkh to build a flourishing economy. People highlighted that sustainable investment in the agricultural sector, such as in extension services and irrigation systems, would boost the rural economy. They further pointed out that private and government-owned enterprises, like textile production, resin cleaning, oil production and dairy factories, could also create employment opportunities if supported by government. A female high-school teacher stated:

*“Young people join the Taliban because they are unemployed... the government should invest in and support agriculture and production factories to win hearts and minds of marginalized communities and unemployed young people.”*

People also pointed out that many communal disputes often arise around the issue of equitable access to development assistance. They argued that citizens were entitled to benefit equally from development assistance, regardless of their ethnicity, political connections and government links, and that communal disputes would be resolved if government and international donors took responsible measures to ensure such equity, through such measures as need assessments and enabling people to monitor development projects. A female participant living in Mazar-e-Sharif summed up the discussions:

*“The roads in our area are unpaved and we do not receive enough assistance as well...all the construction takes place in areas where powerful people live...is it because we are poor and from a different province?”*

Another participant added: *“a large portion of conflict in our villages is over unequal distribution of resources... the powerful take the biggest share and the weak are neglected.”*

### **Addressing Peace Actors and Spoilers**

Throughout the consultative process, people broadly emphasized that ensuring the wider participation of ordinary people – men, women, youth and minority groups – was central to the success of any peace and reconciliation process. People believed increased participation of civil society, women and traditionally marginalized segments of society was crucial to inclusivity and local ownership of the peace and reconciliation process. Therefore, people particularly called for increased participation of

civil society and women in the Provincial Peace Committees in Balkh province. A male community elder from Nahr-e-Shahi district stated:

*“The peace and reconciliation process will be successful only if ordinary people are in the lead and everyone should feel they are part of the process.”*

Another female civil society activist added: *“Women should have a strong role in the peace and reconciliation process...the war takes a devastating toll on women as they suffer a life-long pain upon losing their sons.”*

People suggested that Balkh residents have a strong culture of addressing conflict and local disputes through people-led councils. They universally believed that employing such local conflict-resolution mechanisms would serve provide political and social space in which ordinary people could engage with each other and also with conflicting parties, in a constructive dialogue for peace. A community elder from Balkh district stated:

*“Balkh district is quite big in terms of geography and diverse in population. Different ethnic groups live in peace. This is because we have formed a district level council through which we solve a lot of problems.”*

Another participant from Khulum District Youth Council added: *“Local Peace Councils can resolve local conflicts through peaceful dialogue.”*

To address the negative influence of spoilers, people strongly advocated the use of vetting, based on objective criteria, not only for Taliban reintegrees, but also for leaders of the peace and reconciliation process. When asked on what criteria the vetting should be based, people globally pointed to what a civil society member of the Balkh Provincial Peace Committee explained: *“Those who lead the peace process or reintegrate should be an Afghan, be honest, should not be accused of committing crimes including war crimes and crimes against humanity.”*

## **V. People’s Recommendations**

Throughout the consultation process with the residents of Balkh province, people proposed the following general recommendations for engaging the Government, international actors and civil society in a constructive dialogue to address the root causes of conflict in Balkh province.

### **Strengthen local government institutions**

- Ensure that adequate reform and capacity-building programmes are put in place to boost the ability of the national security forces to exercise its responsibilities legitimately, such as infrastructure development and measures to fight corruption within the ANP and ALP, such as through community-policing, a strong community vetting mechanism for ALP recruits and continuation of the DIAG process.
- Ensure increased dialogue between the civilian state institutions and ordinary people at the local level in an effort to bridge the gap in trust between citizens and local government.

### **Promote human rights and rule of law while tackling impunity**

- Ensure increased awareness among local communities and authorities of human rights concepts, in particular with regard to women's rights, through comprehensive awareness-raising campaigns covering a broad spectrum of social groups, including religious leaders, community elders, political parties, youth groups and government officials.
- Guarantee respect for the rule of law and end impunity by implementing targeted capacity-building and institutional reform initiatives focusing on the justice sector, including the removal of corrupt and abusive authorities, ensuring merit-based appointments and vetting and public scrutiny of senior officials.
- Build the capacity of the national anti-corruption institutions, including the High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption (HOOAC), the prosecution department and the judiciary.

### **Strengthen social and economic development**

- Support implementation of robust rural and urban development initiatives aimed at strengthening the national formal education system, as well as the creation of employment opportunities.
- Ensure equitable access of local communities to development assistance and enable people to monitor development projects in their areas.

### **Support inclusivity of the peace and reconciliation process**

- Ensure that mechanisms exist to involve and obtain the views of traditionally marginalized groups, including women, youth and ethnic minorities, and incorporate those views into all provincial plans for achieving durable peace.

- Support civil society in bridging the trust gap between government and people through awareness-raising on issues related to peace and reconciliation, as well as facilitation of project to resolve community grievances.

Ensure that mechanisms are in place to tackle the negative influence of spoilers of the peace and reconciliation process, including the vetting of individuals leading the peace process and reintegrees benefitting from the APRP, as well as zero tolerance eliminating amnesty for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Jawzjan Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This road map for peace represents a summary of key findings and issues raised in six focus group discussions, 12 individual in-depth interviews and 25 surveys of opinions carried out during a consultative process with 144 (80 men and 64 women) ordinary Afghan citizens residing in Jawzjan province. Participants represented people from different backgrounds, such as community elders, ex-combatants, civil society actors, members of the Provincial Peace Committee, unemployed people, journalists, housewives, displaced people, Provincial Council members, opinion makers, religious scholars, heads of District Development Councils, NGOs workers and shopkeepers. The consultation took place as part of Phase II of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace (hereinafter “People’s Dialogue”), a nationwide programme initiated by 11 civil society networks, including the Afghanistan Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult over 4,500 ordinary Afghans across the country with a view to developing 34 local road maps for peace – one for each Afghan province.

This local road map for peace intends to provide as comprehensive as possible an analysis of local drivers of conflict, as well as to identify relevant actionable solutions to help consolidate and sustain peace and stability in Jawzjan province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

### **Geography**

Jawzjan is one of the northern provinces of Afghanistan, lying about 600 kilometres northeast of Kabul. It covers 11,798 square kilometres and its capital, Sheberghan, is located 130 kilometres west of Mazar-e-Sharif. It is divided into eleven districts, with about 450 villages. Jawzjan shares a border with three other provinces: Balkh to the east, Sar-e Pul to the south and Faryab to the west. Jawzjan also shares an international border with Turkmenistan to the north, with the River Amu Darya (the largest in the region) running close to the frontier.

The topography of Jawzjan is largely dominated by semi-arid plains covering approximately two-thirds of the province’s surface area. They suffer from both a perpetual shortage of water for irrigation, as well as seasonal flooding exacerbated by poor drainage. Towards the south of the province, the terrain becomes more mountainous. Jawzjan province lies between 330 metres and 650 metres above sea level.

## **Population and Tribal/Ethnic Composition**

According to the Central Statistics Office (2012), Jawzjan is home to an estimated 512,100 people, comprised of roughly 260,600 men and 251,500 women. Around 79 per cent of the population lives in rural areas, with the remaining 21 per cent in urban areas. The province has a heterogeneous ethnic composition consisting mainly of Uzbeks, Turkmens, Tajiks, Pashtuns and Hazaras.

Turkmens dominate the population in the northern and eastern districts of Jawzjan, notably Khamyab, Qarqin, Mingajik, Mardyan and Aqcha. Uzbeks comprise the largest ethnic group in Darzab, Qush Tepa and Fayzabad. Pashtuns (mainly Kuchis) live in the flat areas of Qush Tepa, Khwaja Do Koh, Aqcha and Darzab, which are parts of Dasht-e Laili, and there are some Arabs living mainly in Sheberghan, Fayzabad and Khaniqa.

## **Economy**

### ***Natural Resources and Production***

The province has a high level of unemployment and poverty. Natural resources such as gas, oil, sulphur, coal and gem stones are present, but poorly developed or not yet explored. A new supply centre for compressed natural gas was inaugurated in Sheberghan city in May 2012. This is the first modern centre in Afghanistan for vehicles using natural gas instead of liquid petroleum fuels, representing a step forward in environmental protection. The project was funded by USAID, at the cost of USD 2.7 million, with a capacity of 20,000 cubic metres of gas per day.

### ***Land Ownership and Agriculture***

It is estimated that 85 per cent of land is owned by only 15 per cent of the population. According to the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment from 2007/08, only 22 per cent of rural households have access to land. This makes access to land in Jawzjan the lowest in Afghanistan after Kabul (16%). In total, agricultural land comprises 215,753 hectares, including 20,000 hectares rain-fed and 1,000 hectares of the forested land. The main agricultural products of the province include wheat, grain, barley, cotton, oil seeds, melon, sesame and grapes. Jawzjan is considered to be a poppy-free province.

### ***Political Analysis and Governance***

The political situation in Jawzjan is significantly linked to Junbesh-e Milli Islami Afghanistan (Junbesh) deriving its support mainly from the Uzbek ethnic group, and its leader, Abdul Rashid Dostum, who is currently the country's first vice-president. However, after years of single-party domination by Junbesh, other political parties, namely Jamiat-e-Mili Islami Afghanistan (Jamiat-e Islami or Jamiat) and Hezb-e Islami, respectively deriving support predominantly from the Tajik and Pashtun ethnic groups, have succeeded in establishing bases in the province. Junbesh has suffered somewhat from internal power struggles as well.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

#### **Types of Conflict**

##### ***i. Taliban-led insurgency***

Throughout consultations, people generally identified the Taliban-led insurgency as a major threat to peace and stability in Jawzjan province.

At the time of the survey, people estimated that 1,000 to 1,300 armed Taliban were operating throughout Jawzjan province. A majority of the Taliban are home-grown, particularly among the lower ranks. They joined the Taliban because of unemployment or frustration towards the Government's failure or inability to provide services. There are limited number of ideologically-motivated insurgents, in addition to an alleged number of Pakistani insurgent consultants, Helmandi and Kandahari Taliban, as well as number of armed groups belonging to Faryab, Sar-e Pul, Balkh and Jawzjan provinces.

Participants (both men and women) in all the six focus-group discussions unanimously agreed with the view that since 2005 the security situation in Jawzjan had been worsening every year. The current situation is described as dreadful.

All participants agreed with this view of a female teacher in Sheberghan city:

*"After the fall of the Taliban regime [in 2001], at the beginning of the Interim Government security was good for a period of four to five years. Since then the security situation in Jawzjan province has steadily declined. Currently it is dreadful and deteriorating daily. There is limited Government control only over central districts."*

People identified the main base of Taliban in Jawzjan province as Dashti Laili, which lies in a large desert linking the three provinces of Faryab, Sar-e Pul and Jawzjan. This area provides a good strategic location, with its hills, mountains and natural trenches suitable for guerrilla fighting. Most people identified Qush Tepa and Darz Ab districts as the most insecure in Jawzjan, which form part of Dashti Laili or are geographically linked to it.

A village elder from Darzab district observed:

*“The district ANSF was in offensive position in 2012 while a year later in 2013 it is in a defensive position. In 2012 the district police was able to conduct patrol in the area under control of Taliban (western part of Qush Tepa and Darz Ab districts) at any time without assistance from Jawzjan province. But now the district police are not able to conduct patrol without assistance. The security of other parts of Qush Tepa district has got worse during the past 3-4 months. The district ANSF is only able to provide security for themselves and for the district Government departments located at the district centre.”*

#### **ii. Local powerbrokers**

In addition to the Taliban-led insurgency, people identified local powerbrokers as being involved in creating insecurity and instability.

Participants stated that local powerbrokers were acting above the law due to both weak Government and ANSF in Jawzjan province:

*“Four days ago, two bodyguards of General Dostum were killed in Qara Kent village where the ANP check post is only 500 meters away from the scene. These two deceased men were former Junbesh commanders. It is unclear whether they have been killed due personnel enmity as being former Junbesh commanders or whether the Taliban are behind the incident. The perpetrators escaped. Then the other soldiers and bodyguards of General Dostum raided Shakarak Afghania, Hassan Tabin villages (predominantly Pashtun areas) and severely beat up all the residents including male, female, elderly, and children. While we understand that killing of the two General Dostum’s bodyguards is tragic, nevertheless it is not acceptable to beat innocent residents in retribution. Those who were beaten were not the perpetrators. Beating up innocent local people, in the centre of the province, where there is ANA ANP and Government presence, indicates the*

*weakness of Governance, weakness of the ANSF and lack of rule of law in the province.”*

Another participant linked this incident to ethnic discrimination, arguing that General Dostum’s forces harsh retaliation against the Pashtun community in this case, disregarding the rule of law, was due to deep-rooted discrimination against minority groups:

*“Three of the people who were injured [by General Dostum’s guards in the above described incident] were female, they were admitted in hospital for treatment. When people fall in the hands of the powerful, no one comes to their help. This is because of ethnic discrimination – the rationale of this powerful groups in Jawzjan is ‘We are Uzbek and form the majority. You are Pashtun and you are the minority, we can do what we like.’ The ethnic discrimination is one of the main factors of insecurity in Jawzjan province.”*

A number of participants expressed concern over the evolving trend of empowering of local powerbrokers in Jawzjan province, which is on the increase in comparison to other provinces in the northern region, and negatively impacting the rights of people.

A member of a civil society organization said:

*“We have gone through outrageous situations [during the Civil War] in Jawzjan because this province had more local commanders than other provinces. Up to as many as four commanders would rule even in one street, so the ordinary people had to obey four “governments”. Local civilians were prone to being mobbed or looted at any time because it was a totally chaotic situation and there was no rule of law. There were four types of Afghani currency in use (Junbeshi, Dawlati, Numrabala, Numrapayan). Now the number of such local commanders is increasing again and it is spreading fear among the people.”*

Another female participant said:

*“These commanders still have some power and control over a number of people. People cannot drink a glass of tea without their permission. They still indirectly control and pressure us. They make people provide them with water and food.”*

### **iii. Ethnic/political divisions and rivalries**

Participants reported that ethnic discrimination and unhealthy political competition, combined with a lack of cooperation between General Dostum and the provincial authorities, were also causing insecurity and hampering development in Jawzjan province. Meanwhile, this situation has been further exacerbated by the central Government by not taking any initiative to solve the problem.

A male radio reporter explained:

*“The Junbesh party is in power in Jawzjan province and trying to carry out reconstruction programmes but the central Government does not pay attention. Maybe the Junbesh Party is ideologically opposed to the central Government or is in opposition of the Government. But is it the fault of the local residents of Jawzjan? Is it the fault of those villagers who are living in remote areas with no access to good roads, with no access to health centres, hydro-power or water?”*

On the other hand, a resident from Sheberghan criticized General Dostum for not being willing to cooperate with local authorities:

*“Lack of compromise of General Dostum with provincial authorities creates problems. General Dostum does not show any cooperation with the provincial authorities. Even if the provincial authorities are chosen from his ethnicity in Jawzjan he will not support them. Or if the provincial authorities are chosen from other provinces he again would not compromise with them.”*

Echoing concerns about ethnic and political dynamics causing conflict in the province, a women’s rights activist stated:

*“The major causes of conflict in Jawzjan are ethnic discrimination and political dispute. Those who respect the law but do not work in favour of a certain group, are removed from the government. But an official or civil servant who acts unlawfully but for the benefit of a certain favoured group, remains in their post. That is a big problem. Also political rivalry can cause conflicts in the province: a few days ago people staged a demonstration for ten days - some were supporting the provincial governor, others wanted him removed. This caused a crisis in Jawzjan.”*

#### **iv. Land and water disputes**

Participants reported land disputes, particularly significant in Dashti Laili, where they have evolved into persistent, chronic disputes.

A religious scholar explained:

*“In the past 20 years, since Zahir Shah’s period [the former king of Afghanistan], the Dashti Laili’s lands has been a government land used as pasture. Kuchi people and other people who had cattle used to graze them on this land. After 20 years, this government pasture lands are occupied by powerful people or those people who have ties with powerful individuals, commanders or provincial authorities. One person who has power will grow wheat on 2,000 acres of land. The poor and powerless one can grow wheat only on two acres. If a fight breaks out between these two categories of people (powerless and powerful), the powerful who occupy lots of land will be supported, but the poor people who take a small piece of land will be prosecuted.”*

A member of a Provincial Council further said:

*“The land here is a stigma. These Kuchi people were brought or came from other provinces and they occupied the land of Jawzjani people (Dashti Laili land), but today Jawzjani people wants their land back. It is a very serious dispute that has never been solved.”*

The water resources of the province are from the Rivers Sar-e Pul and Hajda Nahr. The head of the District Development Council (DDC) in Fayzabad district said:

*“There is water dispute between Fayzabad district of Jawzjan province and Chemtal district of Balkh province. The water in Fayzabad district is the downstream water of Hazhda Nher River of Balkh province. When the water is decreasing and the land needs water in Fayzabad, Balkhi people will block the water. But when the water rises during rains and flood periods, then they will release the water from the river, hence, washing away land and houses in Fayzabad district.”*

Another participant stated that Jawzjan province had a similar problem with Sar-e Pul province.

## **Drivers of Conflict**

Insecurity in Jawzjan province is based on both internal and external factors. Internal factors identified by participants, included mass unemployment and poverty; rampant corruption within government institutions; absence of the rule of law; injustice; weak governance; fragile ANSF; war economy; lack of social participation; ethnic discrimination; and unhealthy political competition. The external factors were summarized by participants as links between AGEs in Jawzjan and AGEs in other provinces, as well as interference from Pakistan and the international community.

### ***Poverty and widespread unemployment***

Throughout the consultations, people identified the main drivers of conflict as extreme poverty and widespread unemployment. The majority of participants consistently emphasized that lasting peace would not be achieved if the economic situation of ordinary Afghans did not improve substantially. They asserted that the majority of people who had joined the Taliban had done so because of unemployment or frustration with the Government's failure or inability to provide services.

A university professor said:

*"A high number of our youth have graduated from high schools, universities and madrasas, but cannot find jobs. We don't have industry and factories in Jawzjan to recruit these youths. Both the Education Department and the Department of Information and Culture lack the capacity to provide job opportunities for the large number of unemployed youths. If job opportunities are created and income generation projects are set up, the youths would prefer to work for half pay in factories rather than for full pay with the Taliban and accepting the risks of a dark future."*

A local man from Qush Tapa district reiterated:

*"In both Darzab and Qush Tapa districts the community have surfeit of land for cultivation, but due to the lack of precipitation in the last five or six years, they cannot grow good crops. There are no other work opportunities in these two districts, and as result about 40-50 per cent of youths go to Iran and Pakistan in search of work, those who can't go to those places, join the AGEs, because AGEs are providing them with at least something."*

A village elder from Khoja Dokoh district provided similar assessment:

*“People are really facing economic problems in Khoja Dokoh district. About 5,000 people aged 19 to 40 have left Khoja Dokoh district for other provinces such as Kabul, Paktia, Jalal Abad for masonry work, while others joined ANP in other provinces. Many were injured or killed as result of mine explosions, while others disappeared. If the factories are repaired, youths would find jobs.”*

### **Rampant corruption/nepotism and lack of the rule of law**

Rampant corruption, particularly among law-enforcement authorities, was a burning issue raised in all discussions. According to the participants, this causes ordinary people to stand against the Government and join AGEs. Below is a view of an ex-combatant who had joined the Taliban because of corruption:

*“I am working as an ALP in Fayzabad district. I had worked with anti-government groups for almost one year. The main reason people distance themselves from the Government is corruption. For example, I went to the district centre to solve a legal problem, but instead I was put in detention. They asked me for a bribe of Afs 200,000 (USD 4,000) for my release as a guarantee. I tried to borrow money but failed. I could only provide Afs 160,000 (USD 3,200) but could not find the rest of Afs 40,000. They continue pressuring me by phone to pay the remaining amount and warned me that if I don’t, they would summon me again through the people who guaranteed for me. But I had already sold my wife’s jewellery and could not provide them with more money. Pressure to pay up the balance forced me to join the Anti-Government groups. Then I started to motivate people against the Government telling them that the district Government is corrupt. I didn’t allow the Government and village elders to enter our village and surrounding villages. Then Taliban tasked me to kill specific people, this was to create a criminal case against myself so that I could not rejoin the Government. I realized the Taliban’s ill intentions so I joined the peace process.”*

A number of participants agreed on the fact that corruption mostly existed in the first-line departments and among high ranking officials.

A member of the Provincial Council said:

*“The ministries are the most corrupt within the Government administration. A small portion of the international communities’ money was spent on small projects but the lions share was pilfered by corrupt ministries. Here is how government corruption works: When a school is built in a province, the province is not authorized to directly contract the construction company. Instead, the Minister of Education signs the contract with the construction company and the ministries hire and send their own relatives.*”

A women’s rights activist added:

*“I know about a case of one of Taliban brother’s wives selling her jewellery to fund Jihad. This means that among Taliban, there are people with very strong belief. They don’t work for salary or money, many people join the Taliban because of corruption and lack of justice. It should be noted that Taliban justice system is much stronger than the state justice system. In the Taliban system, no one is put above their law; nobody can escape from the Taliban law.”*

A teacher observed:

*“Our prosecutor takes bribes but theirs [Taliban] does not. Average employee’s salary is Afs 100,000 while a teacher’s salary is only Afs 5,000, it is not just. My relatives are with the Taliban. I was also with the Taliban but I am not happy with the Taliban system. We are also hopeless about the Government: there is law, big army, and different government departments; we vote for the Government, we expect rule of law. The Government should eliminate corruption within the law enforcement. These are people’s expectations.”*

Existence of corruption in the Education Department in Jawzjan province was a particular concern that emerged in all the consultative sessions: Jawzjan residents believed that the lack of a strong education system and the existence of corruption in the Provincial Education Department further was further weakening education in Jawzjan. Participants were of the opinion that illiterate people could be easily manipulated by the insurgent groups in their province.

A village elder from Khwaja Du Koh district stated:

*“The main factor for the conflict is illiteracy: around 70 per cent of our people are illiterate. Being illiterate is like being blind. The blind people can easily be directed towards darkness.”*

A local man from Murdain district added:

*“Due to bribery, teachers who have failed the exams are being recruited. When the monitoring and evaluation team goes for monitoring of the quality of education at schools, they go to the teachers houses and have lunch and dinner there. They don’t talk to the people about their opinion of problems in the education. Until our people become literate they wouldn’t be aware of what is lawful and right and what is not.”*

### ***Lack of social participation***

Poor participation due to ethnic discrimination, nepotism, lack of unity and unhealthy political competition was seen as another factor contributing to the conflict in Jawzjan.

A high-school principle pointed out:

*“When a particular ethnic group forms a political party and occupies high positions in Government, they tend to support their own ethnic group. This has a negative impact on the right to social and political participation in the province. The current situation is not fair and it causes conflict.”*

*“The social participation in government departments is weak in Jawzjan province. If a director of a department is Pashtun, the deputy should be Uzbek or the other way round, and the other heads of units should be representatives of other ethnic groups. However, in Jawzjan - if the director is Uzbek, the employees are all Uzbek. If the director is Hazara, the employees are all Hazaras. The government departments are formed as a family”*

### ***War economy***

Throughout all focus-group discussions, people held the view that the war economy was the main barrier to achieving peace in the province, arguing that for some influential actors the current conflict conditions offered an economic benefit.

*“People involved in war-related unlawful businesses risk losing this source of income if there is peace. Therefore these people do not want peace in our country - they need the war.”*

A female teacher added:

*“Those whose benefits are rooted in war, don’t want peace. They pretend that they want peace but in reality they don’t. Examples include corrupt persons holding high positions, running big supplying companies or big construction companies. Furthermore, those with the blood of innocent people on their hands (e.g. those who have committed war crimes or crimes against humanity) have no interest in peace if it leads to justice.”*

A member of the Provincial Council also explained why some individuals might find the war an opportunity for income, especially in an environment with scarce jobs:

*“A Taliban Commander named Turan Amrullah collect Ushr and Zakat (illegal taxation) from the communities. He gathered his members to ask them how much the Government pays for its soldiers. His fighters replied Afs 8,500 per month. Then Turan gave them Afs 120,000 as their annual salary.”*

### ***Intimidation by AGEs***

The participants claimed that, apart from the economic factors, on some occasions people were threatened with death if they did not join the Taliban.

*An ex-combatant in Darzab district said:*

*“Taliban threatened us with death if we didn’t buy them guns and PKs [Kalashnikov]. We were afraid and bought them guns and PKs costing Afs 120,000. A lot of people bought them guns and PKs. Then we worked for them for a while. They were good, we were provided food and were paid a regular salary of about Afs 8,000-10,000 monthly. Right now people are paid even more, Afs 25,000 per month, by the Taliban. The peace process paid some money but not as much as Taliban paid.”*

### **Abuses by state actors**

Various participants identified ill-treatment by local government as another motivation for people joining the AGEs:

*“People grow fed up with the Government’s abusive behaviour and hence join the AGEs. For example, in Darz Ab district people were taken from madrasas and their heads and beards were shaved off in public. As result people got angered and joined the AGEs.”*

A teacher added: *“Our relatives who joined Taliban did not join for money. Even rich people joined Taliban due to harassment by the NDS [National Directorate of Security].”*

### **Lack of adequate security**

People throughout all the focus-group discussions identified **the** ANSF as understaffed and under-resourced to provide stable security to its large population, particularly at the district level.

A representative from Khoja Dokoh district explained:

*“Lack of ANP in Khwaja Do Koh district is an issue. The security situation is getting worse. We have 16-17 ANPs in the district police department. How can 17 ANP provide security for 19 villages, perform patrols and provide security for the five km of highway? AGEs are only 5 km away from our district centre. People are really in fear. Police always claim that police are at peoples service at all times - day and night; however police is not able to provide security for themselves, how can they provide security for the people? Our teachers have concern about their safety. AGEs abuse people. The police Tashkil is not adequate to provide security in the district.”*

Moreover, throughout the six focus-group discussions, people were largely dissatisfied with the Afghan Local Police (ALP) in Jawzjan province.

An influential man opined: *“ALPs are just armed to defend themselves.”*

A school student added: *“Rising insecurity is directly linked to the increasing number of armed groups including Arbakies, local commanders, and warlords; we have experienced it.”*

A village Elder from Darzab district related: *“In Aqsay village of Darz Ab district, both Taliban and ALPs have check-posts and both put pressure on*

*locals not to take a side of the opposition. The locals got fed up with the situation and requested the district governor to disband the ALPs.”*

### ***Ineffective peace process***

The peace agenda of the local government is to persuade AGEs to join the peace process and end the insurgency, promising them job opportunities and vocational training, in accordance with the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP).<sup>174</sup> The participants however pointed out with concern that these were false promises and had not been implemented. Participants claimed that when AGEs join the peace process, they are given only one coat and an inadequate Afs 20,000, so they rejoin AGEs. The body responsible for the peace process at the provincial level, the Provincial Peace Council (PPC), is seen as symbolic in Jawzjan, as participants questioned the independence of the PPC due to perceived connections with the Government and lack of effectiveness of the reintegration process due to corruption and nepotism.

The current characterization of the PPC and its members in Jawzjan province, which was discussed throughout the consultations, is summarized through the commentary below.

A university lecturer stated: *“The Provincial Peace Council is a symbolic body. There is no need for a symbolic department that deceives people.”*

A female university student observed:

*“The members of the PPC are Government employees. They cannot make time to go and do outreach on peace because they are either busy with their government jobs or afraid of their superiors. Furthermore, relatives of powerful people are been recruited as member of the PPC. It would be better if as members of the PPC are selected independent individuals.”*

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<sup>174</sup> The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) provided that ex-combatants who renounce violence, accept the Afghan Constitution, live by the rule of law and cease support for and ties with AGEs, will be reintegrated into their communities and be provided assistance with education and vocational training, as well as protection and security. See: *National Security Council, D&R Commission, Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP)*, July 2010, available at: [https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/AFG/00060777\\_00060777\\_APRP\\_National%20Programme%20Document%202010%2006%2001.pdf](https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/AFG/00060777_00060777_APRP_National%20Programme%20Document%202010%2006%2001.pdf)

A member of a civil society organization added:

*“There is a set of criteria for selecting PPC members. However the provincial governor as well as its lower authorities interfere, ignoring this criteria. They hire friends, relatives, political party members or allies and so on. This is why members of the PPC aren’t capable of delivering a successful peace process - they lack the requisite capabilities. The views of ordinary people have not been sought when it comes to selecting members of the PPC.”*

A resident of Sheberghan city concluded:

*“The current PPC is perceived by the Taliban as a Government department. Therefore, some changes to the members of the PPC must be made.”*

People’s dissatisfaction with the reconstruction and vocational training projects as part of the peace process is demonstrated by the following remark:

*“A number of vocational training programmes have been conducted using the peacebuilding budget. About 120 people have been trained. However, around 40% of the participants were ineligible, they were either relatives of government employees, or persons who were not even present but their names were registered and money allocated for them taken. This happened because of pressure by the local Government. Actually, first priority must be given to AGEs and their families, the family members of martyred, disabled and poor people - not government employees’ family members.”*

A member of Jawzjan Provincial Peace Council who represents Qush Tepa district said:

*“Two years ago, the Provincial Director of the Department of Labour and Social Affairs informed us about donation of a vocational project worth USD 280,000 as part of the peace process in Qush Tepa and Darz Ab districts. After some times, a monitoring delegation from Kabul questioned us [the PPC] whether any vocational project is functioning/ongoing in Darz Ab and Qush Tepa district. We (two representatives from Darz Ab and two from Qush Tepa) were not aware of any projects. The delegation presented us a memorandum written by the district governor as a confirmation of the functioning of vocational projects.”*

According to another participant:

*“From the peace process budget, one female school was built in Mughol village of Darz Ab district and another school in Sheerbak village of Qush Tepa district. However, the vocational project worth USD 210,000, funded by the High Peace Council and implemented by the Provincial Labour and Social Department, was unsuccessful and plagued by corruption. Also the failure to implement an infrastructure project by the Provincial Rural and Rehabilitation Department, funded by the High Peace Council, to improve the quality of the two roads (from Ghijil Khana to Qazil Ayaq and from Messar Abad to Chobash) prompted us to lodge a complaint. A delegation came to do an assessment but no action was taken. I suspect the delegation was bribed.”*

People shared contradictory views on the type of AGEs who have been accepted to join the peace process, as well as the financial support and job opportunities provided for reintegrees.

Various participants claiming to be eyewitnesses consistently agreed with this statement: *“A number of people who were not actually AGEs joined the peace process by handing out old guns, and took the money provided by the PPC.”*

Participants also shared the view that generally many of the AGEs who joined the PPC-led peace process seemed to be not ideologically-motivated insurgents, but rather people who were forced to join the insurgency because of a lack of employment possibilities.

In addition, people claimed that the PPC was not following through on its promises of providing reintegrated ex-insurgents with job opportunities and financial support, which lead to reintegrees rejoining the AGEs:

*“AGEs who joined the peace process were deceived when told that would receive a financial support in return. So they joined the peace process. However, when they [the reintegrated insurgents] discovered the reality, they rejoined the AGEs. They should not be provided false promises.”*

### ***International interference***

Men and women throughout the consultations shared the belief that Pakistan had played a role in contributing directly to Afghanistan's armed conflict.

A local man from Mingajik district said: *"The main factor is the madrasas in Pakistan. A number of youths go to Pakistan for religious study, but instead they are being trained to be Taliban and suicide bombers."*

An elder from Darz Ab district added:

*"It is clear that the Taliban in Jawzjan have a direct link with Pakistan. For example Mawlawi Nimat, a Mufti acting as head of the Taliban Supreme Court, is a major Taliban figure in Jawzjan. He commutes regularly to Pakistan and stays there for several months. He must be receiving instructions from there."*

### **IV. The Local Road Map for Peace**

Throughout the focus-group discussions in Jawzjan province, people proposed the following context-specific and locally driven initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes of the conflict in the province: strengthening and reforming local government institutions; improving the capacity of security institutions; tackling corruption and nepotism; ensuring the rule of law; empowering and enabling a people-driven, independent and effective peace and reintegration process; promoting the meaningful participation of ordinary people in the peace and reconciliation process; and boosting economic and social development. People's concrete and practical proposals for long-lasting peace generally fell under the following four, interrelated themes.

#### ***Strengthening Governance, Security and Stability***

People agreed that the fundamental factor for establishing durable peace and stability in Jawzjan province was ensuring accountability and legitimacy of local government institutions. People attributed the weakness and lack of legitimacy of the Government to a deficiency in building the capacity of security institutions to effectively establish security and rule of law, as well as abuse of authority and the influence of local powerbrokers and warlords over the Government.

One of the concerns raised in the consultations was the insufficient number of ANP in proportion to district population:

*“The number of police in specific districts is too low for the population of that particular area. For example in one district the number of police is 20-25 while the population is between 60,000 to 80,000. How can this small number of police provide adequate security for such a large population? The issue of strengthening police (in terms of personnel numbers and equipment) is always discussed and suggestions put forward but no action has been taken so far. ANSF strength is diminishing in both cities and more remote areas while there is a serious need for more strength in remote and bordering areas.” (A Government employee)*

People recommended that the Government should disband ALPs and illegal armed groups and instead focus on strengthening the state security apparatus.

According to one participant:

*“ALPs are 30% useful and 70% harmful. There is no need for them. It is better to empower ANSF instead of ALPs. The ANSF is the backbone of the Government - if the backbone of a Government is paralyzed, then the Government would not be adequate.”*

Further, the participants were of the opinion that the PPC should be reformed, as they argued it had been “a waste of money” so far. They claimed that lots of money had been spent on this initiative, without any achievement. In their view, the ANSF should instead be strengthened.

In line with the drivers of conflict identified by the participants, such as abuse of authority and abuses committed by state actors, people called for Government accountability reforms to tackle political interference and nepotism within the Government.

An elder from Sari Dara village, Darz Ab district said:

*“Government authorities ill-treated people, particularly the religious scholars. This caused people to distance themselves from the Government. Henceforth, the Government should change its attitudes towards people and be at people’s service.”*

A local man from Khamyab district added:

*“When we have meritocracy in Government, we will have peace. This means people must be hired based on their merit not based on ties and bribes.”*

### ***Promoting Human Rights and Tackling Corruption, Injustice, Impunity and Lack Rule of Law***

Throughout the consultative process, people universally believed that promotion and protection of human rights, enhancing the rule of law and tackling corruption and impunity should be the main goals of the Government in order to achieve sustainable peace in the province and the country. The following commentary encapsulates the views and recommendations of the participants in this respect.

*“If key people in the leadership who are appointed to bring peace are not moral and honest themselves, and instead violate the rights of others and are involved in war crimes and crimes against humanity, real peace will never happen. Peace wouldn’t be reached through propaganda, publications or announcements...”*

A female school teacher in Sheberghan City urged reforms for ensuring justice:

*“Until reform takes place, justice will not be upheld. AGEs will not join the peace process if we don’t have an emblematic example of reform. So it is important to bring some reform in order to bring peace in Jawzjan province.”*

Participants called also for respect for human rights and accountability for human rights violations:

*“Those individuals who killed people before, now they are in power and continue to kill people with impunity, they are still in power. The people are living on mercy of these individuals such as local power broker and political leaders. We know that if the main perpetrator [referring to an incident involving a powerful perpetrator] is found, most likely he will be released through phone call by a person in authority. Unless Allah brings peace I don’t think peace will be brought by our leaders.”*

People claimed that Government officials who commit crimes in one province were being relocated to other provinces and promoted to higher positions, instead of being punished.

To eliminate corruption, people provided the following concrete recommendations, which received wide concurrence among the participants.

A civil society representative said:

*“In order to eliminate corruption, a set of moral requirements should be incorporated into the job descriptions for provincial cadre positions. Also besides working experience, integrity is very important. A review/investigation of the character and working background of the candidate including his moral behaviour, honesty etc...is important. The person in charge of a police department or court must possess competency and moral values. In return, the respective unit recruiting such person will also be effective. If the head of department is corrupt, corruption will negatively influence conduct in all units of the department.”*

Participants called for investigation and accountability for those involved in corruption, regardless their economic and political position:

*“When a complaint is made against ordinary employees concerning corruption involving small amounts of money, they are brought to justice. However when a complaint is made against a big construction company over millions of dollars of corruption, no investigation takes place. Why? It is because ministries, governors and other authorities are involved in these big construction contracts.”*

A female defence lawyer further called for the implementation of the anti-corruption legislation:

*“The main cause of insecurity and instability is lack of rule of law, particularly lack of implementation of the anti-corruption legislation such as the ‘Qanon Tadheer Pool’ (the Money Laundering Law). We have plenty of laws but all are symbolic. They are not implemented. In fact, those supposed to implement the laws are often the violators of the laws. Laws are violated by authorities and judiciaries. Lack of implementation of the Money Laundering Law is undermining security and stability in Jawzjan and other provinces in Afghanistan. Persons who had only a simple shop now own several private companies inside and outside of Afghanistan. They have not been questioned to find out how they made so much money. As a defence lawyer, I haven’t seen a single case involving the crime on money laundering.”*

Almost all participants complained about the head of the Provincial Education Department. They gave an example of teaching positions in

Sheberghan city being sold for USD 1,000, while positions in the districts were being sold for USD 300.

### ***Strengthening the Peace Process***

In order to overcome the weaknesses of the PPC and the peace programmes that are hampering the achievement of peace and reintegration as discussed above, participants strongly recommended concrete initiatives to reform the peace process to ensure its independence and inclusiveness.

Participants stressed the need of ensuring the independence of the PPC and its acceptance by the AGEs:

*“The PPC members are part of the Government authorities (such as the head of the PPC). They cannot talk with the AGEs because of fear and lack of acceptance by the AGEs. The PPC should be independent and not connected to any political party. Government employees shouldn’t be members of it. Members of the PPC should be elders, mullahs, Ulema: people who can reach out to the Taliban. Taliban in Jawzjan are different from Taliban in Kandahar and Helmand. Taliban here are local Taliban. So people shouldn’t have problem with such local Taliban because we have language and other things in common.”*

An ex-combatant commander from Darzab district raised concerns about the failure of the reintegration programme to provide alternative opportunities for reintegrees and called for its improvement:

*“I worked as a Taliban for almost one-and-a-half year in Darzab district, Jawzjan province. Then I realized that Taliban are not good. In 1390, I and 28 other Taliban joined the peace process and handed out our guns, a type of machine gun. The Government gave us only one chapan (traditional coat) and Afs 20,000 (about \$300). Four of my soldiers were recruited as ALP, but not me. I am living in a rental house in Sheberghan city, but I am not able to pay the rent. I cannot return to my residence in Darzab because of the risk due to leaving the Taliban and joining the Government. Actually I regret handing in my gun because if I had sold it, I would have made more money than the Government paid us. There is no work or salary for reintegrees. How they shall continue their life? It is the weakest point of the peace process.”*

In this regard, participants emphasized the need for creating long-term work opportunities for reintegrees. The head of the Department of Women's Affairs said:

*“Creating long-term work opportunities for reintegrees is vital. They are only paid short-term salaries. Only the ex-combatant commanders are paid salaries, not the members. If the ex-combatants are left jobless, they may again join the Taliban. There were some ex-combatants who rejoined Taliban due to unemployment.”*

Some participants viewing the PPC in Jawzjan as “symbolic” and a “waste of money”, called for peace process funding to be used on more practical measures to persuade AGEs to join the process. An influential man suggested:

*“Since its establishment, we have not seen any achievements by the PPC. Instead of wasting the funds this way, the money should be used to build refineries and factories. This will create jobs. AGEs would join the peace process if work opportunities were available.”*

In addition, people raised concerns over the release of hard-core Taliban detainees in the context of the peace and reconciliation process, through the passing of a special decree by the then-President Karzai. Participants stated that, in order to appease various ethnic groups or members of Parliament who had supported his presidential campaign (for the elections held on 5 April 2014), Karzai issued a special decree for the release of specific AGEs. These individuals reportedly restarted their insurgent activities in the region, making the security situation even worse.

A member of the civil society explained:

*“In Dowalat Abad district [Faryab province, neighbouring Jawzjan], six Taliban commanders including Commander Abdul Basir were arrested in Dawlat Abad district and put in Pul-i-Charkhi Prison. He was released through the mediation of a member of Parliament, representative of Faryab province, only to rejoin AGEs in in Dawlat Abad district, negatively affecting the security situation there. Tens of AGEs operating in Darzab district were released from prison through mediation. In order to please the different ethnic groups or members of Parliament who had supported Karzai's presidential election campaign [for the elections held on 5 April 2014], Karzai issued a special decree for the release of the requested AGE.”*

- **Conducting awareness-raising programmes**

Through the consultations, a majority of people held the view that civil society organizations (CSOs) and religious leaders (*Ulema*) had the capacity to engage more effectively with the AGEs on peace initiatives by meeting with them and inviting them to join the peace process. Below are emblematic quotes.

A women's rights activist stated:

*"There are people who joined the Taliban for ideological reasons, therefore there is a need to encourage them to join the peace process for ideological reasons. Religious scholars have been involved at different periods of the crisis in Afghanistan. The religious scholars can bring changes through Islamic education. They can incorporate the theme of peace into Islamic religion and Holy Quran studies."*

A female member of the PPC added:

*"From my point of view the CSOs, those who are experts, operate impartially and are not dependent on any political party, are able to play a positive role as mediators. Female members can play outreach and meet with wives and mothers of AGEs to convince their male relatives to join the peace process."*

A university lecturer concluded:

*"We still have key and very influential people among our communities who are able to gather millions of people by one call. Why shouldn't we motivate and mobilize key people. For example Eng. Nasim, would be able to mobilize all the communities of Darz Ab district. Or Mawlawi Muradi in Murdian district. Or if General Dostum called people, all people including young and old will join him. We cannot achieve peace alone without the help of these key people. If the central Government creates a mechanism and consults these key persons then we will achieve peace. Otherwise, people will be divided into parties. A group of people will take one direction. Another group of people will take another direction. As result conflict will continue and even get worse and peace will never be achieved."*

Participants also suggested that groups of influential local people be organized for awareness-raising at the district level to promote and educate people, through mosques for instance, about the value, importance and advantages of peace and the consequences of war. These activities should cover all districts in the province. It was suggested that if a programme was conducted via mosque loudspeakers, the majority of people in the communities could benefit from it.

*“Ulema and mullahs have a vital role in mosques. Both parties (AGEs and Government) use the mosques for their propaganda. AGEs use mosques for encouraging people to kill the Government employees who they see as infidels. We request that awareness on peace should be incorporated with the values of peace in Islam. The open-minded Ulema should be selected, as they are the one able to rescue this community.”*

### ***Achieving Socio-Economic Progress and Social Justice***

The majority of the participants consistently shared the view that lasting peace would not be achieved in Jawzjan without achieving socio-economic development through eliminating poverty; creating job opportunities; creating equitable economic progress; revising the educational system; and acknowledging the fact that majority of those who joined the Taliban did so because of unemployment or frustration at the Government’s failure to provide services. Jawzjanis believed that the economic life of ordinary people would improve substantially by implementing the following suggestions.

*“We have gas and fuel here [in Jawzjan]. If infrastructure projects to exploit our gas and fuel were established here, job opportunities would be created and the wealth of both communities and the Government would improve. Our mosques, schools, roads and bridges could be constructed from funds derived from these income-generation projects.”*

A member of Provincial Council said:

*“We don’t have electricity in Jawzjan province. We buy electricity from outside of Afghanistan but it is inadequate for our needs. There are gas wells and gas turbines in Jawzjan. If reactivated, they would supply energy to all provinces of the northern region. Why is there no investments to reactivate these gas wells and gas*

*turbines? If such investments take place the people will have electricity and jobs.”*

Participants also provided the following concrete suggestions for development initiatives to improve the socio-economic situation in Jawzjan.

- Reactivating Tasadi Afghan Gas and Tafawosat Neft wa Gas

A member of Ulema Council said:

*“About 20-30 years ago we had two factories. One was Afghan Gas Tasadi and the other Tafawosat Neft and Gas. They employed about 10,000 workers. Both factories still exist and so does the underground raw material used in them.”*

- Extraction from gas wells in Bashokoh village, Jarqodoq village and Janat Kalan village

There are natural gas wells in the Jarqodoq area. The participants argued that if there was a project to develop the mentioned areas, including excavation, exploitation and repairing of gas wells, this would be the first electricity-producing project in Afghanistan, using domestic sources of methane gas. The output of the project is estimated to be around 200 MW, while the province's requirement is only 60-70 MW, so any excess energy could be used by other provinces.

A head of the local *shura* said:

*“During the years 1372-1380, there were several gas wells in Bashokoh village, Jarqodoq village and Janat Kalan village. There was gas in each house in all of Qush Tepa and Darz Ab districts. It even supplied Sheberghan city and Mazar-e Sharif city until year 1380. But now people have resorted to using animal dung as firewood. One bag cost Afs 300. The Government should establish a refinery and gas factory which will improve our lives. How long will the Government beg from the international community? As a member of the local community I can say that everyone have lost hope. People say there is no Government.”*

- Recruiting ordinary workers/labourers of the fuel and gas fields from among residents of Jawzjan province

A female staff member of an NGO said:

*“Our people cannot find work or simply bread to eat, while Bengalis and Chinese people have been employed to extract the fuel and the gas. Even the ordinary workers/labourers are recruited from outside.”*

A local man added:

*“It is clear that all existing disasters in Jawzjan are due to poverty and joblessness. The majority people who join AGEs are jobless and need money. Unfortunately, nobody thinks about this problem but only how they can increase their own wealth and hire people who will help them to do so. The fuel extraction factory established in Jawzjan hires ordinary employees from Kabul, Nangarhar province and other provinces, while local people are living in extreme poverty.”*

To address the above issues, people recommended that Government should rebuild the substructures to extract gas and fuel. They also urged that the mining law should be reviewed to ensure that 40% of staff in mining extraction companies are recruited from among the local population, while 40% of professional staff (technical or specialized staff) could be recruited from outside the province.

- Repairing/building Bandi Barq (power station) in Sultan Ibrahim village

*“Now Turkmenistan supplies our country with weak electricity for a much high price. Instead of paying huge annual electricity costs to Turkmenistan, the Government should build the Bandi Barq (power station) in Sultan Ibrahim village. It would be able to provide electricity for the entire province and provide water to the people in the village, as well as the Dashte Laili deserts.”*

- Building an irrigation system from the Rivers Amu and Bala Murghab

*“The false promises of the Government and its lack of responsiveness to the needs of the people causes people to lose trust and to distance from the Government. For example, people in Jawzjan suffer from poverty. Promises were made many times that the water from Amu River and Bala Murghab River would be supplied to Jawzjan. We met [the then] President Karzai several times on this issue and he promised the water would be supplied. However five years on, no action has been taken by*

*the Government on this issue. All that is needed is to dig 500 meters to get water from Bala Murghan River.” (a civil society representative)*

*“Around 128 villages within Jawzjan province do not have enough agricultural water or drinking water, despite that Amu River is close to these villages. However due to lack of an irrigation system, we cannot use the water from our Amu River. Requests for an irrigation system have been sent several times to the Milli Shura (National Assembly), but our request letters have disappeared there. No action has been taken.”*

- Building protective walls for the River Amur

*“Every year huge parts of land in Qarqin and Khamab district is washed away by the Amu River. I am afraid that one day all the entire Qarqin and Kham districts will be covered by the Amu River. A funding was allocated for building protection walls around Amu River. However, a very small part of that sum was used for actually building protection walls of very low quality. The remainder, millions of dollars, ended up in the pockets of corrupt persons.”*

- Digging selburs to direct the flood water and avoid destruction of property in Koja Dokoh district

*“There are four populated villages in Khoja Dokoh district where flooding occurs every year in March and June. It floods 10,000 hectares agriculture lands, wheat and people’s houses. Several times we have requested Action Aid and the Government to dig selburs, but no action has been taken so far. If selburs are constructed, the 10,000 hectares of agriculture production would be possible and many jobs created which would rescue people from poverty.”*

- Building protective walls for the river and digging wells in Fayzabad district

*“There is a need for wells in our district as there is no drinking water and we need to walk for two-three hours to get drinking water from the river.”*

*“The United Nations built some wells in the district, but they are very low quality and stop working after a short period of time.”*

*“There is a river in Fayzabad district we use for our agriculture every year. There is a need to build protection walls around the river.”*

- *Reactivating the factories in the province*

An influential man from Aqcha district suggested:

*“There was a factory in Aqcha district where animal skin was washed, processed and exported. But it was deactivated. The carpet waving factory in Aqcha district was deactivated too. Jawzjan has lots of mines compared to other provinces. If the factories are rebuilt, they will not only meet the needs of the people in Jawzjan but of people across Afghanistan.”*

- *Repairing the Qush Tepa-Darzab district road*

A village elder from Qush Tepa:

*“The road between Qush Tepa and Darz Ab district is very bad. It is only 95 km. Several times members of parliament promised to repair it, but have not done so yet. This road was not improved during the two rounds of Karzai’s presidency.”*

- *Government encouragement and support for investors*

An influential man from Khamab said:

*“The Government does not assist or support the investors, instead they are asking for bribes. One of my relatives who live in Pakistan came to Jawzjan and decided to build a factory in Jawzjan to create jobs and serve the people. He needed 500 acres of land. He planned to hire 5,000 people in his factory. He stayed here for about one month and tried hard to obtain land until he finally realized that he had to pay a bribe. He became fed up, he told me that he came to build a factory, not to bribe people. Then he left.”*

A university professor said:

*“There is no leisure/social park for women and children in Jawzjan province. One park can be a starting point for peace because children from all ethnic groups would come and meet and play with each other and learn the culture of acceptance from childhood. It doesn’t matter whether it’s a private park or a Government park but having a park is important.”*

- *Strengthened social participation through promotion of unity and solidary and elimination of ethnic discrimination, nepotism and unhealthy political competition*

A female member of a CSO stated:

*“Unfortunately, the authorities work less for solidarity and unity. We have zero schemes on solidarity and unity of ethnicities in Afghanistan. It is a big problem. A programme should be designed to eliminate nepotism in Afghanistan, including Jawzjan province. We have experienced a very negative consequence of nepotism.”*

## **V. People’s Recommendations**

During the consultative process, participants offered the following recommendation to resolve conflict and local disputes in Jawzjan province.

### **Promoting Human Rights and Tackling Corruption, Injustice, Impunity and Lack of Rule of Law**

- Provide no impunity for those who committed serious human rights violations.
- Stop early release of Taliban detainees through issuing Presidential decrees.
- Address corruption, nepotism, injustice and lack of rule of law. Implement the anti-corruption legislation, mainly the *Anti-Money Laundering and Proceeds of Crime Law*.
- Reform the Provincial Peace Council to ensure its independence from political interference and include religious leaders and other influential independent local leaders in the peace process, as well as civil society organizations.
- Conduct awareness-raising to promote and protect human rights, including women rights, and the advantages of peace.
- Strengthen social participation through the elimination of ethnic discrimination and nepotism.

### **Establishing Security**

- Strengthen ANP in terms of numbers and equipment, particularly in the districts and provincial border areas.
- Encourage people to support the local government to avoid insurgents gaining a foothold in their villages.
- Rebuild the people’s trust in the Government.
- Pressure Pakistan to stop providing safe havens and support to insurgents.
- Disarm local powerbrokers and illegal armed groups.

### **Achieving Economic Progress and Social Justice**

- Develop gas production by reactivating Tasadi Afghan Gas and Tafawosat Neft wa Gas; repair/build the Bandi Barq power station in Sultan Ibrahim village; and enable extraction from gas fields in Bashokoh village, Jarqodoq village and Janat Kalan village.
- Improve employment opportunities by reactivating the factories, such as Paikal Post; ensure that ordinary workers/labourers in extractive industries are recruited from among the residents of Jawzjan province.
- Revise the mining law to guarantee that at least 40% of staff in extractive industries are recruited from the local population, while limiting the number of technical/specialized staff recruited from outside the province to a maximum of 40%.
- Improve irrigation using natural resources to boost agricultural development; build irrigation systems from the Rivers Amu and Bala Murghab and protective walls for the River Amu and the river in Fayzabad district.
- Develop infrastructure to protect people's property at regular risk of destruction from flooding, such as in Koja Dokoh district.
- Construct a leisure/social park in Jawzjan province to encourage improved social-ethnic interaction.

Ensure equitable access to development assistance for local communities and enable people to monitor development projects in their areas.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Sar-e Pul Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial roadmap for peace represents a summary of key findings and issues raised in the focus group discussions, individual interviews and survey of opinions carried out during the consultation process with around 135 ordinary Afghan citizens residing in Sar-e Pul province. Participants represented diverse social and political backgrounds, including public sector employees, community elders, farmers, and teachers, representatives of civil society, religious scholars and re-integrees (ex-Taliban).<sup>175</sup> The consultations took place as part of Phase II of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace program (hereinafter the “People’s Dialogue”) initiated by 12 civil society actors and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult over 4,500 Afghan citizens with a view to developing 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

This local road map for peace intends to provide comprehensive analysis of local drivers of conflict as well as to identify appropriate actionable solutions to help consolidate and sustain peace and stability in Sar-e Pul province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Sar-e Pul lies in the northern part of Afghanistan, about 603 kilometers from the national capital, Kabul. The province shares borders with Jawzjan in the north, Balkh in the north east, Samangan in the east, Ghor in the south, Bamyan in the south-east and Faryab in the west. The province comprises of 556 villages and has an approximate area of 16,385 square kilometers.

The province, including the capital Sar-e Pul city, has an approximate population of 711,600, of which 348,000 are men and 363,000 are women. Uzbeks, Tajiks and Hazaras are the three major ethnic groups that dominate the population landscape of the province with some pockets of Aimaqs, Pashtuns, Baluch and Arabs. Around 74 per cent of the population lives in the rural areas, 26 per cent live in urban areas. Population density is only 43 persons per square kilometer.

Reportedly, the province is rich in natural resources and minerals like gas, oil, sulfur, coal and gem-stones. However, people from Sar-e Pul stated that

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<sup>175</sup> Ex-combatants, former Anti-Government Elements, who ceased fighting and joined their communities with the help of reintegration programs such as the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP).

the Government has not commenced exploring or extracting these resources at present, despite the fact that they could assist in reducing the high level of unemployment and poverty. Lack of investment and refineries limit the potential to increase Government revenues. Small industries are scarce in Sar-e Pul. Karakul skin<sup>176</sup> is mostly produced in Gosfandi and Sozma Qala districts. Carpet waving is famous in Sar-e Pul city and the Balkhab district of the province. Carpets, jewellery and shawls are also produced in Sar-e Pul city.

As in other parts of the country, politics does not seem to be institutionalized along the line of ideology, or organized political parties, rather it centers on individual leaders or strongmen in the province. In most cases, it is the ethnic affiliation of the person rather than merit that determines the support of the people.

Two major political parties, namely Junbesh Milli Islami Afghanistan (Junbesh) – supported mainly by the Uzbek ethnic group, and Jamiat-e-Mili Islami Afghanistan (Jamiat-e Islami or Jamiat) – supported by the Tajik ethnic group, dominate the political landscape of Sar-e Pul. After the ousting of the Taliban regime in 2001, Junbesh established its dominance throughout the province under the leadership and direction of General Abdul Rashid Dostum. However, in the 2009 election, the province witnessed a resurgence of Jamiat-i-Islami support, which secured more seats in the Provincial Council (PC) than Junbesh. Many analysts suggest that the rift within Junbesh has contributed to the resurgence of Jamiat in the province. The results of the 2009 PC election indicate that the influence of Junbesh in the province has been waning, while Jamiat has improved its influence more steadily in the politics of the province. Hazara political parties are also active in the province. Hizb-e Wahdat Islami Mardum Afghanistan (Party of Islamic Unity of the People of Afghanistan), Hizb-e Wahdat Islami Afghanistan (Party of Islamic Unity) and Etedaal Milli Afghanistan are the main Hazara parties. There are four Hazara members in the Provincial Council, with Hizb-e- Wahdat Mardum Afghanistan having two representatives and the other two parties having one each.

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<sup>176</sup> A leather material produced from Karakul sheep in northern Afghanistan, used for crafting various clothing items common among the Afghans.

### III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict

#### Types of Conflict

##### *i. Taliban-led insurgency*

Throughout the consultation process, people in Sar-e Pul maintained that the Taliban-led insurgency has increased in some areas of Sar-e Pul and remains capable of challenging the Afghan national security forces (ANSF). The province's mountainous landscape gives insurgents countless hiding places, and makes direct, open fighting impossible. As of 2013 when the consultations were conducted, people reported that Kohistanat, Shiram village of Sar-e Pul district, and Soofak village of Sayyad district are considered the areas most affected by the Taliban in the province. Most of the Taliban insurgency attacks are said to be carried out from the mentioned areas, leading to an increase of insurgent's operations in the province. Planting land mines is one of the main military tactics used by Taliban to target Government forces, but they also cause civilian casualties.

An elder from Kohistanat district stated:

*"I live in Shiram village that is completely under the Taliban's control. Of all Taliban there, 50% are locally recruited Taliban and the remaining 50% are those that originally came from Pakistan. All of these Taliban in my village receive guidance from their leadership that is based in Pakistan-Quetta [capital city of Balochistan province]."*

Another elder from Kohistanat district reported:

*"I represent Sufak village of Kohistanat, we have Taliban who control our village, with no presence of the Government. Taliban do not support the development initiatives in our village, nor do they care about civilian casualties. Recently, a twelve-year old boy was killed by a landmine that was planted by Taliban to target Government forces. In the funeral ceremony I was very depressed and could not control my feelings; and I finally spoke out 'how these Taliban can kill a child and wound the heart of a mother that nourished the child for twelve-years?!'*

An elder of Sozma Qal'a district also raised concerns about the expanding influence of the Taliban in the province:

*“The influence of the Taliban has increased; the size of the area under its control has grown in Sar-e Pul. No one could believe that the Taliban would increase influence in more areas of Sar-e Pul.”*

As in other parts of the country, the security in the Sar-e Pul has gradually been transferred to the ANSF from the international military forces. However, people believed that there has been no significant reduction in the insurgency activities even at the provincial centre. The insurgents are reportedly increasingly initiating attacks to infiltrate and gain more access after the departure of the international forces in the province. Insurgent activities have been on the rise since the security transition and withdrawal of the international military forces, a possible indication that the Afghan national forces are struggling with maintaining security. It is, however, important to note that despite the challenges, the Government forces were increased in Sar-e Pul, mainly to fight against insurgency. A number of police military checkpoints were established on the highway between Sar-e Pul and Jawzjan as well as Afghan Local Police (ALP) were established in the remote districts to maintain local security. In this regard, accounts collected from a female teacher, a man of Sar-e Pul city, and another man from Gosphandi district reiterated people’s concerns about the increasing insecurity in the province and the need for better protection:

A female teacher from Sar-e Pul city said:

*“The insecurity is growing even in the provincial centre, to the extent that the Taliban can come and burn a high school which is close to the provincial governor’s office.”*

A man of Sar-e Pul city:

*“Our security forces should be equipped and strengthened, because it functions as a human heart in pumping oxygen-rich blood to every living cell in the body.”*

A man of Gosphandi district:

*“People will not enjoy their fundamental rights if there is no security. It is not enough to have schools, but there is a need for security so as to make use of them.”*

As a positive security development however, people believed the ALPs were of substantial benefit to fight against the insurgency in Sar-e Pul but warned about possible violations committed by irresponsible ALP member. While people were of the opinion that ALP should be increased in number and

sent to other areas of Sar-e Pul, they were however concerned that they may turn against them and become a security threats.

A man from Sayyad district stated:

*“The Soofak village of our district was completely under the Taliban’s control, but once the ALPs were established in Sayyad, the village was cleared from Taliban presence. We have fair security now in Sayyad we have ALPs composed of both, Jamiat and Junbish political parties that equally fight against the Taliban-led insurgency.”*

An elder from Kohistanat district reported:

*“We support the initiative of bringing ALP to boost more security in our province. The ALPs volunteer to risk their lives to keep our villages safe from Taliban activities. As long as they are sufficiently equipped, they will have enough strength to fight.”*

**ii. Inter- Ethnic / political disputes and local power brokers**

Two major political parties, namely Junbesh and Jamiat, mostly representing the Uzbek and Tajik ethnic populations respectively, dominate the political landscape of Sar-e Pul. General Abdul Rashid Dostum (leader of the Junbesh party and a former *warlord*) remains the most influential political figure in Sar-e Pul and he has influence over his Uzbek ethnic group but as well as the Hazara, Tajik, Aymaq and Arab communities. Some other political actors who have been involved in previous armed conflicts in Sar-e Pul have also been involved in creating insecurity in the province of Sar-e Pul. For example, Haji Payenda, a former Jihadi commander, Taaj Mohd Kohdel of Hezb-e Islami political party, and Haji Rahim ‘known as Dewana [meaning crazy]’ are reportedly the main personalities held responsible for the insecurity in Sar-e Pul.

A former provincial governor’s office staff from Sar-e Pul stated:

*“Our Uzbek people consider Dostum as their leader. He has political control and influence not only over Uzbek dominated areas but also in Hazara, Tajik, Aymaq and Arab communities. People obey and respect him; even if Dostum tells them to divorce their wives they will not hesitate to do so.”*

**Land Disputes:** People involved in the discussions reported that land disputes are an extremely complicated issue in the Sar-e Pul province, greatly contributing to the ongoing current conflict. Such disputes often take place amongst the different ethnic groups, resulting in long-lasting land disputes. The existence of corruption among the Government authorities as well as lack of political interest to tackle the issue notably make it impossible to resolve disputes over land and property in an effective and fair manner. An elder from Kohistanat district added:

*“Half of our district depends on agriculture and most of us are farming. The land is divided amongst different ethnic groups, represented or supported by different local powerful commanders; therefore, there have always been disputes on the land division amongst them. Our Government has not been successful so far to resolve it.”*

In addition, family disputes, particularly violence against women such as forced marriages, often lead to communal disputes and, if not properly addressed by the local authorities and community leaders, can lead to armed clashes contributing to the overall conflict.

The existence of local powerful commanders, often affiliated and supported by the politicians in Parliament, have rendered justice institutions ineffective as result of their political interference and collusion with relevant authorities.

A man from Sangcharak district stated that:

*“It has been our provincial members in Parliament who always interfere with the legal and justice system in Sar-e Pul; they exercise their political power and get their cases resolved in their interest. They always pretend to the public that they are important and useful to the society in Sar-e Pul, but we know that they are the most corrupt people and work for their interests.”*

### **Drivers of the Conflict**

People identified the main obstacles for achieving peace and stability in the province as the weak and ineffective peace process, corruption, poverty, lack of education and employment, insecurity as well as lack of rule of law in Sar-e Pul.

### ***Weak and Ineffective Peace Process:***

One of the factors impeding peace in Sar-e Pul was identified as the weak and ineffective peace and reconciliation process in the province. People stated that they have little expectation for any developments in the peace process led by the Provincial Peace Council (PPC) in Sar-e Pul. This is due to the opinion that the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) was established based on political demands of the Government and this has a negative impact on the peace process in general. For example, people stressed that the Sar-e Pul's provincial peace process is led by a person who engaged in fighting in the past, and does not seem to be sufficiently competent to participate in an effective peace process. Moreover, having a fighting background makes it difficult to initiate peace with the Taliban-affiliated insurgents and therefore this is deemed an obstacle to the peace process in Sar-e Pul. It was generally agreed that the PPC should be restructured with new independent staff and leadership.

A woman rights' activist from Sar-e Pul city pointed out:

*"The APRP could not contribute to any peace success in Sar-e Pul, especially in the areas that are under the AGEs control. Despite the many efforts and resources spent on bringing peace and stability, the result has not been positive. Clearly there was no proper planning and clear agenda."*

An elder from Sangcharak district said:

*"Since the establishment of the Provincial Peace Council, only 665 insurgents have been brought to peace negotiations so far, with the active support of NDS, ANP, PG, and the people of Sar-e Pul, but not the PPC."*

### ***Corruption and Lack of Rule of Law:***

During the consultation process, people consistently regarded corruption as the biggest impediment to improving security, development, and governance in Sar-e Pul. They alleged widespread and growing corruption among the authorities warning that the corruption is provoking other forms of crime and discourages people from seeking justice and human rights protection.

A woman of Sar-e Pul city stated:

*“It is not only the AGEs who cause insecurity in Sar-e Pul, but also the Government, which remains corrupt and unaccountable. For example, someone cannot even get a national identity card unless he/she pays bribe to the relevant authorities.”*

Another woman from Sar-e Pul said:

*“We don’t live in peace because our Government is corrupt. Let’s say that ‘the water is muddy from the top’, so corruption starts from the highest level of the state and spreads throughout the system to the lowest level.”*

People reported that bribery was identified as the most common corrupt practice within the Government institutions in Sar-e Pul. The most corrupt officials were reported to be the prosecutors and judges in the province. Although, the Government has recently established its anti-corruption division at the prosecution office, it is either unable or unwilling to take serious action against corruption. Besides, corruption reportedly exists at the society level and outside the Government structure. Participants noted with concern that it is a common practice for local people to pay a bribe so they get an efficient service. However, in some other cases in order to resolve them, personal relations are preferred rather than following regulations.

A village elder from Gosphandi district stated:

*“You will not get your complaint processed fast until you pay money to the concerned authority. If you don’t pay, you will then have to wait for at least 2-3 months until it is processed. This act has dramatically been increased as a ‘common practice’.”*

An elder of Balkhab district expressed:

*“What is commonly accepted in Balkhab is that ‘relations are preferred than regulations’. It happens when you have a direct or indirect established relationship with the authorities and they support you with the case using their Government power.”*

Through the discussions, people reported that the rule of law has been weakened, hence leading to widespread corruption, insecurity and instability in Sar-e Pul province. In all districts, the provincial local Government was viewed as weak and incapable of enforcing justice and

human rights mechanisms. People stated that the justice and law enforcement officers often are incapable of ensuring that cases are resolved equitably and in accordance with the law largely due to political influence and corruption. People believe that corruption and abuse of authority has been institutionalised in the Government system and occurs right at the very top of the hierarchy.

An elder from Sangcharak district expressed:

*“Those entrusted with upholding the law are seen as most guilty of violating it. We have prosecutors and judges that prosecute and apply jurisdiction only for crimes committed on a small scale, but those accused of serious crimes, are not held accountable. These law enforcement officers favour perpetrators due to corruption and lack of impartiality in the justice system.”*

***Lack of Accountability and Transitional Justice:***

People also raised concern over Government’s failure to address issues of accountability arising from the three decades of war. The people are concerned that the perpetrators have not been held accountable and these very people are an obstacle in terms of legitimizing the current Government, hence creating a deep divide between people and the Government. Whilst victims of war crimes have been demanding justice through an established comprehensive national consultation mechanism and developed transitional justice strategies, the Government seem to be ignoring people’s needs in this respect. People believe that the police, prosecutors and the courts are the main fundamental tools for ensuring an equal and fair justice process, by ensuring that laws are fully enforced and implemented on the ground.

An elder from Sayyad district stated:

*“The failure in transitional justice has contributed to the current armed conflict in Sar-e Pul. The perpetrators of war crimes have not been punished; they are free to do anything. However, in the beginning we were motivated by stakeholders of transitional justice to speak out on the past war crimes so that the perpetrators would be brought to justice. But we know when the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) won the victory over the Ka’ba, he then instructed his men not to punish any of his former attackers but he pardoned them instead, so our president acted the same way.”*

### ***Culture of Impunity for Violence Against Women:***

People voiced concerns that if justice and human rights are not improved to tackle violence against women in the province, people would seek Taliban intervention. People reported that the conflict and harmful traditional practices in Sar-e Pul have caused many women to suffer more frequently from domestic violence. Particular egregious are issues of forced and early marriages, high dowry, exchange marriage, rape, and other forms of violence. Most of these practices are taking place within the families. People attributed the increase in violence against women to the existence of culture of impunity. There is a need to raise awareness of women's rights in order to see more cases can be reported.

A woman from Sar-e Pul city stated:

*"Recently, I heard of a case of 8 years old girl orphan that was forced into marrying an old man against 500,000 Afghans by her family. As she married she was subsequently raped and was kicked out from home by her husband. This was the revenge; the anger of husband for the dowry that he was forced to pay to the family. In another case, an old man paid USD26,000 and married a sixteen year old girl recently."*

An elder from Sayyad district reported that:

*"Those that break the laws are those that make the laws. We have bunch of laws but only few are applied in the violence against women cases. Our justice authorities are corrupt."*

### ***Extreme Poverty and Lack of Employment:***

Extreme situations of poverty and lack of employment opportunities affecting the majority of the population of Sar-e Pul have been reported as the main contributing factors to the instability and insecurity in the province. People stressed that marginalised communities who are unemployed are mostly exposed to infiltration by Taliban.

A district elder from Sangcharak district stated:

*"I will say poverty is one of the causes of the challenges we face today, for that matter, many of us have joined AGEs to fight, with the motivation to get some money and feed our poor families. Because our province is a third-grade province due to its geographic*

*position, therefore, it has not received development assistance as much as other provinces of first and second-grades in the country.”*

People acknowledged that while social development cannot guarantee peace, it may mitigate conflict, at least at the local level. There is a need for the Government to create employment and education opportunities. Sar-e Pul individuals believe that the lack of a strong education system is a serious problem in their province. They reasoned that illiterate people can easily be manipulated and exploited by the insurgent groups.

A woman from Sar-e Pul city stated:

*“If you are an insurgent, you just offer 2 Afghans to someone to shout in the community that God is Great ‘Allahu Akbar’ and urge people to join the insurgents, and he would take it, because, these illiterate and poor people only think of feeding their families and children with that money. Lack of literacy among population living in Sar-e Pul is another serious problem.”*

A man from Balkhab district pointed:

*“When you are not educated, you are a vulnerable person. When the Government loses its control over a village that suffers illiteracy and poverty, the Taliban can easily influence the village. For a small payment, people will not hesitate to join and work for the Taliban in order to feed their family.”*

People further believed that the increase of insecurity in the area was linked to the abandonment of the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) that aimed at extracting and distributing oil to the Government in Sar-e Pul. The mentioned company had initially offered employment opportunities to a large number of people in Sar-e Pul, but because of the insecurity, it pulled out.

*WHO SAID THIS? -*

*“We are not rich but we all need jobs and that should be our right, without being neglected because of our origins. We think this is a clear ethnic neglect by our Government.”*

Similarly, people stressed the need to rotate elderly government employees in order to create work opportunities for the younger and educated generation. Some of the government employees have been in the same

positions for decades, with no replacement, and many lack adequate up-to-date skills.

A man from Balkhab district stated:

*“... the staffing process should be reviewed within the Government institutions; if someone is inadequate or not competent to do their work, they should then be replaced with someone that has relevant skills and education, young people should be given the opportunity to hold Government jobs. We have employees in the local Government who have worked for more than 30 years in the same level and position.”*

***Underdevelopment:***

People complained about the lack of development in Sar-e Pul, particularly highlighting the shortage of water and the Government inaction to address this issue, which they say results in people’s discontent with the Government and may motivate people to join the insurgency.

Participants noted that shortage of water is an increasingly serious concern for the people of Sar-e Pul province. There is reportedly a shortage of water, both for drinking and irrigation, that directly impacts economic development and reduces the livelihood of many families. People stressed that water is crucial for farming and other domestic needs, but as they are poor, it is next to impossible to solve this problem on their own, hence, making them more vulnerable in terms of food security and meeting other related basic needs. People complained that the Government has paid little attention to solving the water problems at the district levels and that there was no effective National Solidarity Project (NSP) initiative to resolve this issue.

A woman from Sar-e Pul city pointed out:

*“When I was in Kohistanat last year, I saw that people were seriously suffering from shortage of drinking water [...] The Government has done nothing to resolve that. Kohistanat is also the most affected area by the conflict.”*

A man from Balkhab district added:

*“We have water problems in the districts and we need the Government to pay attention on that. The Government should prove*

*from this point that it can take care of its citizens, otherwise, people will lose hope and subsequently join the Taliban ...”*

**Foreign Interference:**

People generally believed that the current insecurity in Sar-e Pul province and the country at large was, and still is, a consequence of political interventions by the neighbouring countries, namely, Pakistan and Iran. People of Sar-e Pul believed that Afghanistan’s neighbours are capable of either helping or hampering the country’s stability and development at any stage. Therefore, serious attention is required by the Afghan Government to create a regional strategy to address particularly the drug trade and arms flows, which have not only fuelled the conflict in Afghanistan, but also undermined the social well-being, good governance and stability of the country.

A man from Gosphandi district believed:

*“The insecurity in Sar-e Pul is linked to two obstacles: first, the Pakistani Taliban that misuse our poor and illiterate people to fight for Islam with a motivation that ‘your place would be in heaven if you commit suicide’; and second, Pakistan and Iran, intervening into our Government internal politics and by supporting the drug business.”*

A man from Sayyad district stated:

*“Our Government has systematically proved to be unable of defending themselves against Pakistan, although Pakistan has disclosed many times that it was our enemy. It provides fundamentalist Islamic training to our children, they teach our children how to carry out suicide attacks.”*

A man from Sangcharak district disclosed:

*“I witness the existence of intelligence personnel of our two enemies, Iran and Pakistan, in our district. They are there to work for their respective countries through sharing political and military updates about our province. Why our Government cannot stop them?”*

A man from Sozma Qal’a district stated:

*“All the Taliban in our district are financially and politically assisted by Pakistan. Pakistan continues to create and manage Islamic*

*schools 'madrassa' for our children and teaching them to fight jihad. A 13 year old boy, who was early trafficked to Pakistan and thought at madrassa, has recently returned back to his home in Sar-e Pul. While fighting as a Taliban, he was recently killed in a fighting in my district."*

A man from Kohistanat district:

*"Pakistan will never let our country live in peace. Our Government has got involved in the peace process without knowing who to deal with."*

#### **IV. The Road Map for Peace**

During the course of discussions in Sar-e Pul province, people identified a wide range of peace-building solutions in an effort to address the main causes of the conflict. These included *inter alia*: promoting economic and social development programmes, increasing employment opportunities for the ordinary people, tackling corruption to bring justice for the victims, creating access to education, and reforming the peace and reconciliation process in the province ensuring its impartiality and the full participation of ordinary people. Primary emphasis was put on promotion of human rights and tackling impunity for violation of human rights, as well as the rule of law as the leading factors for achieving peace in the province.

##### ***Promoting Human Rights, Rule of Law and Tackling Impunity:***

During the discussions, people strongly insisted on the need to create and promote a culture of respect for human rights by sensitizing the Government employees and the public. Special emphasis was placed on people based in the villages/districts of the Sar-e Pul province. The province has fewer civil society and human rights activists' presence, which has a negative impact on the human rights monitoring and reporting situation, and hence directly impacts on issues of peace and stability.

A man from Sar-e Pul city stated:

*"Human rights should go hand in hand with justice. If there is no justice, there are no human rights at all. If someone's rights are violated, we certainly have no hope for justice and peace."*

An elder from Gosphandi district reported:

*“We don’t see any human rights progress in our province. UNAMA has closed its office and the AIHRC is not sufficiently active here because it doesn’t have a permanent office. We are afraid, who will advocate for our rights if they are violated, especially by those corrupt authorities! These corrupt authorities will only guarantee justice if they are over-seen by human rights organizations.”*

In comparison with the other provinces of the country, Sar-e Pul province remains weak in establishing and promoting human rights. People also raised concerns about an increasing tendency to misinterpret human rights, claiming that it is a concept imposed by Western culture. While in the center of the province, which is partially dominated by educated society, people believe in and respect human rights, people in the rural areas of Sar-e Pul have limited enjoyment of their human rights. The absence of Afghan civil society organizations and limited operations of the AIHRC partly explain this phenomenon. Due to lack of awareness, women are the most affected group in the province.

An elder from Sozma Qal’a spoke out:

*“The human rights concept has lost its credible meaning in society in Sar-e Pul. People believe it is a western initiative and it contradicts Islamic values and principles. Our Mullahs, who talk first in the public, should also be the first to get human rights knowledge.”*

Another elder of Sozma Qal’a district stated:

*“An increase of human rights awareness is required in our districts in Sar-e Pul, so that men understand that women can at any time raise voice against the violence and to seek legal address for help.”*

A man from Kohistanat district said:

*“Women constantly suffer violence in our district, Kohistanat. People in our districts are so illiterate that no one will understand the human rights meaning.”*

Another man from Kohistanat district voiced:

*“We are not against human rights as it does not conflict the means of Islam. We view it as a positive term in maintaining peace and human dignity. What human rights says for example is that no one*

*should be tortured, exactly the same concept which our Islam pointed out 1400 years ago."*

***Ensuring Impartial and Inclusive Peace and Reconciliation Process:***

Participants urged reform of the peace process in Sar-e Pul in order to address the aforementioned concerns regarding its ineffectiveness and partiality. People emphasized the critical role of traditional leaders, mainly *Ulema* (religious scholars) and community elders, in the peace process, particularly their role in working closely with the Provincial Peace Council in Sar-e Pul. There was some disagreement regarding the issue of granting amnesty as part of the peace process to people who have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. People were generally in consensus that the Government should ensure a more comprehensive and sustainable peace process for Sar-e Pul.

A elder from Sangcharak stated:

*"We strongly recommend that the Government restructures the Peace Council in Sar-e Pul. We really need someone who is effective, impartial and truly capable of leading this process. He should be apolitical with no bias towards any of the parties, as it concerns both sides of the conflict. Entering peace negotiations with the Taliban is not easy, it requires strong interpersonal relations."*

Participants stated that not all members of the insurgent groups should be granted amnesty for committing war crimes or crimes against humanity. It was generally agreed that exceptions should be given to *Ulema* (religious scholars) and elders as they could use their position to negotiate between the Taliban and the Government in Sar-e Pul. Religious scholars in general can contribute to the acceptance of the negotiations and policies for peace, therefore they have an important role to play in the peace-making and peacebuilding in Afghanistan.

An elder from Sangcharak district voiced:

*"We believe that our scholars and elders can be used as keys for peace negotiations between the Government and AGEs. Also, our scholars should be empowered with knowledge and skills so that they can raise awareness and encourage peace and stability during their sermons."*

A man from Sayyad district, however, raised concerns of involving respected scholars and elders in the APRP process given its current format and composition:

*“The APRP is a Government-led project, we are afraid that if our scholars and elders are involved in such peace negotiations, they will lose the trust of the AGEs. In addition, in most cases the APRP has not been able to fulfil their promises to the re-integreees who join the peace negotiations,<sup>177</sup> therefore discrediting further its status.”*

## **V. People’s Recommendations**

Throughout the consultation process the people of Sar-e Pul proposed the following recommendations with a view to engage the Government, international actors and civil society in a constructive dialogue on achieving sustainable peace in Sar-e Pul province:

### **Improve Access to Education:**

- Improved access to education as a standard tool to be used to sensitize the population on all pertinent issues including human rights;
- The number of operational schools, including the number of students, and the enrollment of girls in particular must be increased - providing education to the new generation is essential for provincial sustainable development.

### **Enhance Security:**

- The Government should ensure a substantial military presence, including an increase in the number of Afghan local policemen and women, especially at the district levels where AGEs are present.

### **Comprehensive Peace Process:**

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<sup>177</sup> According to the APRP, ex-combatants who renounce violence, accept the Afghan Constitution, live by the rule of law and cease support for and ties with AGEs, will be reintegrated into their communities, and will be provided assistance with education and vocational training, and with protection and security. See, National Security Council, D&R Commission, Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP), July 2010, available at: [https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/AFG/00060777\\_00060777\\_APRP\\_National%20Programme%20Document%202010%2006%2001.pdf](https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/AFG/00060777_00060777_APRP_National%20Programme%20Document%202010%2006%2001.pdf)

- Ensure a more comprehensive and sustainable peace process for Sar-e Pul;
- Reform the Provincial Peace Council to ensure its impartiality and effectiveness;
- Ensure traditional leaders, particularly *Ulema* and community elders are included in the peace process, especially in the work of the Provincial Peace Council.

**Human Rights Protection:**

- Government's oversight and accountability mechanisms should be strengthened to protect civilians, through fair and impartial investigation of human rights complaints, particularly violence against women.
- Carry out programmes to promote and sensitize the communities and provincial authorities on human rights.

**Development:**

- The National Solidarity Programmes should be strengthened to ensure sustainable development in Sar-e Pul, particularly at its district levels. The NSP has the potential to bear effective results and contribute to rehabilitation and reconciliation when it comes to developing villages in Sar-e Pul province.
- Local communities should be effectively involved in identifying, planning, and managing the economic reconstruction of their respective areas.

**Employment opportunities:**

- Establish employment opportunities, particularly for the young generation, which will enhance peace and stability in Sar-e Pul province;

The Government should develop a programme for the rotation of government employees to give also opportunity to the younger generation who have the skills and education qualifications to effectively carry out the work.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Faryab Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial roadmap for peace reflects the views of 152 ordinary citizens (83 women and 69 men) gathered through five focus-group discussions (including two exclusively for women) in Maymana city, Faryab province. The participants represented various categories of society, including religious scholars, community leaders, prominent elders, members of civil society, Provincial Peace Council members, reintegrees (former insurgents), university lecturers, teachers, journalists, students, NGO workers, influential women, skilled female workers and housewives. It offers insights into the views of ordinary people in Faryab about the armed conflict, especially its root causes, dynamics and main actors. Furthermore, participants' views on the ongoing peace-building initiatives are set out below, together with proposed alternative solutions for achieving stability and a durable peace in Faryab.

The consultation in Faryab took place as part of Phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace (hereinafter: "People's Dialogue"), a nationwide programme initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghanistan Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) to consult over 4,500 ordinary Afghans across the country to develop 34 local road maps for peace – one for each Afghan province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Faryab Province is situated in the western end of the northern region of Afghanistan, bordering Turkmenistan to the west and north, Jawzjan and Sar-e Pul provinces to the east, Ghor province to the south and Badghis province to the southwest.

The provincial capital, Maymana, is approximately 430 kilometres northwest of Kabul, and 230 kilometres southwest of Mazar-e Sharif. The province comprises 15 districts.<sup>178</sup> The terrain of the province ranges from the Hindu Kush Mountains of the south to the desert flatlands of northern Faryab. Four seasonal rivers run through the province: Qaisar, Maymana, Almar and Gurziwan. These rivers, mainly fed by springs, rainfall and melted snow, flow during the winter, spring and early summer seasons. There is

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<sup>178</sup> Maymana Municipality, Khan Char Bagh, Qorghon, Andkhoy, Qaramqul, Dawlatabad, Shirin Tagab, Khowja Sabz Posh, Bilcharagh, Gurziwan, Kohistan, Pashtun Kot, Almar and Qaisar. Ghormach district is part of Badghis province, but administered by Faryab province according to Presidential Decree issued in December 2008.

one artificial dam: Band-e Sar-e Hauz in Pashtun Kot district on the River Maymana.

The population of the province is between 1,700,000 and 2,000,000.<sup>179</sup> Comprising an estimated 3.82 per cent of the country's population, Faryab province is the eighth most populous province in Afghanistan.<sup>180</sup> The vast majority of this population is rural (81.8%).<sup>181</sup> Faryab's large returnee (refugee and IDP) population, estimated at 94,299,<sup>182</sup> constitutes approximately 9.9 per cent of the provincial total.<sup>183</sup>

Despite a lack of recent and reliable estimates on the ethnic breakdown, the population is thought to be majority Uzbek, followed by Tajik/Aimaq and Pashtun, and then the Kuchi, Turkmen, Arab and Hazara minorities. Uzbeki is the most widely spoken language (spoken by the majority), followed by Dari and Pashto.<sup>184</sup> The nomadic Kuchi population was estimated at 68,900 in 2007,<sup>185</sup> equivalent to 7.3 per cent of the provincial population. The predominant religion is Sunni Islam, with only a handful of known Shia families. Sectarianism has never been a major cause of friction or conflict in the province.

The vast majority of the population's income comes from agriculture and livestock, followed by non-farm labour, trade, services and manufacturing. The main economic sectors are agriculture, livestock, industrial manufacturing and natural resources. The main crops produced for consumption and market are wheat, barley, flax, sesame, cotton, melon, watermelon, grapes and other fruits/nuts, such as pistachios, almonds, pears, cherries, apples, quinces, apricots and mulberries. Livestock is used or sold for consumption (meat), draught power, transport and production of livestock-related products (butter, dairy, hide/leather products, such as karakul). The province has little large-scale manufacturing, but some small-scale production of carpets, rugs and handicrafts. In provincial and district

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<sup>179</sup> National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, 2011, a publication funded by ASGP/UNDP which discusses development projects and the work of Faryab's provincial governors.

<sup>180</sup> National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) 2007/8

<sup>181</sup> NRVA 2007/8

<sup>182</sup> 2002-2007 IDP and Refugee returnee figures provided by UNHCR.

<sup>183</sup> Based on UNHCR provided returnee figures and Faryab population estimate from 2007/8 NRVA.

<sup>184</sup> MRRD Provincial Profile

(<http://www.mrrd.gov.af/NABDP/Provincial%20Profiles/Faryab%20PDP%20Provincial%20profile.pdf>)

<sup>185</sup> National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) 2007/8.

centres, carpentry, welding, transport (trucking and taxis), construction and retailing of consumer products are common businesses. Faryab has natural resources such as salt, marble and coal, which are yet to be exploited to their full potential.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

#### **Types of conflict**

##### **v. Taliban-led insurgency**

The majority of participants in all five focus-group discussions conducted in Faryab identified the Taliban-led insurgency as a major and ongoing challenge to peace and stability in the province. As a result of its geopolitical position as the northern region's gateway, the majority of those consulted believed that Faryab had always witnessed armed conflict between various armed groups, particularly over the last two decades. Most respondents identified Ghormach as the most insecure district in Faryab and an 'insurgency gateway' into the province. Anti-government elements (AGEs) in Ghormach have managed to expand their partial control and influence into the neighbouring districts of Qaysar and Almar, where they control many villages. In addition, AGEs have managed to expand their activities into other districts of Faryab, such as Pashtun Kot and Dawlatabad.

A female representative of civil society said:

*"We have had relatively good security here in Faryab, but unfortunately it is getting worse day by day, for many reasons. For the time being many areas in Faryab are under Taliban control and there is a large distance between people and the Government."*

A significant increase in AGE activities in Ghormach, Qaysar and Almar districts is negatively impacting on the morale of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in other relatively secure districts. Consequently, ordinary people are losing their trust in the ANSF.

A member of the Women's Council in Gurziwan district said:

*"If we compare previous years with today, the security situation is getting worse day by day. Taliban slowly oust pro-government forces from villages and regularly patrol those villages. In some areas, pro-government forces intentionally do not fight against the Taliban. The local population is losing their trust in the ANSF day by day."*

**vi. *Illegal Armed Groups: factional rivalry***

In addition to the Taliban-led insurgency, Faryab has long been a place of factional conflict. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the province continued to experience factional armed conflict longer than any other province in the northern region. Since 2009, former illegal armed groups have been remobilized as pro-government militia in order to combat the rising insurgency in Faryab. Once again, these commanders are taking an increasingly prominent role in the province. Some have been mobilized through local community defence programmes, such as the Afghan Local Police (ALP) and the Critical Infrastructure Protection Programme (CIP),<sup>186</sup> while others remain as auxiliary forces in the villages and district centres where police have check-posts. These pro-government militias are expected to offer support when ANSF check-post personnel cannot fend off insurgent attacks by themselves. Between 2009 and 2013, most of the former commanders and their men have been recruited by ANP and playing a key role in the fight against insurgents. However, through the remobilization of former commanders in pro-government militias, latent local conflicts (both personal and factional) have been reignited. This has added to the complexity and challenges involved in fighting the insurgency.

A school teacher said:

*“Many groups, such as Taliban, Arbaki, illegal armed groups, police and ALP, are fighting in Faryab. Former jihadi commanders and influential elders have armed some of these groups with legal or illegal weapons. The fighting is between Taliban and the other armed groups or between non-Taliban armed groups fighting each other.”*

**vii. *Ethnic enmity, rivalry between local power-brokers***

Participants identified several other types of conflict in Faryab, including ethnic conflict between local communities, with the support and

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<sup>186</sup> The Critical Infrastructure Protection Programme (CIP) - a local security initiative designed to protect areas where neither the ALP nor the regular ANSF have been deployed - was initiated in 2011 by ISAF and ANSF, in parts of Kunduz, Balkh and Faryab provinces in northern Afghanistan. On 25 December 2011, then President Karzai ordered the disbandment of the CIP. As of 31 December 2012, ISAF/ISAF Special Forces had disbanded all community-based local defence initiatives, transitioning most to ALP. In the northeastern and northern regions, five CIP groups were disbanded, with 900 men converted to ALP. See UNAMA 2012 Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, p. 45, [http://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2012\\_annual\\_report\\_eng\\_0.pdf](http://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2012_annual_report_eng_0.pdf)

intervention of key political players and AGEs; conflict between local power-brokers for control of wealth-generating activities; and conflict between power-brokers for the expansion of their influence in the community.

A university professor explained:

*“Personal disputes between power-brokers in order to keep their influence and power, communal disputes due to illiteracy and ignorance (particularly amongst communities living in the villages) are the main concerns in Faryab. Recently, AGEs set many houses on fire in Qaisar district. The main cause was a dispute between communities. This dispute arose due to carelessness of government officials.”*

### **Drivers of conflict**

Participants identified three main drivers of conflict in Faryab: (1) mismanagement by local government officials, including ANSF officials in Faryab, resulting in their failure to provide good governance, rule of law and security, due to corruption and/or lack of capacity; (2) political reasons, including the importance of Faryab’s geopolitical position as the northern region’s gateway and many political factions harbouring animosity generated by past events; and (3) social and economic gaps, such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, lack of awareness on the part of ordinary people of their rights and responsibilities and poppy cultivation in some parts of the province). Participants also expressed their belief that peace and stability could be secured in Faryab if these challenges were addressed.

### ***Widespread corruption and weak peace and reconciliation process***

The majority of participants criticized local officials for widespread corruption in line departments, including the Provincial Peace Council (PPC) in Faryab. Participants believed corruption was a major cause of dissatisfaction among ordinary people with local governmental officials. Participants noted that corruption was a path to influence and amnesty for local power-brokers. It also leads to injustice and unemployment.

A religious leader said:

*“The main cause of conflict, particularly at district level, is the Government (local administrators). In many districts of Faryab, local officials are not performing their tasks properly, they are extremely*

*corrupt. When the lands of ordinary people are occupied by power-brokers, local officials don't listen to ordinary people's complaints. For example, two power-brokers (both members of Parliament) are the decision-makers in Qaisar. They have divided Qaisar into two parts. District authorities cannot or will not interfere with their decisions."*

Several participants explained how corruption in line departments directly impacts on ordinary people's lives, especially when development projects are suspended due to corruption.

A journalist said:

*"A big issue which is fuelling armed conflict and creating distance between the people and the Government is corruption. The recruitment process itself is corrupt; people from provincial level go to Kabul and buy governmental positions. When they obtain their job, they have to collect bribes for people in Kabul in order to hold onto their job. The central Government has been unable to focus on development projects in Faryab. For instance, a water dam in Almar and the asphaltting of the ring road have both been suspended for a long time. This leads people in Faryab to believe that some high-ranking officials in the Government don't want these projects to be implemented."*

Corruption in the peace and reconciliation process was another concern for participants in Faryab focus-group discussions. Many participants noted that the peace process in Faryab had been undermined by corruption in the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) and the Provincial Peace Council, as well as poor recruitment choices for members of the Council.

A civil society member said:

*"The peace process is not a process, but rather a project for some power-brokers and government officials. Most Provincial Peace Council members are corrupt and untrustworthy people."*

Some participants believed that the APRP was being misused by criminals to secure amnesty and that this would continue unless a transparent vetting process and a grievance-resolution mechanism were put in place. According to some participants, some of those that had joined the peace process were not actual AGE groups.

A female civil society member said:

*“The Government must end or reform the APRP because giving money to reintegrees encourages ordinary people to commit crimes and to join the Taliban and then reconcile to make money and get amnesty.”*

Some reintegrees who participated in the focus-group discussions confirmed the existence of corruption within the APRP in Faryab. They emphasized that such corruption had led many AGE groups who would otherwise be willing to join the peace process to continue fighting.

A reintegree from Faryab said:

*“We decided to join the peace process to play a positive role in implementation of development projects, but unfortunately we were not given that chance. The Provincial Peace Council in Faryab is totally corrupt. I joined the peace process with 100 rifles but before speaking to media, I was asked by some provincial officials to say that I only had 71 weapons. This meant 29 of my weapons have not been deposited: Peace Council members and provincial officials took them. Also, some of our new weapons were swapped with useless weapons.”*

Others noted that, despite its favourable financial position, the APRP in Faryab was very slow to act and had delivered no significant achievements so far.

A female NGO worker said:

*“Most of those who join the peace process later return to the Taliban. The main reason is unemployment. The Peace Council must be strengthened or abolished. The Peace Council’s members are extremely corrupt. We all know that ordinary people are coming along with old and useless weapons and taking advantage of the peace process.”*

Various participants noted that reintegrees did not receive sufficient support from government officials and security departments.<sup>187</sup> The result

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<sup>187</sup> The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) provide that ex-combatants who renounce violence, accept the Afghan Constitution, live by the rule of law and cease support for and ties with AGEs, will be reintegrated into their communities, as they will be provided assistance with education and vocational training, and with protection and security. See *National Security Council, D&R Commission, Afghanistan Peace and*

is lack of protection. Security fears have led reintegrees to seek rejoining AGE groups.

A former Taliban member said:

*“With the cooperation of the Peace Council in Faryab, we (71 persons) joined the peace process. However, government officials have not supported us. Government employees here in Faryab are expecting us to share whatever we get from the Peace Council with them. A specific amount of money is allocated to us for renting a house: they want us to share that money with them. I had two houses in Faryab. I sold both to feed my children. We don’t get a proper salary. Some of us were even tortured by ANSF. We don’t want guns if police can guarantee our security. If we wanted weapons, we could easily buy them in Faryab or bring them from Pakistan. The Government rearms warlords to protect us but don’t give us weapon for our own protection. We don’t have the possibility to rejoin AGEs but if we could, we would.”*

### ***Impunity of pro-government armed groups***

Many participants noted that misconduct by pro-government militias (harassment of ordinary people, interference in Afghan National Police/Criminal Investigation Department work, extortion, illegal taxes, arbitrary detention, beating, forced labour and other types of abuse and impositions on local people) was fuelling the armed conflict. It has led ordinary people to welcome Taliban into their villages.

A member of the Provincial Council in Faryab said:

*“The existence of armed groups that persecute people has made ordinary people tired and cynical. It makes no difference to them whether they are under the control of Taliban or pro-government armed groups.”*

Apart from misconduct, some pro-government armed groups in Faryab are in contact with the Taliban and get money from both the Government and the Taliban. As a result, AGEs can easily overrun ANP check-posts. This negatively impacts on ANSF morale.

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*Reintegration Programme (APRP)*, July 2010, available at:  
[https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/AFG/00060777\\_00060777\\_APRP\\_National%20Programme%20Document%202010%2006%2001.pdf](https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/AFG/00060777_00060777_APRP_National%20Programme%20Document%202010%2006%2001.pdf)

A women's rights activist said:

*“Some of the commanders of pro-government armed groups, like Arbakies, are in contact with the Taliban and sometimes support the Taliban by providing them with secret information on ANSF and ANP check-posts. This helps AGEs overrun ANP check-posts.”*

Withdrawal of international military forces (IMF) from Faryab and lack of ANSF capacity were also considered major security gaps in Faryab. Many participants noted that the premature withdrawal of IMF<sup>188</sup> was negatively impacting on ANSF and ordinary people's morale. It is considered a big achievement for AGE groups, as it indirectly strengthens their ranks.

A member of Faryab's Women's Council said:

*“Since the withdrawal of international military forces from Faryab, AGEs have managed to bring more areas under their control and influence. Today, in many villages of Faryab, people live under Taliban law.”*

### **Political factors**

Throughout all focus-group discussions, participants raised political reasons behind ongoing armed conflict in Faryab. They noted two main issues: (1) the importance of Faryab's geopolitical position; and (2) the existence of many political parties with past animosities. It was mentioned that over the past two decades Faryab province had experienced many armed conflicts between various actors (Taliban versus the Northern Alliance, Taliban versus ANSF). Parties to the armed conflicts have always been trying to maintain their presence in Faryab.

The head of an elders' council (*shura*) argued that the conflict in Afghanistan had been fuelled by interference from neighbouring countries:

*“Illiteracy and unemployment is not new. We had it in the past, but we were not fighting each other. The root causes of current armed conflict are not in Afghanistan. This war is forced on us. Some*

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<sup>188</sup> As of 1 January 2015, NATO transitioned from its International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan to its non-combat Resolute Support Mission (to train, assist and advise Afghan national security forces). The number of international forces has significantly decreased – as of December 2015, the RSM force comprised of 12,905 soldiers from 42 Troop Contributing Nations. See: <http://www.rs.nato.int/troop-numbers-and-contributions/index.php>, last accessed 6 March 2016.

*neighbouring countries are interfering in our country. Whether we want it or not, we will have armed conflict for years to come.”*

Additionally, a university lecturer noted the impact of politically motivated rhetoric on the people:

*“Sometimes politicians and policymakers, whether intentionally or not, make the situation worse. For instance, they warned people that the Taliban would gain power in 2014 when the international military withdraw from Afghanistan. This boosted the morale of AGEs and made ordinary people afraid.”*

Some participants believed that, due to political reasons, the Taliban had managed to increase their influence within government offices, including in the security sector, and they were enjoying support from high-ranking officials.

A female teacher said:

*“Taliban get support from some high-ranking governmental officials. On the other hand, the Government and the security agencies (NDS) don't have control over those who publicly encourage people to join the Taliban. For instance, fundamentalist religious scholars or mullahs, particularly during Friday's prayer, publicly endorse and promote Taliban activities in ways that encourage our youth to join the Taliban.”*

### ***Discrimination, social and economic underdevelopment***

Various participants also raised social and economic factors as root causes of the ongoing armed conflict in Faryab. Many pointed to poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, as well as lingual, ethnic and communal discrimination amongst locals and government officials, as fundamental causes of armed conflict.

A lecturer from a teacher training centre in Faryab summarized the people's views and concerns:

*“From my point of view, the main causes of ongoing armed conflict here in Faryab are poverty; unemployment; the existence of corruption within government line departments; existence of power-brokers at the head of communities or in official positions; illiteracy; addiction of youth to drugs; linguistic, geographical and factional discrimination amongst key political players; the existence of inter-*

*personal, family and communal disputes; and the non-existence of commitment by the Government or intention to build peace.”*

#### **IV. The Road Map for Peace**

In all five focus-group discussions, aside from identifying drivers of conflict in Faryab, participants offered concrete recommendations to address gaps in existing efforts to build peace. Most participants stressed three prerequisites for reducing armed conflict in Faryab: (1) strengthen local government institutions, including the Peace Council, and support of the APRP through cooperation between ordinary people and civil society; (2) capacity-building of security sector and disarmament of pro-government militia groups; and (3) social-economic development.

##### ***Strengthening Local Government Institutions***

Throughout all focus-group discussions, participants identified weak governance due to widespread corruption as a root cause of conflict in Faryab. They emphasized that most governmental officials, including judicial officials at provincial and district level, were extremely corrupt and lacked sufficient capacity to carry out their work. Most obtained their jobs through a corrupt system: this is why the local administration has been unable to provide people with good governance and rule of law. It also explains why some youths have joined AGE groups and do not want to reconcile.

As a measure to prevent corruption and nepotism, most participants supported direct election by the people of the Provincial Governor and Mayor (currently appointed by the President). They also called on the local administration to prioritize rule of law, justice (human rights) and a genuine fight against corruption and drugs as a means for achieving a durable peace. People believed that only then could the peace and reconciliation programme, APRP, be accelerated in Faryab.

A University lecturer said:

*“If we claim that the root causes of the conflict in Faryab are external, I don’t think we can design a new peace and reconciliation strategy for Faryab province. We should think about internal factors which fuel the armed conflict in this province. They include weak governance, corruption and corrupt governmental officials. These are the key factors that create distance between people and the Government. The Government (provincial high-ranking officials)*

*must therefore take necessary corrective steps towards strengthening governmental institutions. They must really fight corruption.”*

***Reform the Peace and Reconciliation Programme: Ensure Inclusive and Accountable Peace Process***

Some participants believed that reform of the APRP and the Provincial Peace Council could help the local administration to regain its lost reputation and encourage AGE groups in Faryab to join the peace process.

A civil society member said:

*“Changes to the Tashkil of the Peace Council are needed. International experts, such as peace consultants, need to be appointed at national and possibly provincial levels. Also, all ex-commanders and power-brokers serving as members of the Provincial Peace Council must be replaced by influential and impartial elders.”*

Some participants recommended alternatives to the APRP as a way to give the local administration more prestige and encourage AGEs to trust local government and join the peace process. They stated that some AGE members or groups in Faryab were fighting the ANSF because they did not believe in the local administration, considering them a puppet regime. These AGEs believe their fight against this regime is *jihad* (holy war). Local government should engage influential and trustworthy religious leaders to deliver the message about implementation of necessary reforms to the local administration and the Peace Council. AGEs will then indirectly receive the message of reform in the mosques after prayers.

The head of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission in Faryab stated:

*“An alternative solution to the existing approach of working through the Peace Council is the use of religious scholars in the peace and reconciliation process. They can easily explain to the people the Government’s plan for peace and reconciliation. Most AGEs are fighting because they think the current Government is not Islamic but instead a puppet regime. Religious scholars (imams) have the capacity to explain and convince the AGEs that this is an Islamic Government and that’s why the door of reconciliation has always been opened.”*

A major obstacle to peace and reconciliation in Faryab, identified by many participants, is the lack of involvement of ordinary people and civil society groups in the peace process. This was identified as a critical weakness of the APRP in Faryab province. Participants stressed the importance of this issue and discussed at length how ordinary people and civil society could be involved in the peace process.

An NGO worker said:

*“Having a peace council at provincial level is not a bad idea. Unfortunately in Faryab, this process has not been successful because the Peace Council is corrupt and most of the project budgets go into the pockets of members of the Peace Council. Unnecessary expenses of this Council must be stopped. Influential, educated and experienced people should be hired as members of the Peace Council. Some AGE groups are unwilling to join the peace process because the wrong people are members of the Peace Council in Faryab.”*

A civil society member raised additional concerns about the ambiguity of the government peace and reconciliation policy:

*“The central Government has never offered a clear definition of AGEs. We (ordinary people) can’t distinguish armed opposition and armed criminal groups. In addition, due to wrong and unclear central Government policies in the fight against AGEs, ordinary people have lost confidence in the Government and ANSF.”*

### **Empowering the ANSF and Disarming Pro-Government Armed Groups**

One of the main concerns of participants in all focus-group discussions was a lack of ANSF capacity. Quantitative and qualitative gaps within the ANSF still exist. Participants stressed the importance of improvement of ANSF capacity before the withdrawal of the international military forces from Faryab province in 2012. Most participants noted that deployment of enough security personnel and equipment, as well as capacity-building of ANSF, could rebuild the trust of ordinary people in ANSF. It would also lift the morale of ordinary people.

A university lecturer said:

*“Capacity-building and proper equipping of ANSF, disarmament of illegal armed groups, encouragement of people through local media to cooperate with ANSF against terrorists, provision of support and*

*security to stimulate private sector investment, a security plan for better implementation of big infrastructure projects (including the ring-road from Maymana to Herat and the water dam in Almar district) and higher salaries for ANSF, are essential practical steps for achieving peace and stability in Faryab."*

In addition to empowering ANSF through capacity-building programmes and adequate equipment, participants emphasized the need for the disarmament of pro-government militias who are allegedly harassing local people in their villages. Participants voiced their dissatisfaction with remobilization of former illegal armed group commanders, some under the self-defence initiative and others within the ALP. They noted that most of these commanders had been accused of committing criminal offences in the past and should be put on trial instead. Participants therefore recommended the immediate disarmament of these commanders.

A university lecturer said:

*"ALP commanders are former warlords. They have committed many crimes in the past and now they are persecuting local communities through extortion (illegal tax collection), interference in police work, arbitrary detention and beatings. For these reasons, communities don't like them and prefer the Taliban parallel justice system."*

### **Social and Economic Development**

The majority of participants believed that weak governance due to corruption, injustice, lack of rule of law and security concerns had damaged the reputation of the Afghan Government and that ordinary people in Faryab did not trust local administrations. They identified gaps in governance and came up with recommendations on how to rebuild the reputation of local government so that people would support it.

A bar association member said:

*"Within the last decade, the government has done little work on infrastructure projects. Instead of completing water dams, we buy electricity from neighbouring countries. Rather than working on mechanization of agriculture, we import wheat from abroad. These gaps in the central Government's strategy and planning impact negatively on the lives of ordinary people."*

A number of participants noted that poverty and unemployment were the main root causes of insurgency in Faryab and proposed the following

practical suggestions to local government to address the situation: ensuring equal access to development projects without discrimination; supporting private-sector investment; mechanization of agriculture; and any other efforts that could improve agriculture production and reduce poverty.

Participants noted that one of the factors impeding development in Faryab was the fact that many of the high-ranking officials appointed to the province in the past ten years were not originally from Faryab. Their priority is to further the interests of their own political factions rather than to work for the benefit of the people of Faryab. People also claimed that linguistic or regional discrimination by high-ranking officials had further blocked the implementation of development projects in Faryab. Such projects include the water dam project in Almar district and the asphaltting of the ring road connecting many districts of Faryab with the northern and western regions. Prolonged suspension of these projects is a major cause of rising unemployment that is also instigating youth to join AGE groups.

A school teacher said:

*“Local officials must provide men and women with equal opportunities for employment. The necessary corrective measures must be taken to end ethnic discrimination and associated violations of the law. National unity amongst people must be strengthened through practical actions by governmental officials through implementation of development projects in a balanced way to ensure that all districts of Faryab benefit.”*

Participants reported that people in Faryab believed that local government had been unable to support and protect the private sector. As a result, there has been little private-sector investment in Faryab compared to several other northern region provinces, including Balkh. The people of Faryab want the local administration to make this a top priority.

A health worker said:

*“Support for the private sector by local government is essential. It will create job opportunities for ordinary people, including women.”*

A community elder further stressed the need for the Government to focus on agricultural development and mechanization:

*“With mechanization of agriculture, the local government can encourage poor farmers to work on their lands instead of joining insurgent groups.”*

## **V. People's Recommendations**

During the consultations in Faryab, participants offered the following recommendations for addressing the root causes of conflict and building sustainable peace in the province.

### **Strengthening Local Government Institutions**

- The provincial governor and mayor should be elected by the people through democratic, province-wide elections.
- Government recruitment processes must be transparent and competitive, with priority given to eligible candidates from Faryab province.
- Local government must take practical measures to fight against corruption, ethnic discrimination and poppy cultivation.

### **Reform and Strengthen the Peace and Reconciliation Process**

- Membership of the Provincial Peace Council must be overhauled (controversial and corrupt members must be replaced by educated, impartial, trustworthy and influential people).
- The appointment of respected and impartial elders as members of the Peace Council will give ordinary people much needed involvement in the peace and reconciliation processes. It will also enhance respect for local authorities among the people.
- Strengthen the APRP through the involvement of ordinary people and civil society.
- Justice must be done through prosecution of war criminals before judicial institutions.

### **Empowering the ANSF and Disarming Pro-Government Militia Groups**

- Quantitative and qualitative gaps within the national security sectors must be filled by recruiting new personnel, providing equipment and delivery of capacity-building programmes.
- Pro-government militia groups and illegal armed groups must be disarmed.
- ANSF reform is essential. It must reward achievement, punish disloyalty and abuse of power and include a proper regime for promotions and salary increases.
- A comprehensive security plan for better implementation of big development projects is needed.

### **Social and Economic Development**

- Implementation of suspended development projects is urgently needed. Priorities include the water dam project in Almar district and the ring road project discussed above.
- Non-discrimination must be enforced in the employment sector. Faryab's people, especially the youth, need and deserve equal employment opportunities without discrimination on the basis of ethnicity or language.
- National unity and solidarity amongst people must be strengthened by government authorities through providing equal access to utilities and social services, including health, education and potable water.
- Steps must be taken by local government to fight against harmful traditional practices.

Mechanization of agriculture is needed to increase personal income. It will also strengthen the provincial, regional and national economy.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace  
Badghis Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial road map for peace represents a summary of key findings and issues raised through focus-group discussions, in-depth interviews and surveys of opinion carried out during a civil society-led consultation process with 170 Afghan citizens from Badghis province. Participants included both men and women, representing diverse social and political backgrounds, including public sector employees, community elders, farmers, teachers, representatives of civil society, religious scholars and reintegrated ex-insurgents. The consultations in Badghis took place as part of phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace programme (hereinafter "People's Dialogue") initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) to consult over 4,500 ordinary Afghans across the country with a view to developing 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

This local road map for peace intends to provide a comprehensive analysis of local drivers of conflict, as well as to identify appropriate actionable solutions to assist in the consolidation and sustainability of peace and stability in Badghis province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Badghis province is situated in the northern part of Afghanistan's western region, with an area of 21,858 square kilometres. It borders Herat, Ghor and Faryab provinces and has an international border with Turkmenistan. It has six districts – Bala Murgab, Qadis, Jawand, Abkamary, Muqur and Qala-e-Naw. The provincial administrative centre, Qala-e-Naw city, is located in Qala-e-Naw district. Ghormach district was previously part of Badghis but now is part of Faryab province.

Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmens, Baluchis and Hazaras are the main ethnic groups in the province. As with the rest of Afghanistan, no exact population numbers are available. The population of Badghis is approximately 62 per cent Tajik, 28 per cent Pashtun, 5 per cent Uzbek, 3 per cent Turkmen, 1 per cent Hazara and 1 per cent Baloch. Tajiks therefore make up the majority of the population, while Pashtuns are the largest minority. Pashtuns constitute a majority in Bala Murghab and Muqur districts, while Tajiks are the majority in the other four districts. The Uzbek population lives mostly in the Baghak valley, close to Qala-e-Naw city and in Muqur district. The Uzbek community of Badghis is well represented in the local administration. Turkmens are confined to the Murichaq valley of Bala

Murghab district, which borders Turkmenistan, while Baluchis live in Qarqach village in Muqur District.

Jamiat-e-Islami and Hezb-e-Islami are the main political parties in Badghis. Geographically, Hezb-e-Islami is considered strong in the Pashtun-dominated northern areas, while Jamiat-e-Islami is more popular in the Tajik-dominated areas, particularly in Abkamari and Qala-e-Naw. However, Jamiat-e-Islami allegedly has more influence in the local administration.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

#### **Types of Conflict**

Participants identified the Taliban, inter-ethnic conflicts, illegal armed groups (IAGs), the weak presence of the ANSF and interference from neighbouring countries as the key factors creating instability and conflict in Badghis province.

Participants said that Taliban-led insurgents in the province attack governmental organizations, as well as public service non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on health, water or any other aid projects. In Qadis, Bala Murghab and Muqur districts, the Taliban have control of rural areas, where they rule as they like. Following the transition of security responsibility to the ANSF, the Taliban have been able to extend their influence into more villages, especially in Bala Murghab and Muqur districts. Some of the Taliban groups are also involved in inter-tribal disputes, supporting their tribal allies when attacked by other tribes.

People in Badghis criticized the Taliban for claiming that their war is religious and that they fight primarily for the good of the people. A university student from Qadis district said that:

*“The Taliban claim that the Government of Afghanistan is not in accordance with Islam and that they [Taliban] fight the ANSF because the Government does not follow Islamic orders. [But] I do not believe the Taliban’s claims because they are just fighting for their own interests and not for Islam.”*

An additional factor contributing to instability in the province is the support of local people for the Taliban in providing them with food and accommodation. Some of the participants stated that local people living in the districts do not know whether the Taliban or the Government of Afghanistan are right. For them, the Ulema has the responsibility to inform the people what is right. According to one of the participants in the group discussions:

*“In fact, the residents in Badghis expect the Ulema and Islamic scholars to let the people know [about the rightfulness and wrongfulness of the Government and the Taliban]. But unfortunately the Ulema and Islamic scholars are not actively taking part in this process to advance the awareness of the people in a proper manner.”*

Some of the participants furthermore alleged that the Taliban were also supporting drug-smuggling in the districts and that they are in turn supported by these smugglers. The cooperation of ordinary people with the Taliban in the districts is seen as “compulsory”. The participants believed that the Taliban were mostly interested in having a close connection with the people to benefit from the drug-smuggling and narcotics production. They claim that the Taliban want to change the views of people in different ways, including by adhering to their strict interpretation of Jihad.

Another type of conflict in Badghis, identified by the participants, is based on tribal issues. This type of conflict mostly arose following the fall of the Taliban regime. During Taliban rule, the then-Government supported Pashtun tribes at the expense of other ethnic groups and tribes. Some of the participants believed that the current Government was also not impartial and supported specific tribes and ethnicities over others. A local elder from Bala Murghab district explained:

*“Once upon a time we had stability in Badghis. Then some of the Government’s officials started to harass people in the rural areas and as a response the affected people started a resistance against the Government, supported by anti-government elements from Kandahar and Iran. Now they are the biggest challenge to security and stability [in Badghis]. The Government should be national and not based on tribal interests. Pashtun people believe that nowadays in Badghis the non-Pashtuns are in power and that they do not like the Pashtuns. The Government discriminates between categories of the people.”*

Aside from the Government’s alleged actions, participants in Badghis claimed that tribal elders had created small armed groups to support their respective tribes and fight against other. Sometimes, people alleged, these armed tribal defence groups join the Taliban and fight against ANSF. A member of civil society expressed the belief that:

*“The elders of a tribe create individual armed groups for their own benefit. The conflicts between the tribes then increase to the point that some of them join the anti-government elements (Taliban) in the mountains.”*

Participants stated that some of these problems were created when local governments decided to support a specific tribe or ethnic group in their districts, prompting the rival tribe to move to the mountains and join anti-government elements (AGEs) to fight against this injustice.

### **Drivers of Conflict**

During the group discussions, in individual interviews and in survey forms, participants identified the actual drivers of the conflict in Badghis province as: the Taliban-led insurgency groups (supported allegedly by neighbouring countries, including Iran and Pakistan); local warlords and politicians holding Government posts or when running for office; Government institutions, including Provincial Councils and Parliament; and also IAGs that were created as a result of tribal disputes.

#### ***Taliban-led Insurgency***

The Taliban in Badghis rearmed three years after the fall of the Taliban regime in the province in 2001. According to participants, there are three types of Taliban in Badghis: the first are those fighting for ideological reasons and supported in their fight against the ANSF and the international military forces by the Taliban Quetta Shura<sup>189</sup>, located in Pakistan, or Iran; the second group are those initially created in response to tribal disputes; and the third have their roots in perceived Government weaknesses and injustice.

Regarding the first type of Taliban, one participant stated that:

*“AGEs (Taliban) don’t like the presence and support of foreigners in Afghanistan. So, as long as foreigners stay in Afghanistan, the fighting will continue.”*

The participants also accused the Taliban of “lying” when they say they are fighting for the good of the people, insisting that the Taliban are not really working to uphold Islamic values.

According to participants, neighbouring countries also have a strong role in the conflict dynamics in Badghis province, as well as in Afghanistan more generally, by supporting unemployed youths financially and encouraging

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<sup>189</sup> A militant organization composed of the leaders of the Afghan Taliban believed to be based in the city of Quetta in Balochistan Province, Pakistan. The Shura was formed after the fall of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan during late 2001, when its senior leadership escaped to Pakistan.

them to fight against the Afghan Government and international military forces. An elder from Qadis district stated that:

*“Every one of them [AGEs] benefits, some of them work for neighbouring countries, some of them collect illegal taxes from local people. No one of these AGEs are fighting for Islamic principles. They receive support from neighbouring countries to destroy structures. They receive money to conduct the insurgency.”*

Participants expressed various views regarding the reasons for the Taliban’s resurgence in Badghis. Some believed the lack of education and employment opportunities was a factor in the insurgency. A local elder from Qadis district said:

*“As I mentioned, the people mostly are unemployed and uneducated, so AGEs can manipulate them very easily. Political parties also utilize this situation to encourage and support some people to fight against the Government.”*

Most participants expressed little faith in the Government because of corruption and lengthy administrative procedures hindering the delivery of services. They also pointed to the lack of real justice in the Government’s system as one of the reasons local people join the insurgency. Most participants from the districts indicated a preference among people in the districts for the Taliban’s informal justice system to resolve urgent problems. A local resident of Qala-e-Naw stated:

*“The other reason [people support the Taliban] is poor governance. People feel hopeless when it comes to Government activities and therefore they go to the Taliban courts.”*

### **Local Illegal Armed Groups**

According to the participants, the second factor for conflict in Badghis is the presence of IAGs, which were mostly created on the basis of tribal lines and led by former Mujahedeen or warlords. Outwardly, they support the Government and prevent Taliban infiltration into the province and attacks on the local population. However, they are at the same time a driver of conflict and violence in Badghis. Participants alleged that sometimes these IAGs collect *ushr* (illegal tax) from the local population and force them to provide weapons or other support. In addition, jihadi commanders who have a strong presence in Government structures have allegedly started

rearming their tribal groups to maintain presence and influence in the rural areas. In an in-depth interview, a local resident of Qala-e-Naw city stated:

*"In fact, I cannot say who is to blame, but I can confirm the presence of irresponsible and ambitious persons who were jihadi commanders before but still have a strong influence or presence in the current Government, even though now they are retirees. At the same time, most of them do not hold official power, so again these are the people who really want to cause destruction and complicate matters for their own benefit. If the security situation improves, they will no longer be needed by the Government, nor would they be able to get jobs in the Government as they are mostly uneducated."*

Like the Taliban, these IAGs also become a challenge for the Government's formal justice system. In most areas, local warlords resolve cases unofficially to show their presence and dominance over the local population. A local elder from Qala-e-Naw city confirmed that:

*"Illegal armed groups are the second factor for instability in Badghis, they are just making the people suffer. They do not allow the people to go to the Government to resolve their problems."*

IAGs have become a significant challenge for ordinary people in the districts of the province. Interlocutors stated that in Jawand district, for instance, local people cannot even marry their children without the local warlord's permission, which usually requires a forced payment by the family. A local resident of Jawand district who works for an international NGO stated:

*"Each of them [warlords] just thinks about their own interests and force people to AGE groups that cause instability. They just think about how to increase their power and extend their influence in the area."*

Presence of the warlords prevents the people from enjoying their basic human rights, according to the participants. Some of these warlords and IAG commanders allegedly have a simultaneous presence in high-ranking government positions while at the same time controlling IAGs active in the districts. This enables them to maintain local control, while at the same time ensuring that they are viewed as necessary partners for the Government to safeguard their official positions.

#### **IV. The Road Map for Peace**

Participants identified the general roots and causes of the conflict in Badghis. They emphasized the need to take concrete decisions and steps towards conducting an effective counter-insurgency programme: ensuring economic and social development; reviewing the peace programme and establishing a new structure driven by transparent and committed members; implementing the rule of law and eradicating rampant administrative corruption; and ending neighbouring countries' interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs in order to end the conflict in the province.

##### ***Conducting Effective Counter-Insurgency***

One of the most important steps toward achieving peace in Badghis, according to the participants, would be for the Government to conduct an effective counter-insurgency. To bring peace and stability to the province, they emphasized that the Government should conduct counter-insurgency military operations against both AGEs, as well as those supporting the AGEs. In addition, participants believed that the ANSF should be properly trained and should safeguard national interests. Participants also identified the failure of the judicial system as another obstacle to peace in the province. They expressed frustration that the courts release AGEs or give them light sentences when the ANSF arrest them, even with proper evidence, which demoralizes the ANSF. Participants believe that such outcomes result from rampant corruption in the judicial system.

##### ***Improving Economic and Social Development***

As mentioned above, most of the participants believed that lack of employment was one of the major problems encouraging youth to join insurgent movements. They recommended that the Government should provide job opportunities, especially for youth, to occupy them and ensure them some income. They also recommended that the international community should establish factories in the provinces so that the people can provide for their families, not only to develop the economy, but also to reduce dependence on imported goods from neighbouring countries. One of the participants in the People's Dialogue group discussions requested that the Government and the international community should *"pave the way for job opportunities to grow and support our livelihood activities."*

In addition, participants noted the high price of electricity in Badghis (45 Afghanis per kilowatt-hour) in comparison, for example, with the nearby province of Herat where people pay only 10 % of this amount. This disparity

dampens economic growth, the lack of which has been noted as one of the drivers of the conflict in the province.

### ***Reforming the Peace Programme for Transparency and Commitment***

Participants clearly expressed a lack of faith in the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP). They claim that the security situation in Badghis still remains unstable, despite around 1,500 AGEs having joined the peace process in the province. They believe that most of the reintegrated individuals were not actual AGEs but ordinary villagers gathered by local government to show the APRP in Badghis in a positive light. They also said that the APRP members for the most part cannot go into villages. Instead, most of them never leave the provincial centre, Qala-e-Naw, and just participate in meetings. A civil society activist participating in the People's Dialogue discussion stated:

*“The peace process [APRP] could create a good relationship with civil society and could encourage high numbers of AGEs to join the peace process. But it cannot keep them [reintegrated ex-combatants] in the programme or prevent them from rejoining the AGEs. Those responsible for the peace process [the APRP] do not have a good relationship with the people; they don't meet the tribes or visit them in their districts.”*

Participants believed that during the thirty-five years of armed conflict, neighbouring countries, including Iran and Pakistan, had shown their enmity toward the Afghan people and done much to destroy the Afghan economy, as well as the country's military structures. Participants were of the opinion that Pakistan and Iran train the AGEs and encourage them to fight against the ANSF, destroy schools, stop the education of women and girls and frustrate the ability of people to access their rights. They also believed that it was the responsibility of the international community to ensure that neighbouring countries cease their interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs, while also urging the Afghan Government to be serious in countering such involvement.

### ***Additional Views about the Role of the United Nations***

Participants from Badghis emphasized that the United Nations, especially UNAMA, had a role to play in securing peace in Afghanistan. They requested the UN to assist the Afghan Government in the peace and reconciliation programme. They also believe that UNAMA, representing the United Nations in Afghanistan, is able to put pressure on neighbouring

countries to stop interference in Afghanistan's internal issues. A farmer from Muqur district stated:

*"The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan – UNAMA – should be the key player for the Afghan Government from the viewpoint of assisting in the negotiations."*

Participants called on the entire international community, especially the UN, to advise and support the Afghan Government to root out governmental and electoral weaknesses and help find solutions to the problems and challenges facing the country. A police officer from Abkamary district stated that:

*"We welcome the role of the international community in providing peace and security in the region, but we recommend that UNAMA work closely with the central government to find a solution so that conflict is eradicated from this country. We ask UNAMA to guide the Afghan Government to address their weak points as still we are suffering in our province."*

## **V. Participants' Recommendations**

### ***Support reform and inclusivity of peace and reconciliation process***

- The Government should assign loyal and impartial people to the APRP to ensure a transparent and credible peace process. Also, the Government should ensure that those individuals who join the peace and reintegration process are genuinely Taliban and that measures are put in place to prevent them from rejoining the insurgency.

### ***Improve security and strengthen local government institutions and the rule of law***

- The Government should tackle corruption openly and honestly, as well as take concrete steps to reform the public sector, police and judiciary and increase their professional capacity.
- The Government should end discriminatory hiring practices.
- The Government should increase security in the districts, by increasing the number of professional security forces operating there.
- The ANSF should conduct military operations at the district level to clear the Taliban from the districts.
- The Government should ensure the ANSF are fully professionalized.

- The Government should disarm all illegal armed groups operating in the province in a sustainable manner, including collecting their weapons.
- The international community should continue its assistance to Afghanistan, especially in building the capacity of the ANSF and improving economic development.

***Improve social and economic development***

- The Government should focus on job creation, especially the establishment of factories in the province, to improve economic development in the province and advance employment.
- The Government should increase the quality of the education sector, by improving the capacity of teachers and trainers.
- The Government should extend more healthcare services to the districts and ensure the people's access to clean water in the rural areas.
- The Government should improve the roads and transport networks, which would encourage greater economic opportunities for Badghis.
- The Government should look into the option of supplying electricity from neighbouring countries in order to address the issue of high electricity prices in Badghis province, which would also lead to enhanced economic growth in the province.

***Prevent interference of neighbouring countries***

- The international community should prevent interference by neighbouring countries in Afghanistan's internal affairs, while the Afghan Government should complain about such interference to the United Nations.

***People's responsibility to ensure peace***

- Local elders and religious leaders should also support and assist the Government in its security and development initiatives. In addition, religious leaders should advise the people to send their children to school to continue encouraging peace.

Local people also should take responsibility to discourage AGEs from attacking the ANSF from their districts and to prevent youth from joining the Taliban or any other insurgent groups. Local people, especially in the districts, should send their children to school.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Herat Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial road map for peace represents a summary of key findings and issues raised in the focus-group discussions, individual interviews and surveys of opinion carried out during the consultation process with 150 Afghan citizens residing in Herat province. Participants were comprised of around 45 per cent women, and represented diverse social and political backgrounds, including public sector employees, community elders, farmers, teachers, representatives of civil society, religious scholars and reintegrees (ex-Taliban). The consultations took place as part of phase II of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace program (hereinafter the “People’s Dialogue”) initiated by 11 civil society networks and the AIHRC to consult over 4500 ordinary Afghans to develop 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

This local road map for peace intends to provide as comprehensive as possible an analysis of local drivers of conflict, as well as to identify appropriate actionable solutions to help consolidate and sustain peace and stability in Herat province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Herat, the third largest province of Afghanistan, lies in the west of the country, with a total area of 53,565 square kilometres, and borders Farah, Ghor, and Badghis provinces. The province also borders Iran to the west and Turkmenistan to the north. The province is divided into 15 districts, while Herat city, the administrative centre, is made up of 12 internal districts.

Herat province has an estimated settled population of 1,744,700 or some 290,783 families. However, it is widely believed that the population of Herat province might be as much as twice that of the official figures due to internal migration. Next to Herat city, the highest population densities are in Injil, Shindand, Guzara, Kushk-e-Rabat Sangi, Pashtun Zarghun, Gulran and Ghuryan districts. Herat province also has a population of nomadic Kuchi people whose numbers vary according to the season. In winter, 4.1% of the overall Kuchi population stay in Herat province, residing in 166 communities in various districts. Around three-quarters of these are short-range, partially migratory people, whereas 12% are long-range, partially migratory and 13% are settled.

The people of Herat in general are known as people with strong cultural traditions, including good education. Around 72% of the population of

Herat is said to be living in rural areas and 28% in urban areas. These figures also may vary given the influx of incomers to Herat city resulting from the deteriorating security situation in the region, as well as the growing numbers of Afghan refugees returning from Iran, often involuntarily. The Dari and Pashto languages are spoken by 98% of the population and 97.7% of villagers. Languages spoken by the remaining population are Turkmen and Uzbek.

As the gateway to Afghanistan from the west, Herat is a major transport hub and one of the biggest commercial cities in Afghanistan. Tax and custom duties generate an estimated 250,000 to 300,000 US dollars daily revenue from import and export commodities. About 40% of all imported goods come through Islam Qala town on the Iranian border. It is in this part of the country that the roads to Iran, Pakistan and Central Asia diverge: one leads to the Pakistani border town of Chaman via Kandahar to the south; another to the Turkmen border town of Kushka to the north; and the third leads to Islam Qala on the Iranian border in Herat province.

Herat is taking major steps towards self-sufficiency in the industrial sphere, with the Herat Industrial Park attracting lots of private investors, including some international companies that have set up factories there. In the past, around 600 factories were operating, however in recent times, only 162 are still functional. This is largely attributed to the deteriorating security situation, along with the uncertainty over the continuing presence of international forces in Afghanistan.<sup>190</sup>

Jamiat-e-Islami, one of the main jihadi parties, has managed to embed itself widely in Herat province because of its role in the collapse of the Communist regime in Afghanistan.<sup>191</sup> Former jihadi commanders, however, are still known to retain sustainable support and influence in the province.

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<sup>190</sup> As of 1 January 2015, NATO transitioned from its International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan to its non-combat Resolute Support Mission (to train, assist and advise Afghan national security forces). RSM operates from Kabul as its central hub, but also has one of its four regional bases in Herat (in addition to regional hubs in Mazar-e Sharif, Kandahar and Laghman). The number of international forces has significantly decreased: as of December 2015, the RSM force comprised 12,905 soldiers from 42 troop-contributing countries. See: <http://www.rs.nato.int/troop-numbers-and-contributions/index.php>, last accessed 6 March 2016.

<sup>191</sup> Following the collapse of the Communist regime in 1992, the mujahedeen forces dominated for three-and-a-half years, after which they were defeated by the Taliban in 1995. Former jihadi commanders regained power in Herat province, however, following the ousting of the Taliban regime by the United States-led forces in 2001.

### III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict

#### Types of Conflicts

During the consultations, people in Herat identified a wide range of interconnected conflicts, including the Taliban-led insurgency, political disputes and inter-ethnic and tribal conflicts.

#### Taliban-led Insurgency

Although not as conflict-prone as many other parts of the country, participants identified the Taliban-led insurgency against the Government of Afghanistan as a significant type of conflict in the province. Participants observed that various groups of anti-government elements (AGEs) were broadly united under the Taliban.<sup>192</sup> However, they noted that while these AGEs have a common goal in fighting Government forces, they lack unity once the fighting ends. The people consulted widely believed that the insurgency was being pushed by neighbouring countries and that its roots lay elsewhere.

According to a university professor from Herat:

*“There...is an imposed war that is currently ongoing. The conflict and fight between the Government and Taliban is a kind of that [imposed conflict]. Taliban are not originally from Afghanistan, they are from other countries and have been sent to fight for their [foreign countries’] benefit.”*

Focus-group participants observed that people could travel freely in the districts in Herat immediately after the fall of the Taliban. Now, however, they cannot travel safely more than one kilometre from the district centres and the Government is unable to control the security situation. People complained of illegal taxes, as well as threats and intimidation by AGEs.

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<sup>192</sup> Since the People’s Dialogue consultations in Herat in 2014, there have been some developments in the Taliban movement in Afghanistan, which also has affected the Taliban in Herat province. The revelation of the death of the Taliban leader Mullah Omar in July 2015 has resulted in fracturing of the Taliban movement. The subsequent appointment of Mullah Akhtar Mansoor as the new Taliban leader was met with dissent within some leaders of the group, deepening rifts within the Taliban. One of the Taliban dissident groups was formed in Herat, a Taliban splinter group called the “*High Council of Afghanistan Islamic Emirate*” under Mullah Rasul, with a stronghold in Herat’s Shindand district. In December 2015 there were reports about in-fighting between the rival Taliban groups of Mullah Mansour and Mullah Rasul in Herat, Shindand district. These new developments add to the deteriorating security situation in Herat province and affect the complex conflict dynamics.

Although Herat city is relatively well-developed, the rest of the province is more complex. Certain districts, such as Gulran, are known for limited Government control and the strongly conservative sentiments of its inhabitants.

According to a farmer from Shindand district:

*“Taliban don’t compromise with the Government and don’t want to stop fighting because they don’t accept the Government and the Constitution. In villages and districts, it is considered the right of men to beat women and to deal with the cases [of violence against women or other disputes] according to their wishes. The people of the villages and elders do not support girls to attend school and don’t want education for women at all.”*

There is also the fact that, even within 20 kilometres of Herat city, parts of the surrounding districts are considered off-limits or under Taliban/AGE control, at least at night, including parts of Guzara district. Regular Heratis, although recognizing the struggle between the Government and the insurgents over control of the country and the people, pointed out that it is often ordinary people who suffer.

A female cleaner from Herat explained:

*“AGEs, Taliban, who call themselves Muslims, conduct suicide attacks, killing the innocents, the men, women and children...AGEs are the main actors of the conflict that take on the Government of Afghanistan and implement their self-made rules and regulations.”*

Like much of the rest of the country, the people of Herat, especially those living in districts far from Herat city, have to deal with the reality of the Taliban-led insurgency every day. While many of them can access district centres and Government institutions, they are often forced to live between the warring parties, cooperating with both as necessary in order to survive.

According to a farmer from Herat:

*“People in the districts have contact with AGEs (Taliban). Because the area is unsecure they have to be with the Taliban to save their families. As a farmer I am doing this interview for an UN-supported initiative, but if the people find out that I did the interview they [Taliban] will kill me.”*

The people of Herat province reported that they suffer not only from being caught in the crossfire between armed conflicting parties, but also from direct threats against the civilian population from AGEs demanding

disengagement from cooperation with the Government, including through kidnapping, harassment, threats and intimidation. Unfortunately, there is also the regular targeted killing of individuals in Herat city and nearby districts by armed men on motorcycles, often using pistols with silencers. Likewise, in the conflict-affected areas of the province, there have been incidents in which pro-government forces have taken revenge on the families of insurgents.

### **Political Conflict**

Another type of conflict in the province identified by the participants is that between different political actors and powerbrokers who jostle for control over Herat's population and its financial resources. Herat controls the bulk of cross-border trade with Iran, which is lucrative for both legitimate and illegal businesses.

The powerbrokers vie for influence through both legitimate Government institutions and through affiliates. Armed groups broadly affiliated with respective powerbrokers and influential individuals were alleged to be behind a range of violent and intimidating acts in Herat over the past decade. At the same time, powerbrokers ensure that they are represented in Government institutions through individuals loyal to them. Ordinary people are therefore caught in the middle. People in Herat noted that political conflict, fought by proxies loyal to one or another powerbroker, allowed those powerbrokers to retain influence and control.

A female university student said:

*"Economic crisis is another factor that contributes to the conflicts. There are some armed groups in Herat that work for the benefit of Government ministers and create conflicts and earn money; this is because there is no income source to cover their expenses. There are also some other groups [supported] by neighbouring countries which work for their [neighbouring countries'] benefit and receive big amounts of money. All these [issues come] back to the Government of not being able to control the situation."*

According to a Government employee in Zinda Jan district, *"Local power brokers and warlords are the main reason for instability [in Herat province]. They have engaged for many years [in causing] instability because they receive the benefits."*

The "benefits" described by participants are linked to gaining political power and strengthening patronage networks that powerbrokers derive

from such illegal activities. At the same time, interlocutors believe that neighbouring countries also use these powerbrokers to advance their own, sometimes violent interests. Ordinary people in Herat, as well as Government officials, regularly accuse neighbouring countries of involvement in violence in Herat, often with the complicity of local powerbrokers who might also be active in the Government.

As one member of a local shura explained:

*“Local power brokers are in control of the districts and villages where they have links with neighbouring countries. They receive money to be against the Government’s presence in the area. Hari Rod River is one of the problems. The Iranian Government has been paying AGEs to stop the [construction of the] Salma Dam because following the Salma Dam’s completion Iran will be faced with a lack of water. In Ghoryan district there are three groups of the AGEs who are working for Iran, to fight against the Afghan Government, they usually attack ANSF or abduct local elders.”*

Participants believe that the powerbrokers in Herat maintain their relevance by ensuring a certain level of instability, since without instability and areas that lack full Government control, their ability to influence those areas decreases or disappears.

### **Interethnic and Tribal Conflicts**

Herat is a diverse province affected by interethnic and tribal disputes that vary from one area to the next. In Shindand district in the south, for instance, conflict between the Tajik and Pashtun populations, among various Pashtun tribes, and within sub-tribes and families, defines which side people may take in the broader conflict.

Herat is populated by the Tajik, Pashtun, Hazara, Turkmen, Uzbek and Kuchi ethnicities. Sharing power between and among the various ethnic groups has been a source of friction and caused certain conflicts in the province.

A Government employee from Zinda Jan district said:

*“Ethnic problems in my district are the other reason for conflict. Pashtun people do not like Tajik people to be in power, likewise Tajik people do not like Pashtun people to be in power. The lack of unity among Afghan people, lack of flexibility, poverty and weak governance are the other reasons for violations and instability in Zinda Jan district. Some of the people are fighting for political reasons, some because of the lack of employment, and some because of ethnic issues.”*

In addition to the conflict between ethnic groups, Herat province experiences even more conflicts within ethnic groups, between tribes and sub-tribes. In the easternmost district, Chisti Sharif, the main conflict is between the Chisti and Pahlawan tribes, although both are Tajik and generally pro-government. The conflict between those tribes allegedly began ten years ago after a woman divorced a man from one tribe and married a man from the other. According to local sources, more than two-hundred people have been killed in subsequent fighting.

Explaining the conflict among tribes in Gulran district, a university professor from Herat explained that:

*“Tribal war is an inherited war which still continues with the younger generation. They try to take revenge for their ancestors and feel that they should be armed and fight. This kind of war is caused by the absence of the rule of law and a poor Government system that is unable to solve disputes. Baluch and Alizai, Jamshidi and Noorzai tribes in Gulran district acquired arms and fight against each other. Why doesn't the Government inquire about this situation or follow up the case to solve it? Their fights and conflicts affect other innocent people and allow other illegal armed groups to create violent conflicts under the name of the Taliban.”*

Even within villages, disputes can break out over the division of benefits from development projects. Such gains that are perceived to be unevenly or unjustly distributed can fuel local conflicts within homogenous groups. According to participants, this can sometimes lead to the neglected parts of the population joining AGEs.

A school teacher from Karukh District explained:

*“Development projects in the district are another source of conflict, as the money for the projects are being distributed to the village leader and his family. If the village leader is not informed about the project, he will create problems. Also the people who are working as guards for the projects are armed and they are doing some other illegal activities on the side.*

*A project called “Work for Food” was initiated for the people in one village, but the benefits of this project were divided among village leaders instead of the vulnerable people in need. In such situations, the people cannot sit quiet and ignore such injustice. They will be looking for a solution to find a way and take their rightful share. When they don't have their Government's support, then they will try to join AGEs to be supported financially.”*

Tribal and ethnic conflicts are unfortunately not limited to the rural districts of Herat. In the past decade, there have been clashes and riots involving different communities in Herat city, encouraged by certain community members to mobilize radical elements within their respective communities. While the situation in the city and its immediate surroundings has remained calm over the last few years, people and communities have not forgotten those who have been injured or killed in such episodes. Unfortunately, because of ties to powerbrokers, many of those involved in such actions have not been punished in the formal justice system.

### **Drivers of Conflict**

When discussing the reasons driving the conflict in Herat province, participants pointed first to the influence of neighbouring countries, poverty and lack of education, the culture of impunity and then to the powerbrokers, interethnic and tribal disputes, as well as political interest. During focus-group discussions and in-depth interviews, most participants mentioned each of these issues as factors that drive and exacerbate the conflict in Herat province.

### **Interference by Foreign Governments**

In every discussion, participants raised the influence of foreign powers as a key driver of the conflict in Herat, with anti-government groups, criminal groups and foreign agents working for different destructive purposes in the province. Most participants pointed to regional and neighbouring countries, with allegations that AGEs in Herat go to the neighbouring countries for medical treatment and training whenever required. Some participants also noted that, while Afghan forces and convoys were targeted by the Taliban and other AGEs, the United States forces were not targeted, drawing inferences that there must be some collusion between the US forces and the insurgents. Thus, many people in Herat feel that the key driver of the conflict is a result of factors outside their communities.

A female teacher said:

*“Actors of the conflict are the agents of the neighbouring countries who are active in our country - in the provinces, districts, and villages. They ensure the control of the provinces, districts and villages through the cooperation of the village and religious leaders by paying them a very small amount of money. Some operate under the name of the Taliban, some with unknown [or unnamed] illegal armed groups and some with other groups that are apparently working with the Government while supporting the AGEs behind*

*their backs. If we look a little bit back, not going so far, just looking at our fathers' and mothers' times, the situation was different. They tell us that in their time different tribes like Hazara, Uzbek, Tajik, Pashtun and Jewish lived together in the same area. They did not have any problem [living] together. But since the time of the internal conflict and since ISAF has been active in Afghanistan, tribal and religious fights started."*

While local people point to the negative influence of neighbouring countries, they also point out that outside actors take advantage of pre-existing conflicts and exploit disputes and mistrust between the tribes.

According to a staff member of the Provincial Joint Secretariat Team (PJST):

*"Neighbouring counties create conflicts among local tribes to encourage them to fight against each other. The result is that tribes join AGE groups and go to the mountains. Each conflict starts from a small area like a village. In Kushk-e-Rabat Sangi district, for instance, the relatives of a village leader bought weapons to protect their families, but when the village leader got armed, he got power and gradually joined the Taliban and went to the mountain."*

People's view that outside actors are effectively funding insurgents in Afghanistan is widespread in the province. Although some interlocutors note that AGEs obtain their funding through extortion, *ushr*, and other criminal activities, they point to neighbouring countries as the main source of arms and funding.

According to a female shopkeeper:

*"There are many illegal arm groups that are active under the name of the Taliban. Who asks who they are, and who are they working for? Nowadays they are getting more and more active and they have reached to the city [of Herat]. They get arms from neighbouring countries."*

As a result, some participants stated that it would be better if Afghanistan was closed for foreigners. According to a local elder from Guzara District:

*"Fight and conflict would start from regional countries and spread to the country [Afghanistan], provinces, districts and villages. Therefore, first the doors of Afghanistan should be closed on foreigners, so that they do not find the chance to use Afghanistan for their own benefit."*

## Poverty and Lack of Education

According to a female school teacher from Herat:

*“In Afghanistan, anyone who has more power and money can control local affairs due to the economic weaknesses of the people. They [the poor people] are capable of anything if they have a supporter to give them a penny.”*

Although Herat city and province in general are relatively affluent compared to the rest of Afghanistan, the booming economy of recent years has tapered off. Residents have reported that tens of thousands of jobs have been lost as businesses have moved out of the Herat Industrial Park and other private investments have been severely reduced. As noted above, the number of industrial factories in Herat had fallen to 162 at the end of 2013 (at the time of the consultations) from a peak of over 600. This has led to significant strain on the local economy and scarce legitimate employment opportunities for ordinary Afghans. Not surprisingly, participants pointed to the stagnating economy and lack of educational opportunities as key drivers of the conflict in Herat. Joining the insurgency provides people with money and weapons.

A female housecleaner said, *“The people get arms and go to the mountains [to join the AGEs], all because of their life expenses. The most important factor that fosters the conflict is unemployment.”*

Participants blamed the Government for not being able to create jobs and ensure economic prosperity. The people repeatedly complained that young people were forced to go to neighbouring countries, mostly Iran, for work. They travel there legally and illegally and often return addicted to opium. Others turn to a life of petty crime and kidnapping, especially of local businessmen and their children, which is unfortunately common in the province.

Another tragically frequent occurrence is the targeted killing of off-duty ANSF, government officials and ordinary individuals. According to some, this is a for-hire service. The preferred method, used by criminals and insurgents alike, is to use two men on a single motorcycle. The passenger shoots the victim using a pistol with silencer as the driver makes a quick getaway. This method has been used to injure and kill off-duty ANSF members, prominent mullahs and even young women accused of acting improperly.

According to a housewife from Herat:

*“The other factor is that poverty forces people to join AGEs and earn money for the daily expenses of themselves and the family. The Government could not contain the economic crisis and the people do anything because of money. To earn money, some migrated to neighbouring countries and some conduct illegal activities like robbery, kidnaping and killing of innocent people.”*

Although the economic downturn has affected Herat city and districts in the immediate vicinity, the lack of economic and educational opportunities in districts farther from the centre of economic activity has an even greater impact on the lives of ordinary people there. In districts such as Farsi, Gulran and Kushk-e-Kohna, as well as remote parts of more central districts, the youth either have access to no or extremely limited educational facilities. Participants believe that this not only affects their ability to find jobs, but it also affects their general path in life.

According to a local elder from Guzara district:

*“The main cause of conflict is illiteracy. There is a big difference between a youth from the city and a youth from a district and village. When youths are far from education, they cannot differentiate between right and wrong. They only think about fighting and the only path for them remains to join AGEs.”*

### **Weak Government Institutions and Absence of the Rule of Law**

Participants pointed out that the Government lacks the ability to control certain groups and contain volatile situations. The existing tribal and social fissures, combined with limited Government control, provide ample room for disputes to deteriorate significantly.

According to a female university student:

*“In a vulnerable country like Afghanistan, where there is no stable Government, where there is no rule of law, where there is no social tolerance, and where there is no equality among its people, any single act that violates the rights of others can lead to a big conflict. In a country where there is rule of law, every person relies on the Government to prevent abuse.”*

The inability of the Government to contain local conflicts and prevent them from escalating is often considered a legacy of the many years of war in

Afghanistan and the interference of well-known powerbrokers in the province. In addition, people in Herat pointed to the lack of Government commitment and lack of faith of the people in the formal justice sector. The inability of the formal justice system to resolve criminal and civil cases in a manner that stakeholders perceive as just encourages impunity. In addition to the Government's general weakness, participants also highlighted its failures to tackle corruption and nepotism.

Explaining how local actors maintain links with Government and AGEs and enjoy immunity, a school teacher from Karukh district recounted:

*"In Karokh district there is no real Talib, all the conflicts come from within the people - such as tribal conflict, political conflict. All the conflict creators and AGEs are linked to each other. A live example: there is a village leader who is in contact with the Government and AGEs at the same time. The village leader has 3,000 armed men and the Government cannot confront him. One of his armed people killed two civilians, but nobody could do anything. The Government system is a system of nepotism and racism. It grows and the roots are very deep."*

Lack of the rule of law can also amplify disputes at the personal or tribal level and encourage people to join the insurgents. Like other situations described above, a grievance dealt with poorly or in an unjust way can alienate large groups of people. Participants commonly agreed that corruption and cronyism preclude the resolution of criminal cases. They alleged that corruption in particular permeated most levels of the formal justice system, from police to prosecutors and judges, leading to widespread distrust of the justice system. Even where bribery and intimidation did not play a role in the resolution of a particular case, there is little trust in the justice system. This situation, according to participants, contributes to the cycle of violence and reprisals in the province.

A mother of five children explained how impunity in the formal justice system leads to further impunity:

*"The conflicts are a result of local issues and the shortcomings of the justice system. In a village, two tribes start fighting and one person gets killed. Because of full corruption in the system, the case is closed and the convicted perpetrator gets released from prison. So, the other side cannot accept it, invite their friends to join AGEs and create a group to take revenge. Now they are confident because are supported by the Taliban and would do other illegal things without any fear."*

## **Interethnic and Tribal Disputes**

Most of the various ethnic groups residing in Herat are further divided into tribes and subtribes, while the city of Herat has been the scene of Shi'ite-Sunni violence in the past ten years. Key powerbrokers in the region are linked to the Pashtun and Tajik populations, as well as tribes within ethnic groups, further complicating the ethnic and tribal conflicts in the province [see below]. However, tribal issues that drive the conflict often start off as more localized issues over land, property or codes of honour.

According to a university professor from Herat:

*"The local disputes that lead to conflicts are based on the ethnic and tribal prejudice, like Tajik towards Hazara and Hazara towards Tajik, and the same is true for other ethnicities. In the areas where the Hazara tribes live, the girls cannot get married to a Tajik boy. If the Hazara girl is seen together with a Tajik boy in the Hazara area, both the girl and the boy will be killed."*

Participants explained that such conflicts tend to be protracted and difficult to solve, especially once "blood is shed". Although such conflicts are often localized and do not necessarily feed into the larger political struggle, sometimes they do. An example of this situation is the conflict between Pashtun tribes in Shindand district. Conflicts have formed between tribes and sub-tribes and even within families, with one faction becoming part of the national or local police and the other side becoming part of the insurgency. Such a conflict essentially boosts the larger struggle between groups and helps provide foot-soldiers willing to take up arms, nominally for the Government or the insurgency, but in reality rooted in self-protection. However, even if the larger, overarching conflict ends, participants noted that finding lasting peaceful resolutions to tribal conflicts may prove more difficult.

According to a female shopkeeper:

*"Structures of conflict are based on the struggle amongst two groups, two races, two tribes like the Mohamadzai and the Noorzai. Higher authorities like the Government cannot control the conflict and it continues generation by generation."*

## **Influence of Politicians and Power Brokers**

The western region of Afghanistan, and Herat province in particular, is rife with political competition between politicians, former and current, who are in turn often linked to powerbrokers who have their roots in the jihadi

period. Participants repeatedly stated that politicians and powerbrokers in the province had links to AGEs and IAGs and used their influence to stoke conflict. People believe that by ensuring a minimum level of conflict in an area, local and regional powerbrokers are ensured a place in government (formally or informally) as they have local credentials and power structures in place that can contain the conflict.

According to a female university student:

*“Unfortunately in Afghanistan, if a jihadi leader is ignored, he can create many problems. This group got their fame as a result of the jihad against the Soviet Union. They are also trying to ensure they are not ignored in the current political equation.”*

As Afghan society moves forward, such actors that relied on the chaos of the jihad and civil war periods to retain control over certain areas are ensuring that, through patronage and limited state control, they retain influence. Politicians and powerbrokers ensure that their partisans receive places in district and provincial government positions, which also affects the rule of law and fosters impunity [see above]. As they seek to maintain influence at the fringes of Government control through various proxies, the general instability caused by the situation weakens the Government, especially at the local level, and helps fuel the various conflicts. The participants further believe that the influence and support of politicians and powerbrokers on different groups can also stymie peace efforts.

According to a PJST staff member:

*“The influence of local people such as religious leaders and village elders are effective, especially about making peace. But sometimes mediation of a local leader is not effective. Take as an example two tribes who have IAGs, the Chishti and the Pahlawan [in Chisti-Sharif district]. The Chishti tribe is supported by a minister and the Pahlawan tribe is supported by a member of Parliament. The local elders were killed as they tried to advocate peace among them; they were not accepted by the two rival groups.”*

In addition, participants claimed that when district governors were shuffled between positions or fired, they created problems for the new district governors by undermining confidence in them. Participants also alleged that local and provincial authorities had links with neighbouring countries, receiving money in exchange for allowing security to deteriorate. Like many of the other issues discussed by participants, the issue of politicians and

powerbrokers being drivers of the conflict is interwoven with the other conflict drivers.

#### **IV. The Road Map for Peace**

Throughout the focus-group discussions in Herat province, people almost unanimously identified a wide range of context-specific locally driven peacebuilding initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict. These included reforming and expanding the peace and reconciliation process; addressing the governance gap and ensuring a society governed by the rule of law; expanding economic and development opportunities; and curbing the influence of foreign powers in the province. Although curbing the foreign countries' influence in the province is not necessarily a local, provincial-level issue, it is important to note as it was normally among the first response from people consulted as part of the People's Dialogue in Herat. It is especially important given that Herat province has two international borders.

##### **Reforming and Expanding the Peace and Reconciliation Process**

Participants consistently pointed to the fact that the current peace process under the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) is failing in its main task of achieving local reconciliation in Herat province. The members of the Provincial Peace Council are accused of acting in their own interests or the interests of powerbrokers or politicians.

One university student said:

*"I wonder how the conflict [actors] get empowered, the AGEs (Taliban) were driven out from Afghanistan in one night, and brought back in a day. Afghanistan has witnessed a huge number of AGEs who apparently reconciled and joined the peace process, but there is no improvement in terms of security. The APRP people are not real representatives of the people. APRP members are mostly linked to political parties."*

Although many participants expressed doubts as to whether reconciled former insurgents (reintegrees) were in fact actual insurgents or simply armed individuals wishing to obtain the material benefits of joining the peace process, others pointed to the failure of the current peace initiatives to provide alternative employment opportunities for reintegrated former insurgents.

According to a farmer from Shindand district:

*“The Government promised many things and has done nothing in terms of development projects and opportunities for reintegrees after they joined the APRP. They [reintegrees] should find a way to support their families financially.”*

The failure to provide appropriate alternative employment for reintegrees is consistently raised by the people as a challenge to the peace process. It is yet another cross-cutting issue linked to the larger economic aspects of the conflict. As participants pointed out, in addition to ensuring that ex-combatants do not return to the fight, greater economic prospects will also ensure that others never join the insurgency.

The peace process is in need of greater transparency in all aspects, including recruiting the right people and demonstrating their impartiality. The participants also questioned the selection of the Provincial and National Peace Council members, noting that some of them were either long-standing enemies of the Taliban or had no local networks through which to engage with insurgents.

People consulted in Herat commonly recommended the use of mullahs and religious leaders in outreach activities. At the same time, some participants saw the need to bring civil society, women and women’s groups together with the religious bodies to preach the message of peace alongside long-term education and development as the way forward.

According to a female housecleaner:

*“Local mediators, village elders and religious leaders have an important role for solving the conflicts, but it depends on who they are working for. If they work for their people and the benefits of Afghanistan and their village, they can and do solve the most complicated conflicts among the people, but if they work for someone else, then they solve the problem for the benefit of their lords.”*

Thus, people in Herat saw a role for all segments of society in supporting the peace process. However, it remains for the Government to develop a meaningful way to include all these voices in the peace and reconciliation process, ensuring the appropriate participation of all levels of society, including women and representatives of civil society.

One elder said:

*“We have two categories of local elders in the districts - those working for their own benefits, and the other - working for the people. The second group has popularity among local people and even the AGEs, but the Government does not support them. If the Government supports these groups of elders, they will be effective for advocacy in the districts.”*

### **Expanding Effective Government Control and the Rule of Law**

Another common view expressed by the participants was the need to expand effective Government control and ensure the rule of law throughout the province. Participants spoke of the impunity enjoyed by IAGs and influential people in formal justice institutions and the application of the law. They alleged that different groups represented in the Government or in the police had been acting according to their tribes' interests when conducting official business. They also noted that the Government was effectively not present in many areas of the province. Some complained that the Afghan Local Police (ALP) were stoking conflict in certain areas rather than containing it. Another common perception was that corruption was present in every level of society and that rooting it out was crucial to ensure effective Government control, which in turn would help contain conflicts.

According to a female university student:

*“It is really difficult to suggest recommendations for resolving the conflicts in Afghanistan, because the Government is almost completely corrupt. But still, there are some ways that can help finish the current conflicts in Afghanistan. First of all, the Government should do its best to bring equality among the people. It should look at the people as citizens not subjects. Rule of law can solve many problems. If there is a small conflict, the rule of law can solve it very easily, but when there is no Government to do so, it is really difficult to finish or at least reduce the conflicts.”*

In the instances when people complained about rampant corruption within the Government, some participants expressed positive views of the Taliban period, claiming that at least there was peace and that the law was effectively implemented. In the words of a prisoner at the Herat Provincial Prison, an IDP originally from Faryab Province: *“If we implement Islamic law there won't be any conflict or insecurity. The Afghan Taliban and the people of Afghanistan can provide the peace in this country.”*

The theme of corruption and accountability was not just voiced for the courts and formal local government. The people also noted that such guarantees of impartiality must be extended to the peace process as well. While people were in favour of a meaningful peace process capable of bringing insurgents back into the fold, they also raised the need to safeguard the rights of the victims. Participants noted that reconciled insurgents were not investigated or charged with any of the crimes they had committed during their insurgency and that a sort of *de facto* amnesty was in place. Given that so many participants viewed corruption, lack of Government control and impunity as drivers of the conflict, the reform of Government, weeding out corruption and strengthening implementation of the law were seen as crucial on the path to peace.

During the consultations, an elder mused:

*“Law is the electrical wiring installed in every corner of an area, but there is no light and only blindness till the electricity is released. The rule of law is the wire and implementing of the law is the electricity that will light everywhere.”*

Crucially, participants felt that Government must pay attention to the challenges faced by ordinary people in Herat and include their views in the planning of development and peace initiatives. An effective Government, in their view, includes not only effective Government services and control, but one that is responsive to the needs of citizens. As an elder from Guzara district said: *“The Government should hear the ordinary people’s opinions, because they suffer the most of the created problems and they are the main victims of conflicts.”*

### **Expanding Educational and Economic Opportunities**

Across the board, the people felt that the lack of economic opportunities and meaningful education was a key component in the intransigence of the insurgency. People from a wide variety of backgrounds noted the need to increase possibilities for the people to live stable, economically prosperous lives in order to defeat the insurgency.

According to a university professor from Herat:

*“The Government is focused on fighting the AGEs. They have forgotten about their responsibility to support people – when people face problems, they try to find a supporter. Then [in the absence of Government support] they will join AGEs, (Taliban) [if the Taliban support them]. But if the people*

*have work opportunities and are involved with their work, they will fight against AGEs, instead of joining them.”*

Participants also called on the Government to expand infrastructure projects such as building roads, bridges, highways, dams and irrigation systems as a way to increase employment and improve livelihood opportunities and economic development in the province. Given the lack of employment opportunities as the Herat Industrial Park lost businesses and factories, as well as the reduction in foreign investment, some participants noted the need to develop more local industries and placed emphasis on the Government’s role in creating job opportunities.

According to a PJST staff member: *“The level of economy should be increased. For example if the Government works on mineral extraction and factories, 90% of the people can be involved in this work.”*

As noted above, participants linked economic development and the availability of job opportunities to ensuring that potential fighters have viable alternatives to joining the insurgency, as well as to ensure that reintegrated former insurgents do not have a financial incentive to return to the fight. The future path to stability, in the view of participants, lays in extending government control to the districts, making development a reality for people in rural areas and expanding both the quality and availability of educational opportunities.

People further argued that increased economic opportunities in Afghanistan would ensure that young Heratis were not forced to go to Iran for work, from where many of them return with opium addictions and may subsequently engage in criminality, causing further problems in the province. Participants pointedly noted that positions were often filled by uneducated individuals with “connections”, despite the availability of hundreds of unemployed youths with first-level university degrees. Aside from expanding economic and educational opportunities, people also called on the Government to ensure more transparent and fair hiring practices.

### **Resetting International Relations**

Participants argued that the international community could help prevent interference and infiltration from neighbouring countries into Afghanistan’s internal affairs. They looked to the United Nations to assist in ending interstate issues and the interference of neighbouring countries, requesting the Afghan Government to take action in this regard.

At the same time, they also pointed to the Government's security arrangements with ISAF and western countries as antagonizing their neighbours. According to a PJST staff member:

*"The number of security incidents were high from 2004 up to 2005, and then they decreased for a period of time, but nowadays again there is an increase because of the departure of IMF troops and the presidential elections [referring to the presidential election on 5 April 2014]. The cause for the increasing conflict is the interference of neighbouring countries. Afghanistan signed military alliance agreements with western countries, which neighbouring countries don't like. As much as Afghanistan continues this, the level of insecurity will increase. In such conflict and problematic conditions, people cannot enjoy human rights, and justice is trampled."*

In addition to strategic issues, participants also called on the Government to increase border security. They see Herat, with its border with Iran and links to the rest of the country, as particularly affected by cross-border activities.

A shura leader from Koshsan district recommended that:

*"Borders should be closed to the mafia. Just a few days ago around 1,300 kg explosive devices were sent to destroy the Salma Dam [a hydroelectric dam project funded by the Indian Government in eastern Herat]. It might have been transferred from the neighbouring countries wanting to interfere into the affairs of Afghanistan, as they don't want Afghanistan to be independent, and they help the AGEs. Peace is impossible as long as weapons are available among irresponsible people and [action is taken against those] who protect and support the, including the neighbouring countries in border areas".*

Participants also noted that the lack of national unity was being exploited by neighbouring countries. They therefore called on the Government to take action to ensure that tribal and ethnic divisions were not exploited by neighbouring countries for their benefit, while at the same time noting the need of the ANSF to be further professionalized.

A local man from Ghoryan district said: *"The Government should prevent any tribal favouritism amongst the ANSF, and not allow the neighbouring countries to divide the people into tribes and ethnicities."*

Although the conflict originates from local sources and enablers, the participants noted with concern that the complex local situation allowed external actors to manipulate it to their benefit.

## **V. People's Recommendations**

Throughout the consultations in Herat, people proposed the following general recommendations with a view to engaging Government, international actors and civil society in a constructive dialogue on addressing root causes of the conflict in Herat province.

### ***Support reform and inclusivity of peace and reconciliation process***

- Reform the provincial peace processes to ensure the individuals involved in the implementation of the process are free from political interference or bias.
- Mobilize tribal elders, mullahs, Islamic scholars and members of the Community Development Councils to take part in the peace process by advocating for peace.
- Promote conditions for the people to start a mass movement for peace advocacy, in partnership with Government.

### ***Strengthen local government institutions and the rule of law***

- Effectively fight corruption and the influence of mafia groups and powerbrokers.
- Eliminate nepotism and favouritism based on ethnicity and tribal affiliations and bring offenders of such misconduct to account.
- Ensure Government employees at all levels have adequate education and qualifications, and replace uneducated Government employees.
- Strengthen and implement the rule of law, end impunity for serious crimes and eliminate the "culture of impunity".
- Disarm and collect weapons from members of illegal armed groups.
- Ensure the fair distribution of power and social justice.
- Build better relationships between the population and the Government, ensuring that the people are viewed as citizens and not subjects.

### ***Improve social and economic development***

- Provide job opportunities for the local population so that they are not compelled to join or support the insurgency.
- The Government should focus on infrastructure projects in order to link inaccessible districts, which at the same time will provide employment for large numbers of local people.
- Protect and utilize the natural wealth of Afghanistan (coal, gas and mineral wealth) and ensure the proceeds are used inside the country.
- The international community should have a strong focus on enhancing institutional capacities, strengthening education and supporting agriculture and creating job opportunities.

### ***Promote human rights***

- Enhance awareness of the people, including those in the rural areas, of various political and social issues, including their human rights, through the media, seminars or workshops.

### ***Prevent interference from neighbouring countries***

- Prepare a sound and clear foreign policy for dealing with the international community, including neighbouring countries.

Prevent the intervention by neighbouring countries in Afghanistan's internal affairs.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Farah Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial road map for peace represents a summary of key findings and issues raised in focus-group discussions, in-depth interviews and surveys of opinion carried out in Farah province, involving 143 ordinary Afghan citizens residing in the province (with around 20 per cent female participation). Participants represented diverse social and political backgrounds, including public-sector employees, community elders, farmers, teachers, representatives of civil society, religious scholars and reintegrated insurgents. The consultations took place as part of Phase II of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace (hereinafter the “People’s Dialogue”) initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult over 4,500 ordinary Afghans with a view to developing 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

This road map for peace intends to provide, as comprehensively as possible, an analysis of local drivers of conflict, as well as to identify appropriate and tangible solutions to help consolidate and sustain peace and stability in Farah province.

## **II. Provincial Profile**

Farah province, with over 48,000 square kilometres of territory, is the fourth largest province in Afghanistan, and lies between the provinces of Herat (to the north), Ghor (northeast), Nimroz (south), Helmand (southeast), with Iran to the west. As such, it is considered a gateway between the western and southern regions of Afghanistan.

Farah is divided into 11 administrative districts: Bala Buluk and Khak-e-Safid in the north, Farah centre (seat of the provincial government) and Bakwa in the south, Qala-e-Kah and Shib Koh in the west, Purchaman in the northeast, Gulistan in the southeast, Anar Dara in the northwest, Lash Wa Juwayn in the southwest and Pusht Rod in the centre. The population of the province is estimated to be between 800,000 and 1,000,000, of which approximately 90 per cent live in rural districts. Both Pashto and Dari are spoken in the province, with Dari being the predominant language of Government and the western districts, while Pashto is the main language in the eastern districts.

Ethnic Pashtuns are believed to make up about 75 per cent of the population, the majority of whom are Noorzai (who themselves are divided into 15 sub-tribes), followed by Barakzai and Alizai. The rest of the

population is Tajik (approximately 10 per cent), Ilat, Moghol, Baluch or Sayed.<sup>193</sup>

Farah also has a population of Kuchis and other nomads whose numbers vary with the season. In the summer, according to the Department of Kuchis and Nomads Affairs, up to 110,000 Kuchis migrate to Farah, with the majority going to Pusht-e-Koh, Anar Dara and Farah centre.

It is also estimated that more than 100,000 Farahi residents currently live as economic migrants in Iran. Many have also moved to Herat province, where there are more economic opportunities.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

#### **Types of Conflict**

During the People's Dialogue, Afghan men, women and youth identified a wide range of types of conflict impacting peace and development in the province. The most significant conflict in the province is the Taliban-led insurgency against pro-government forces (PGFs), which began following the ousting of the Taliban regime by the US-led forces in 2001 and the subsequent establishment of the new Government and State of Afghanistan. Afghans believed that the armed conflict between these two parties has created other inter-connected conflicts involving tribal issues, mafia/organized crime, as well as those involving the Afghan Local Police (ALP).

The main type of conflict identified by the participants in Farah, however, pointed to that between Taliban-led insurgency groups and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). As one defence attorney from Farah stated:

*"I believe there are two main types of conflict in Farah province, the most notorious one being the conflict between the Afghan Government forces and Taliban in the area, and the other is the tribal conflict which only exists in very specific areas, such as Bala Buluk district. Regardless of the ethnic background, a Talib is known in the area as a Taliban member, his tribal identification is replaced by his affiliation with the Taliban, and this person will no longer be called a Noorzai, Achakzai or Ghorozai, as long as he is a Taliban member."*

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<sup>193</sup> These figures are all approximations as no scientific population surveys have been conducted in Farah province.

The security situation in the province is fluid, with security worsening in one part of the province and subsequently in another. This occurs as a result of many changing factors, including the availability of weapons and the extent of Government presence in an area, in particular the ANSF. A member of the Afghan Sisters Movement noted with concern:

*“Except Farah city, there are no schools in the districts, as there should be, and in many districts such as Bakwa, Gulistan, Bala Buluk there is not even a primary school there. Yet the narcotics mafia have dominated almost everything out there.*

In some areas of Farah province, personal rivalries add yet another layer to the conflict. When, for instance, one individual who has a pre-existing personal rivalry with another obtains a Government position, the rival would in turn seek the support of the insurgents. According to the participants, those who hold Government power may subject their rivals to arbitrary detentions, harassment and intimidation, while those who enjoy Taliban support abducted and intimidated individuals, planted improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and, in some cases, conducted attacks against their rivals. This situation is thus blurring the line between the larger armed conflict and personal fighting, but both cause civilian harm.

In some other areas of the province, drug mafia groups reportedly also create conflict. Although not a new phenomenon, this has increased in recent years as the Government has lost control over specific and strategic areas where such groups operate.

People further alleged that these drug mafia groups have manipulated the situation in their favour by supporting the insurgents with logistical and financial resources, while the insurgents provide them in turn with protection for their drug trafficking convoys to the border, as well as for their poppy fields. This has additionally contributed to increasing the capability of the insurgents, resulting in growing insecurity and instability in Farah province. Participants characterized the situation, with the insurgent groups expanding and reinforcing their power, as a “major crisis”. They blamed the lack of adequate Government presence in the districts, as well as the significant financial support provided from the drug mafia to the insurgents. In the areas where poppies are cultivated in large swaths of land (such as Bakwa and Bala Buluk districts), the Taliban allegedly protect the fields from eradication, while in the areas where the Government is in full or partial control, poor farmers cultivate significantly fewer poppies and the Government simply attempts to eradicate the crops only during the harvest

season. Participants complained that there was no alternative crop for farmers, so the Government's action simply destroyed their livelihoods.

The degree to which tribal issues drive the conflict depends on the particular district, the history of tribal relations and the power dynamics at play. These depend on the amount of support received from various actors, the resources available and the degree to which tribal issues can be exploited by different actors based on their sometimes pre-existing disputes. An elder from Bala Buluk district explained:

*“Unlike other districts of Farah province, unfortunately Bala Buluk district suffers from tribal and ethnic conflicts. As an example, back in the years, a local person from a specific tribe killed another person affiliated to a rival tribe. The victim was only an ordinary farmer and had nothing to do with the dispute between the two rival tribes. So now you tell me what other members of his [the victim's] tribe should do in such circumstances? It is clear that they [the victim's tribe] have risen against the perpetrator's tribe, and as result this conflict lasted for some five years.”*

Interlocutors noted that in Bala Buluk district, the tribal conflict was centred on gaining power over the local population and rival tribes. Whether such power is achieved through influence in Government-sanctioned institutions, obtaining the support of AGEs or utilizing the drug mafia, matters little at the local level.

Many other factors, however, act to exacerbate conflict in the province. One of those causes identified by participants is the lack of political sustainability at the central level, as well as low literacy rates at the local level. These gaps, participants argued, are exploited by actors in the conflict and make it easier for them to obtain human resources and logistical support from local people. Another factor contributing to the conflict is the lack of political and economic opportunities for Farahi residents. The rampant administrative corruption reported by participants was also identified as a factor contributing to the ongoing conflict, with participants raising concerns that local people were forced to circumvent the Government to avoid being subjected to corrupt practices.

A female medical nurse from Farah city, reflecting on the conflict dynamics in the province, as well as by alleged interference from neighbouring countries, stated:

*“There might be some ideological Taliban who fight for their ideas, but they are not so many that they could create instability on their own. Also there might be Afghan National Army or Police who fight for the interest of the country, but they are very small in number. Both the Taliban and the Afghanistan security forces fight for their own financial benefits. The Afghanistan security forces fight for their monthly incentive/salary, while the Taliban fight for a couple of thousand Pakistani rupees or couple thousand of Afghans that the criminals give them to destabilize the situation. The major conflict that is going on in the province is the conflict between the AGEs and Afghanistan security forces supported by the foreigners [international military forces]. The continuation of this conflict is not only due to the lack of work opportunity and the rampant administrative corruption, but it also has other factors that exacerbate the situation. For example, Iran and Pakistan have always been the enemies of Afghanistan and they either send their Pakistani Taliban to the area, or they hire the local Taliban by paying them a few thousand of Pakistan rupees and giving them an AK-47.”*

### **Drivers of Conflict**

During the discussions with the participants of the focus-groups, individual interviews and surveys, participants believed, as outlined above, that the real drivers of the conflict in Farah province were the Taliban-led insurgency groups supported by neighbouring countries, including Iran and Pakistan, the drug mafia, some tribal leaders and officeholders and politicians in Government, including members of the Provincial Council and Parliament.

#### ***Taliban-led insurgency***

According to the participants, there are two types of Taliban: one is the internal Taliban who have problems with the current Government over the presence of foreign troops and foreigners; and the second type is the foreign Taliban who are apparently working to destroy stability in the province. The foreign Taliban include those supported by the Governments of Iran or Pakistan. In the category of “foreign Taliban”, participants also included those Taliban who have migrated from Helmand, Kandahar or other neighbouring provinces. Furthermore, people believed that Iran’s interest in Farah province was rooted in access to water resources. Most of Farah’s natural water flows to Iranian territory, even though Farah is suffering from a general lack of water. Thus, people claimed, it is not in

Iran's interest to have a peaceful and stable Farah in which the Government and the people are able to harness their water resources fully.

A civil society and women's rights activist stated: *"I can't say there is fight for ideas, but the fight in Afghanistan is an act of terror. Nobody is arrested for their ideas, they are not killed for their ideas, but they are killed because they have been tricked by some of the political circles either inside the country or outside the country."*

Participants acknowledged that lack of educational facilities, including high schools and primary schools, as well as poverty, had resulted in a lack of individual awareness regarding peace, development and patriotism, and allowed for the proliferation of misinterpretations of Islamic Sharia law regarding *jihad* in the districts, which further contributes to the conflict in Farah province.

In this regard, an elder from Granai village of Bala Buluk district, provided the following example:

*"I recruited a daily-wage labourer to cement my home, he was from Bala Buluk district. During the lunch break, I asked him what he is doing in the city and he replied that he is working to earn some two or three thousand Afghani to buy a mobile phone and then he will join the jihad in Bala Buluk district. When I asked him about the basic principles of Islam, including the conduct of prayers and basic verses of the Quran, he could not answer. But he was continuously insisting that he will do jihad and it is an Islamic obligation to fight the infidels."*

The Government was also identified as a driver of the conflict, with participants pointing to factors such as corrupt and unprofessional military and civilian staff. During the consultation, people reported that in some districts the police had accused the local population of having ties with the insurgency. The police conducted arbitrary detention, harassment, intimidation and sometimes committed other serious crimes against the local population. An elder from Khak-e-Safid district claimed:

*"Months ago, the now deceased Chief of Police of Khak-e-Safid district arbitrarily detained and severely tortured four young people who had hunted a goat from the mountain but did not bring it to him. So the members of the victims' family had to take up arms against the police in the area and create instability."*

People claimed that the actors in the conflict benefit from the insecurity in the province in different ways. For example the drug mafia allegedly uses either the Taliban or Government forces to transport their goods, depending on the situation.

Participants also noted that escort companies benefit from insecurity, too, as they can easily get contracts to escort ISAF's logistical convoys at high prices. They further alleged that corrupt government officials were also pleased with the lack of security because the Government could not remove them from their positions without risking their joining the insurgency. The same holds true for corrupt senior officials. These corrupt officials reportedly often support a specific group of armed men or financially support the Taliban who create instability in the area. Or they simply benefit from being corrupt and in a position where the Government is reliant on their continuing service. As a result, the Government looks away when these officials accept bribes or engage in other forms of corruption. A former ANP officer reiterated these claims with the following example:

*"I remember that we seized three fuel tankers as they didn't pay the fees to the Department of Customs. After few minutes we received a lot of phone calls from Kabul forcing us to release the fuel tankers. The officials from Kabul were saying that the security is not good and if you continue seizing the tankers from such strong businessmen, then you would jeopardize your life."*

According to the participants in the discussions, the actors in the armed conflict in Farah had no specific agenda for peace, as their personal interests would likely be damaged if the province was safe and secure. The participants also believed that local Taliban and other insurgent groups had no independent ideology but followed decisions made elsewhere, either by the Quetta Shura,<sup>194</sup> Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence or the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

#### **IV. Road Map for Peace**

Participants identified the following groups as being potentially the best advocates for peace: the mullahs, local elders and the members of the

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<sup>194</sup> The so called "Quetta Shura" is the Council of Taliban leaders who took refuge in Quetta, in Balochistan province of Pakistan, following the ousting of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan by the United States intervention in 2001.

Community Development Councils. However, it was acknowledged with concern that those who try to advocate for peace in Farah would be targeted either by Taliban, other insurgents or the drug mafia. Noting this vulnerability, the participants called on the Government to provide security for peace advocates as they would otherwise be unable to exert their influence effectively or work for peace in the province. Participants further urged the international community to consider preventing interference from neighbouring countries as part of the peace agenda for Afghanistan. According to the participants, local elders are good at solving local tribal or personal disputes, however, when it comes to the overarching political conflict between AGEs and Government, it is difficult for them to make a difference.

As for the broader aspects of the conflict, the participants believed that it was necessary for the Government to take concrete steps toward ending interference by neighbouring countries, including possibly by referring the matter to international forums; conducting an effective counter-insurgency campaign; ensuring economic and social development; establishing a peace programme driven by transparent and committed persons; and ensuring that the rule of law is applied equally to everyone. They also stated that the Government must eradicate rampant administrative corruption to end the conflict in the province.

### ***Prevention of Interference from Neighbouring Countries***

The participants believed that the only remedy left to resolve the armed conflict in Afghanistan was to react against neighbouring countries' actions towards Afghanistan. Although the participants stopped short of calling for military retaliation in most circumstances, they called for stronger measures to be taken against the proxies of foreign states. For example, they suggested that if it is found that suicide attackers who kill people in Afghanistan have links to Pakistan, the Afghan Government should arrest and punish them before they strike and seek to punish their foreign accomplices. They also stated that when Afghan migrants are killed at the border by Iranian state forces, or if AGEs are found to have received weapons and financial support from Iran, the Afghan Government should take measures against all involved to bring them to justice. They also stated, however, that in instances when Pakistan launches rockets into eastern Afghanistan, the country should respond with similar action. The participants argued that the international community could help prevent interference and infiltration from neighbouring countries into Afghanistan's

internal affairs. Although it was unclear if the participants were referring to a specific United Nations body such as the International Court of Justice, or consideration by the United Nations Security Council or the General Assembly, the participants argued that opening a “case” at the United Nations would allow for a greater understanding of inter-state issues. They also provided recommendations for the international community to prevent such interference. A member of the Farah Chamber of Commerce and Industries (CCI) said:

*“We should open a case at the United Nations to prevent Iran’s and Pakistan’s clear interference into Afghan affairs, as we are extremely affected by those countries’ negative interference.”*

### ***Effective Counter-Insurgency***

The participants pointed to the Taliban-led insurgents as the key actors causing instability and armed conflict and called on the Government to take concrete steps toward ending the phenomenon. The people noted that conducting counter-insurgency operations and then leaving the area was not a way to end the insurgency. Instead, they stated that the Government should establish a strong footprint in the area by establishing bases with professional staff capable of arresting criminals and implementing the rule of law in a professional manner. They also stated that a proper counter-insurgency strategy should include the establishment of an effective investigation and interrogation mechanism because, even when AGEs are arrested, judges are unable to convict them of crimes due to inadequate investigations.

### ***Public Economic and Social Development***

As stated by the participants, one of the major factors contributing to the conflict is the dearth of economic opportunities and the lack of basic life necessities for the majority of the population. They alleged that the actors in the armed conflict promise money and weapons, which is often the only choice for poor people in the province to survive. The participants pointed out that there were no schools, good clinics or other humanitarian assistance available in remote areas of the province. As a result, the local population has no choice but to take advantage of offered alternatives to obtain resources. A civil society and women’s human rights activist said:

*“In this province and in particular in the districts, the birth rate is high, while the population only have access to weapons and that is it. They have no access to education, health services, and lack water and food*

*security. What do you expect from such generation, except violence and conflict? Taliban and other AGEs can easily use them as free human resources for their own goals and objectives.”*

Participants further noted that another problem in Farah was the lack of Government attention to the construction of the electricity dam at Bakhsh Abad, which was planned years ago. They suggested that if the dam was to be completed and electricity provided to remote areas, there would be a positive change to the lives of ordinary people.

### ***Transparent and Accountable Peace Programme***

During the consultative process, participants alleged that the current Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) was driven by a group of people who had been involved in crimes during past Afghan armed conflicts. The participants also believed that the current APRP members were not committed to their duties, but worked only to further their own interests, thereby preventing concrete progress towards peace in the province. An elder from Farah complained:

*“There is no specific and tangible outcome of the peace process in the province. Some specific groups of people have gathered together and have made a programme for their own interests and there is no involvement of the ordinary people in the process.”*

The participants recommended that it was essential to reform the current peace programme, including its goals and objectives, as well as the staffing of the APRP and High Peace Council, to ensure meaningful community inclusion in the process.

## **V. People's Recommendations**

Throughout the consultations in Farah, people proposed the following general recommendations to the Government for addressing the root causes of the conflict in the province:

### ***Reform the peace and reintegration process and encourage inclusivity***

- Revise the goals, objectives and appointment process of the High Peace Council/Provincial Peace Council and the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) to ensure the impartiality, credibility and inclusiveness of the peace process.
- Mobilize and support tribal elders, mullahs, Islamic scholars and members of the Community Development Councils to advocate for peace.

### ***Strengthen local Government institutions and the rule of law***

- Ensure that Government positions are filled through a merit-based selection process.
- Establish an effective anti-corruption programme in the province.
- Enforce the laws equally, without discrimination, against both the powerful and ordinary citizens.

### ***Strengthen and expand security with effective counter-insurgency efforts***

- Prepare a concrete counter-insurgency plan for the province that includes establishing an effective Government administration in areas recovered from the AGEs.
- Improve the security situation in Farah province by strengthening the ANSF and military presence in the province.
- Disarm and collect weapons from members of illegal armed groups and other irresponsible armed individuals.
- Appoint high-ranking officials from Farah province, including governors, chiefs of police, heads of military and security institutions, as they have better knowledge of the local situation.

### ***Social and economic development***

- Maintain good and efficient coordination between the provincial and central governments to ensure effective implementation of national programmes.
- Provide job opportunities for the local population so that people are not compelled to join or support the insurgency.
- Establish an effective counter-narcotics plan that provides alternative livelihood opportunities for farmers involved in poppy cultivation.
- Limit the loss of water from the River Farah that goes to Iran and build the water and electricity dam in Bakhsh Abad to enhance the economic development in the province and create additional job opportunities for local people.
- Enhance public awareness on a variety of issues, including their human rights.

### ***Prevent interference of neighbouring countries***

- Prepare a comprehensive and clear foreign policy for dealing with the international community, including neighbouring countries.

Prevent the intervention of neighbouring countries in Afghanistan's internal affairs.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Nimroz Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This roadmap for peace is a summary of the findings of focus group discussions carried out in Zaranj city, Nimroz province. The consultations involved men and women from throughout the province, and participants included local residents, civil society representatives, tribal leaders, religious shura members and teachers.

The consultations took place as part of phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace program (hereinafter the "People's Dialogue") initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult over 4,500 Afghan citizens with a view to develop 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Nimroz province, with its diverse demographic mix, is distinct from other provinces in the south of Afghanistan. Historically, the majority of the population is Baluch and Barahawi although considerable migration has resulted in the Pashtun community becoming a majority (60 per cent) in the province. Baluch, Tajik and Hazara communities constitute the remaining 40 per cent of the population.

Whilst cross-border trade (both legal and illegal) with neighboring Iran plays a significant role in the local economy, agriculture remains the main source of livelihood for much of the population. The vast majority of communities in the districts are engaged in agriculture and are substantially dependent on the local river systems for irrigation of their crops. Agricultural production in the province however is vulnerable to drought and other climatic factors.

Since the fall of the Taliban regime, there have not been any major conflicts between communities, even though inter-tribal differences and tensions exist, particularly between Baluchis and Pashtun communities in some areas. Tribal elders are the most influential persons in communities and their endorsement is often sought by political parties.

The province has a strong Iranian influence, most obviously in the widespread use of Iranian currency, but also politically. Local people argue that the supply of electrical power to Nimroz from bordering towns in Iran is not perceived as a neutral arrangement and in coming years, may be used as a tool for political pressure.

Iranian cultural influences can also be seen in the province most notably that women are able to work outside their homes and play a greater role in public life as compared to their counterparts elsewhere in southern Afghanistan.

From a security perspective, the province is less affected by the insurgency than other provinces in the south, although there may be some community level sympathy and support for Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) in some districts such as Khashrod. The strength and presence of insurgents has been weakened in the province due to regular security operations by pro-Government forces in Khashrod and Dilaram districts, which are transit points for AGEs traveling between Helmand and Farah provinces. Khashrod is strategic from a political and security standpoint. Its district center, Ghorghori, was the provincial capital during the Taliban regime.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Drivers of Conflict**

The local governance in Nimroz is challenged by the following factors: low levels of professionalism in provincial line-departments, widespread corruption, weak government infrastructure, insecurity in some outlying districts and low level of attention/assistance from the central government.

Nimroz has been spared the worst of the insurgent-driven violence that has affected other provinces in the south of Afghanistan. However, much of the province, particularly in the areas bordering Iran, is effectively lawless, allowing extensive smuggling, notably of narcotics.

There are also particular challenges facing the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in Khashrod and Delaram districts. Here, the local government is perceived to be particularly weak and incapable of extending its authority beyond the main cities. This weakness has resulted in these districts coming under AGE control. The Taliban is thought to have raised its profile by exploiting the rift between Khashrod's communities and the authorities. According to participants another factor influencing the insecurity is that many Mullahs and *Ulemas* in Nimroz, particularly those from Zaranj, have reputed close links with the insurgents' networks based in Iran.

The authorities and civil society fear that security situation might deteriorate with the withdrawal of international military forces. They are of the view that the Afghan security forces are under-trained and under-equipped. It is feared that particularly it would be a great challenge for the

ANSF to counter the insurgency and control infiltration from neighboring countries.

As Nimroz is badly affected by seasonal drought, local communities have long sought government assistance in improving the water supply and irrigation systems within the province. Work to rehabilitate the Kamal Khan dam, and the Nahr-i-Lashkari canal, which brings water from Helmand, has long been promised by central Government, but these projects remain unfinished resulting in resentment in local communities towards the Government.

A local resident from Charborjak district said:

*“The Government promised to re-build the Kamal Khan dam, but did not do it, and still drought is pervasive throughout the province. This has caused unemployment, has increased poverty and has compelled some people to join the Taliban to gain an income so they can feed their families.”*

Participants also linked the conflict to the increase of poverty and lack of economic opportunities in the province.

A Shura member explained:

*“The drop in living standards is one of the main causes of conflict. There is no justice in the administration supported by the internationals, and the authorities have not fulfilled their promises to the people. This why the people join the insurgents, as they think the insurgents will be fairer.”*

For local communities, government promises of an improved security situation and the expansion of local development programmes have largely remained unfulfilled and have therefore affected the credibility of the Government. The continued insecurity in some districts, notably Dilaram and Khashrod, has frustrated the local inhabitants. Poor service delivery from local authorities especially the lack of water supply in drought affected districts, has made locals feel they are neglected by the local Government.

The regular influx of Afghan refugees returned from Iran and Internally Displaced People (IDPs) from Helmand and Farah have also put pressure on Government services. There is concern within communities living in border areas that weak governance and administrative corruption may facilitate AGEs narcotics trade and other illegal activities in border areas.

#### **IV. The Road Map for Peace**

- **Strengthen social and economic development**

Participants stressed repeatedly the urgent need for development assistance in order to reinforce stability in Nimroz . Communities voiced disappointment at what they saw as “missed opportunities” for development in the last decade, as well as frustration that after billions of dollars have been spent on aid by the international community throughout Afghanistan, the people of Nimroz are still suffering from unemployment and poverty.

Residents of Nimroz also called on the Government to urgently resolve the recurrent water shortages in the province by implementing the irrigation infrastructure projects. This would also contribute to enhancing the welfare of the residents relying mainly on agriculture.

In addition, many also called for more adequate assistance for the IDPs seeking refuge in Nimroz from conflict in neighboring provinces. IDPs reportedly put an additional strain on local public services and on shared resources.

A teacher from Zaranj stated:

*“We have thousands of people coming from other provinces and they are not fully integrated into Zaranj’s population and increase the levels of unemployment. The Government must manage better the influx of refugees.”*

- **Promote good governance and act against corruption**

Participants consistently saw corruption and self-interest by provincial authorities as a major cause of social discontent and urged the Government to take immediate steps to resolve these issues.

An elder from Zaranj said:

*“The Government authorities appoint their own people based on their own interest, and pave the way for crisis. They are promoting conflict by not acting upon their social responsibilities.”*

Furthermore, a direct connection has been made between weak government due to corruption and nepotism, and insecurity.

A journalist said:

*“How can you have security when you have weak government? Appointments are made not on the basis of ability, but on who pays the highest bid. When someone is appointed, the first thing they do to recover their expenditure is to seek illegal incomes through bribes and dealing with drug traffickers.”*

Even those working within the provincial Government acknowledged the problem of corruption.

A government employee from Zaranj said:

*“We in Nimroz are suffering from the corruption that exists in most government departments. I think this is a huge problem and the Government must eliminate it, then all other [security] problems will be easier to resolve.”*

For many of those who participated in the consultations, the drugs trade was at the heart of corruption within the Government, and particularly within ANSF.

According to an elder from Zaranj:

*“The Government does not fulfill its role and the security forces are involved in drug trafficking. We often can’t disclose the true facts about this as we fear for our own safety.”*

- **Uphold the rule of law and address impunity.**

Communities called on the Government to address impunity, including of those involved in drug trade as well as other powerful figures. Impunity was seen as severely undermining the rule of law in Nimroz.

In the words of one tribal elder from Zaranj:

*“The drug traffickers, and the widespread corruption in the judiciary, are the main sources of conflict. The judiciary should be strengthened in order to control the drug traffickers as a measure to bring stability in the province.”*

According to participants, impunity and the absence of the rule of law are a root cause of conflict. Many complained that law is only enforced against the poor people, and the rest are “untouchable”. Instead of upholding the law, many stated that government officials, particularly ANSF and Afghan

National Police (ANP), were the main violators of the law. As a result, the formal justice system is widely distrusted.

A Shura member from Zaranj said:

*“People do not go to the official courts, but go instead to local shuras to resolve their disputes because widespread corruption exists in the judicial system.”*

Participants also urged for ending impunity for past crimes and grave human rights abuses as a means of building peace. One tribal elder and former district governor stated that impunity for past crimes was a major cause of current problems:

*“If you look back at the history of this county, major crimes and human rights abuses were committed by warlords. At one time, people were optimistic that these criminals would be convicted, but nothing happened. If there is no justice in society, there will definitely be conflict.”*

These sentiments were echoed by many participants, who seemed cynical that their expectations had not been matched by reality, and were not very optimistic for the future if the problems they had identified were ignored.

The Head of a Tribal Shura in Zaranj stated:

*“Where there is no meritocracy, no trials for human rights abusers and the peace council staff are not neutral or impartial, there is no path except towards crisis and conflict.”*

- **Strengthen the Peace and Reconciliation Process**

Participants made recommendations for strengthening the High Peace Council (HPC). Many called for a more inclusive, grass-roots peace process that focused on achieving practical results rather than being a theoretical discussion forum.

A community representative from Chakhansur district said:

*“The Peace Council should be composed of people from different ethnic and religious groups from throughout the province, and all those who work to bring peace should believe in peace.”*

Many participants were critical of the HPC, both at provincial and at national level. Some pointed out that there are many others, currently outside the Peace Council, who also have the capacity to work effectively

for peace, including members of the *Ulema Shura* and Provincial Peace Council members.

Even members of the Provincial Peace Council were critical of its work, with one member stating:

*"I don't see the progress towards peace by the Peace Council. They spent a lot of money uselessly."*

Some participants urged the peace process to engage communities at the lowest possible level, and complained that the Provincial Peace Council was not consulting widely enough about its activities.

According to one nurse working in a local clinic:

*"From my point of view, if local peace mechanisms work effectively, the whole process is strengthened."*

In summary, many felt that the success of the peace process was the responsibility of everyone, and should not be left to a selected few to decide on.

A local NGO employee stated:

*"I think peace cannot be achieved by only one part of society. Peace does not belong only to the elders or to peace council members."*

## **V. People's Recommendations**

Participants in the consultation process in Nimroz put forward the following recommendations with the view of addressing the particular concerns identified in the province.

### **Strengthen social and economic development**

- 1) Fight poverty and generate employment through properly targeted development projects.
- 2) Implement measures to mitigate the effects of seasonal drought, particularly the completion of the Kamal Khan Dam and Nahr-i-Lashkari canal rehabilitation projects.

### **Promote good governance and act against corruption**

- 1) Ensure a merit-based selection and appointment process for government officials.

- 2) Promote trust in government by ensuring that officials at all levels act with integrity.
- 3) Dismiss all government officials who are found guilty of corruption.

**Uphold the rule of law and address impunity**

- 1) End widespread impunity, particularly of those connected with the drug trade.
- 2) Robustly tackle corruption, abuse of power and lack of transparency in the criminal justice system.
- 3) Investigate and punish those responsible for past grave human rights abuses.

**Strengthen the Peace and Reconciliation process**

- 1) Broaden the peace and reconciliation to make it more fully inclusive of different tribal and religious groups.

Consult and engage with communities at the grass-roots level to strengthen the peace process.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Helmand Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial roadmap for peace represents a summary of the findings and issues raised in consultations carried out with communities in Helmand province. The consultations took the form of focus group discussions with the participation of 50 men and 25 women in total. Due to restricted access in Helmand owing to insecurity, the consultation activities were limited.

The consultations took place as part of phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace program (hereinafter the "People's Dialogue") initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult over 4,500 Afghan citizens with a view to develop 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

This local road map for peace intends to provide as comprehensive as possible an analysis of local drivers of conflict. It also strives to identify appropriate and actionable solutions to help build and sustain peace and stability in Helmand province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Helmand is located in the south-west of Afghanistan. It borders the provinces of Nimroz and Farah to the west, Kandahar to the east, Pakistan's Baluchistan to the south, and Uruzgan, Daikundi and Ghor to the north. Covering an area of 61,829 square kilometers, Helmand is the largest province in Afghanistan and has a diverse mix of ethnic groups. Helmand province is divided into 14 districts. The capital is Lashkar Gah, a thriving bazaar town.

At the time of the consultation people reported that the districts of Baghran and Deh Shu are under the control of Anti-Government Elements (AGEs). Road access to some districts such is problematic, which affects government service delivery. In all other districts a governmental presence has been reportedly maintained only in the district capitals. (Subsequent to the People's Dialogue consultations in Helmand other districts were threatened and captured by the Taliban.)<sup>195</sup> Helmand is beset by security, governance and development challenges.

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<sup>195</sup> Since the withdrawal of the international military forces from Afghanistan in 2014, the situation has deteriorated with Taliban expanding its operations and control. In Helmand in 2016 the Taliban made a number of attempts to take control of the provincial capital Lashkar Gah city and a key district of Sangin has been captured in 2017.

Afghanistan's longest river, the Helmand River, flows for over one thousand kilometres passing through a number of provinces - from Wardak through Bamyan, Daikundi, Uruzgan, Helmand and Nimroz, providing irrigation and fertile areas along the river banks. The overwhelming majority of Helmandis are Pashtuns; the main tribes are the Alizai, Barakzai, Noorzai, Ishaqzai, Alokozai, Popalzai, Kharuti, Taraki, Suleimankhel, Tokhi, Kakar, Niazi, Safian, Downtani, Hotak and Khogiani. There is a substantial number of Baluchis in Helmand province, particularly in the south. Other minority groups residing in Helmand include Hazaras, Tajiks and Sikhs.

Like Kandahar, Helmand is often referred to as the "breadbasket" of Afghanistan. Its economy is agriculture-based, with southern areas of the province relying primarily on the production of cotton, nuts, peas, pulses, maize, and wheat. The north is more renowned for its almond, grapes, and pomegranate orchards. Helmand is also the province with the highest level of opium cultivation in the country. After opium production, wheat is the next biggest crop. Opium remains a major source of income for many farmers, while a smaller number of entrepreneurs profit hugely further up the value chain. Animal husbandry and transport services comprise the bulk of other commercial activity. Helmand has suffered in the past from drought with severe consequences for farmers' livelihoods. There is a lack of adequate storage, refrigeration and market facilities for its agricultural output, especially fruits.

Politics in Helmand province is tribally-based and driven. Grassroots communities reportedly have considerable mistrust towards political parties given previous disappointing experiences and the belief that political leaders are motivated by personal interest. For this reason and due to the ongoing insecurity, political party activities in Helmand province have been muted. Helmand is strongly influenced by Pashtun tribal culture. Tribal elders are the key decision-makers in community councils (*jirgas*). Education fares poorly in Helmand, with an overall literacy rate of 5 per cent to 8 per cent among males, and 1 per cent among females. Only 6 per cent of children aged 6 to 13 are enrolled in school. Helmand's health facilities can best be described as basic, with only four hospitals (one provincial and three district hospitals) serving the entire province, along with 56 health centres and 425 health posts.

### III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict

#### Types of Conflict

Helmand is characterized by significant Taliban control of territory. For example, Baghran district is reportedly entirely under Taliban control, including the district capital. The district is considered safe in the sense that it is not contested and there are no ongoing military or terrorist operations. Residents are reportedly allowed to travel outside the district, to Kandahar and to Lashkar Gah, but may be interrogated by Taliban upon their return and are therefore reluctant to talk to outsiders. Hence, it is difficult to find out information from this district. . Neutral health and educational workers are presumed to operate in the district and are not bothered by the Taliban as long as they do not display pro-Government attitudes. There has been a reported fierce fighting in the disputed districts between Government forces and the Taliban, such as in the districts of Sangin and Musa Qaleh (at the time of the consultations) .<sup>196</sup> In general, people claimed that the Government hold the district capital and major roads while the Taliban dominate the countryside. In many villages a similar duality exists between daytime Government control and night time Taliban presence.<sup>197</sup>

In areas of Helmand province where the Taliban do not firmly control the territory their tactic has been destructive and anarchic: create havoc by hit-and-run attacks, by holding disputed territory for brief periods, by playing cat-and-mouse with the security forces and by contaminating land with IEDs when they withdraw. In September 2013 an ALP officer told media his unit had defused no less than 114 IEDs on a single day, left behind by the Taliban to render territory uninhabitable or punish villagers simply for allowing themselves to fall back under Government control.

At the time of the consultations, in 2013, Afghan security forces have been conducting military operations in the northern districts of Helmand, most notably in Sangin, Musa Qaleh, Nawzad, Wa Sher and Kajaki. Nonetheless

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<sup>196</sup> In 2017, Taliban took control of Sangin district.

<sup>197</sup> This summary of the security situation in Helmand reflects the situation during the consultations in 2013, however subsequently the security has deteriorated in Helmand following the withdrawal of the international military forces in December 2014, with attempted Taliban offensives to take control of Lashkar Gah in 2016. Consequently, the frequency and intensity of armed engagements with Afghan national security forces increased significantly resulting in civilian casualties, displacement, closure of education and health-care facilities.

they have largely failed to root out all the insurgents from the affected areas, which some analysts say is due to poor coordination between security forces stationed along the border areas of Helmand, Uruzgan and Kandahar. As a result, AGEs withdrawing from one district are safe as soon as they cross into a neighbouring province. The operations have also resulted in significant civilian casualties and the displacement of thousands of families. Families trying to return to their villages have often found mines and IEDs placed in or around their residences and fields, hindering their safe return. AGE resilience in these northern areas is due to their need to protect mobile opium processing factories. Afghan security forces are challenged by the security transition in combination with severe limitations in several operational areas: Air to ground attack in support of ground forces, medical evacuation of wounded, medical support, intelligence/surveillance and counter-IED. Attrition of security personnel is a significant challenge.

With the withdrawal of international military forces from Afghanistan in 2014, Afghan security forces and AGEs are now fighting each other with more primitive, similar weapons, which prolongs and intensifies many battles. The impact of conflict on civilians is catastrophic, however there is limited information on civilian casualties due to the remoteness and inaccessibility of the conflict areas.

In a further indicator of the worsening situation in Helmand, UNHCR figures in 2013 showed that the number of IDPs in Afghanistan's southern region increased by 44 per cent: an additional 56,586 persons became displaced in 2013, pushing the total number of IDPs to 183,880. The south thus had more IDPs than any other region in Afghanistan at the end of 2013. Most IDPs originate from the districts of Naw Zad, Musa Qaleh, Kajaki and Sangin in northern Helmand.<sup>198</sup>

Furthermore, humanitarian actors confirmed that delivering aid in Helmand province was becoming increasingly difficult because security forces at checkpoints outside Lashkar Gah imposed expensive escorts on aid convoys

Ideology and insurgency are only one aspect of the conflict in Helmand. However, Helmand residents believed that the main cause and actors of

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<sup>198</sup> With the deteriorating security situation and the continued intense ground fighting between Anti-Government Elements and Afghan national security forces the displacement levels significantly increased further.

violence in Helmand is the “poppy mafia”, as a resident of Sangin district called it:

*“Sangin is of strategic importance to AGEs and their drug-related activities. Other provinces even transfer their poppy crop to Helmand for onward smuggling because Helmand provides such an enabling environment. Certain groups in the Government want to create and maintain insecurity to keep the profitable cultivation of poppy going. In Sangin we have massive amounts of land usable for cultivation of any agricultural crop, but unfortunately the Government does not support us, so most of farmers drift towards poppy cultivation. AGEs use the income from poppy to fund their insurgency.”*

#### **Drivers of Conflict:**

Participants identified ideology but also the economic benefits, which in Helmand originates from drug cultivation and trade, as the main drivers of conflict in the province. In addition people also pointed to, *“low quality of education, joblessness, lack of fundamental services such as electricity and water for agricultural activities, lack of good governance”* (in the words of a local council member) , as well as nepotism, bribery and embezzlement.

An employee of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) explained:

*“The long border with Pakistan is a main reason of insecurity in this province. Through this border insurgents infiltrate into Helmand and fight with the Afghan Government. Cultivation of poppy is another reason of insecurity. Illiteracy and lack of understanding of Islamic beliefs – for which unscrupulous Islamic schools in Pakistan are mostly responsible – also contribute to sustaining the insurgency in this province.”*

A member of a local council echoed the observation that a diligent interpretation of Islam would promote and protect – not assault – peace, mutual respect and human dignity. He pointed out that people’s frustration and readiness to become violent was also fuelled by a lack of basic services.

People were generally of the opinion that the Taliban would remain a source of insecurity. One religious scholar was of the opinion that the Afghan Taliban receive support from better skilled foreign (especially Arab) jihadists, who were also particularly ruthless. He also claimed that internal

rivalries within the Afghan Government and power structures weakened the anti-Taliban forces and contributed further to Government inefficiency.

An educated worker in Lashkar Gah also said:

*“Illiteracy is one of main factors driving conflict and disputes in the province. The intentional interference of neighboring countries by supporting the Taliban has also caused civil war and destruction. At the moment I do not see any political will for peace in the country by the powerful players; with a will it would be easy to defeat the Taliban and other AGEs.”*

Participant further claimed that the reintegration of former combatants through the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) remains slow. At the time of the consultations with residents in Helmand, it has been reported that in 2013 there were approximately 450 “silent” reintegrees: these were AGEs who have renounced violence but had yet to surrender their weapons or officially join the APRP process. These AGEs have given a commitment to the Provincial Peace Council to cease their insurgent activities and return to their communities. By late 2013 the total number of insurgents in Helmand who had reconciled via the formal APRP process stood at 294. The majority of these were low-ranking “political” (national security) detainees released from prisons, as opposed to active Taliban fighters.

Additionally, participants saw tribal rivalry and personal conflicts as fuelling the armed conflict.

A member of the Provincial Peace Council said that the conflict in Helmand was so difficult to resolve because political and ideological disputes overlapped with tribal vendettas and personal conflicts and create a messy web of interlinked, violent conflict:

*“There are also tribal rivalries that have a negative impact on the society and the people of this country. Sometimes personal disputes escalate into military conflict. There is no moral limit to the methods used to fight the enemy: People recruit children to kill their rivals and the Taliban use children to carry out suicide bombings and other types of terrorist attacks.”*

People’s opinions of the international military forces were ambiguous: They were seen as drivers of both conflict and peace. People acknowledged and welcomed their role in fighting the insurgency, funding development

projects (especially infrastructure) and – particularly – training the Afghan security forces. However, they also noted that their fighting caused civilian casualties and suffering. Many respondents emphasized that despite international efforts the professionalism of Afghan security forces was still inadequate.

People reported consistently that nepotism, bribery and embezzlement had become a common, almost unavoidable practice in government institutions, which is by now deeply entrenched in Afghanistan and navigated quite skilfully by its population which erodes governance and the rule of law. It has been reported that as a result of the corruption and inefficiency of local Government and the judicial system, communities in some parts of Helmand have turned to Taliban “courts” for more expedient resolutions of family and community-level disputes.

#### **IV. The Road Map for Peace**

Throughout the focus group discussions people had a clear view of what needs to be done to achieve a sustainable peace in Helmand. People were wary of conflict and wanted peace, which they understood to mean not only an absence of war or a defeat of the Taliban, but also fairness, dignity and human rights.

A member of a peace council said:

*“People are very thirsty for justice. They must see this justice from their own Government.”*

Similarly, a civil society activist urged the Government to address the widening gap between the government and the people, implement the rule of law, respect and protect human rights, and establish a meritocracy.

People’s practical proposals for long-lasting peace fall under the following four interrelated themes:

##### ***Strengthening Governance, Security and Stability***

A single theme consistently reiterated by almost everybody in the consultations was that Afghans’ desperate desire for a government “of competent and righteous” people that would “end the rule of the gun”, in the words of the late Afghan intellectual Muhammad Qasim Akhgar. Unfortunately, government officials were frequently observed paying lip-service to these aims.

People called for the following issues to be addressed in order the legitimacy in the government apparatus to be restored: tackle the pervasive corruption, self-serving attitudes of power-holders, lack of skills among civil servants, abuse of authority and interference in government by local power brokers and warlords. People's disillusionment with the Government was sometimes compared in intensity to the nationwide frustration and disgust that helped bring the Taliban to power almost two decades earlier, however people said that this alarming historical parallel and devastating indictment of the status quo does not serve as a wakeup call. "Business as usual" continues, and in fact seems to be getting worse, in the words of one civil society activist:

*"The first and foremost reason for conflict is that distance that has been created between the Government and the people. Unfortunately, this distance is increasing year by year."*

People believed that governance will be strengthened if there is established culture of democracy, political honesty, civic pride and service to the community.

A civil society activist also stressed on the importance of freedom of expression and media in improving the Government :

*"Media in Helmand are not independent; all of them support the Government and they do not cover the real problems of ordinary people. One tribe enjoys a powerful connection with the Government, but that tribe is not the voice of all Helmand people. Nobody can criticize and complain about the situation in Helmand, so it is not only the AGEs who are oppressing the people – even the Government is doing it. The citizens are passive and powerless because they do not know anything about the rights and role of media, about freedom of expression and about the value of civil society."*

People also called for strengthening the peace, reconciliation and reintegration process, as as many were critical of the ongoing related activities mainly because they doubted the sincerity of those who participated in the process. They called for inclusiveness and transparency of the peace process, acknowledging that competent, honest, influential leaders and decision-makers without blood on their hands could potentially play a positive, vital role in the peace process.

Participants complained that the Helmand's peace process is not driven by a popular grassroots uprising of citizens tired of the conflict, but is a top-down process often managed (and participated in) by people for whom the ongoing conflict is actually more profitable than peace. People also claimed that the persons leading peace processes were unskilled, non-transparent, lacked strategic vision, making the whole peace and reconciliation process ineffective.

A former civil servant said:

*"The Provincial Peace Council has its own limitations: The members are rarely able to travel to the insecure and remote districts of the province. To start with, they do not even have a travel budget to make these trips. In addition, people simply do not trust the Provincial Peace Council."*

A Provincial Council member remarked that the alleged deficiencies of the Provincial Peace Councils were a mere reflection of the general state of affairs in all government institutions:

*"Lack of transparency exists not only in the peace process; we find it in all government administration in Afghanistan."*

One university student said:

*"There are some people involved in the peace process who are actually extremists. They are not reliable guarantors of peace for the people of Helmand. Because of these people the peace process is slow, inadequate and unsatisfactory."*

### ***.Promoting Human Rights, the Rule of Law and Tackling Impunity***

People in Helmand stressed on the need of the Government to ensure respect and protection of human rights of all residents without discrimination. .

A member of a social council from Nad-e-Ali district demanded the following improvements for achieving democracy, peace and human dignity:

*"All mayors and governors must be elected directly through the people in free and fair elections. We must fight against corruption. People who are violating human rights must be detained, prosecuted and punished by fair courts of law. In the peace and reconciliation process the Government must take practical, not only*

*symbolic action. Also in the peace process we must make a distinction between some AGEs who genuinely want to return to civilian life and the pretenders who [participate in the peace process but] are still fighting against the Government.”*

People had a very strong concern about the lack of fairness and the rule of law currently paralyzing Afghan society and many institutions of the State.

A member of a religious council gave a thoughtful list of recommendations that can improve human rights and accountability:

*“Implement the rule of law; respect Afghan and international law; eliminate all kinds of discrimination against minorities; establish meritocracy; wide-ranging reform in all sectors, especially in Government and media because independent and credible media can help to create a culture of peace and reconciliation.”*

People showed particular disdain for Afghanistan’s judicial sector, alleging corruption and unfairness in the judiciary which negates the very essence of this branch of government. A Provincial Council member provided the following illustration:

*“I have seen a man imprisoned for years because of stealing one bicycle. By contrast, one murderer was freed. People cannot tolerate such corruption and injustice. Some of them will join the AGEs because of their frustration and disappointment with such arbitrariness. If the Government would create jobs for the people, cultivation of poppy would vanish and the insurgency would fade away. There are allegations against some district governors yet they are still in their official posts and the Government has ignored their corruption. There are strong forces in our system who want to keep alive this culture of impunity.”*

Even mid-level government officials were said to move amounts of bribes that are enormous in relation to legitimate salaries, particularly in Helmand province, whose economy is agriculture-based and primitive.

The absence of strong and professional judicial and law-enforcement institutions undermines seriously human rights and the rule of law and security.

People urged the Government to address impunity for past and current crimes. Participants pointed out that Afghanistan’s rampant impunity for crimes of any type had two major negative consequences: it has created a

deep rift between people and the Government, and in some cases triggered acts of personal revenge by victims who felt they could not rely on state institutions any more to deliver justice.

### ***Realising Social and Economic Development***

Throughout the consultation process, people universally believed tangible progress in economic and social development was crucial to establishing sustainable peace in Helmand province and recommended that efforts are focused on: strengthening education, improving healthcare, creating employment opportunities and ensuring equitable access to development. However they also stressed on the need for better accountability for the use of development aid.

A member of a religious council warned that development aid was a mixed blessing, particularly in a setting like Afghanistan where huge amounts of money had poured into a country with weak governance and almost no rule of law:

*“The flood of international aid into this province created anarchy because there are people who have no political culture and lack the capability to use big amounts of money in ways that are useful to the community.”*

A representative of a juvenile council complained:

*“We lack of good leadership, monitoring and evaluation in our province. International organizations have spent hundreds of millions of dollars, yet people have not observed any changes in their life. We do not even know what concepts like ‘transparency’ and ‘accountability’ mean. After three decades war they people need to feel and experience development and improvement in their communities.”*

A resident of Nad-e-Ali claimed that it was lack of state support and poverty that drove farmers to support the narco-insurgency. However in addition to these factors, it should be noted that poppy cultivation yields far higher profits than any other crop, which may well make this a temptation :

*“People need to cultivate poppy because the Government is not supporting agriculture in this province. For example, our district would be ideal for cultivating cotton of high quality, but unfortunately the Government pays no attention. It does not buy our products, so what should we do? Farmers are under financial*

*pressure. Water for irrigation is scarce and expensive. Most of farmers cannot pay that money if they only cultivate legitimate crops.”*

Participants also criticized that development initiatives focused mostly on cities, but neglected rural areas. People claimed that development activities were beset by the same problems that plagued the Government as a whole.

A resident of Nad-e-Ali district complained:

*“Our district is only 12 kilometers from the provincial capital. Yet we have no proper schools and facilities for students and teachers. Sometimes we have teachers and schools, but there are no students, so the teachers who are taking their salary do not actually work. The Department of Education is drowning in corruption.”*

A member of a social council elaborated on the corruption and nepotism affecting development projects and governmental resource administration:

*“When any delegate is sent out by his head office for monitoring, evaluation or control purposes he will be bribed and will then report back that everything is perfect. Employment and other opportunities are given to incompetent people. Members of parliament and provincial governors always try to install their own people in official positions. Jobs are sold. When somebody has paid for a position the first thing he or she does is to compensate, by any means, the expense he or she made. We have recently noticed frequent dismissals and appointments of district governors. If a district governor is successful in carrying out his duty, why he is changed? If he is not, why he is appointed to another position or in another district...?”*

A former government employee, who had occupied a mid-level post, echoed this frustration providing an example of nepotism of his personal experience:

*“In Government, those who do their job are not praised and the ones who commit mistakes are not punished. I have a bachelor’s degree, yet I was dismissed from my position and replaced with someone who is illiterate but with close relations to influential people.”*

### ***Addressing Actors and Spoilers of Peace***

Participants claimed that there was little support for the Taliban. One person described that citizens could not trust the Taliban because they behaved brutally and erratically, without uniform standards and norms on which people could rely. Some people regarded the Taliban as opportunistic drug dealers and condemned them as being unprincipled criminals whose only belief was in money and who regarded everything as a commodity, including their recruits.

A civil society activist said he had heard the following report from the Taliban-controlled district of Baghran:

*"[Insurgents] established a committee to encourage people to join Taliban. They pay an amount of 20.000 Pakistani rupees [USD 200] to those who give them an AK-47 and 700.000 [USD 7.000] for a vehicle of the type used by Afghan National Police (ANP) rangers. In Helmand province 62 Taliban joined the peace process, but later we came to know that it had all been just for show."*

People's opinions on who could further peace and rule of law in Helmand were divided. There was general recognition that customary law and its institutions (*shuras*, tribal elders) resolved community-level disputes more efficiently than secular judicial institutions. However, people readily acknowledged that the time for archaic, inhumane punishments by customary law bodies was over, particularly if women or children were discriminated or harmed. As participants were of the opinion that the Provincial Peace Councils and official "shows" of reconciliation were not trustworthy, they looked for alternatives.

A secondary school headmistress suggested:

*"There are people who can play a positive role in mediating between pro-Government and anti-Government forces. Members of parliament, members of the Provincial Council and tribal elders have the capacity to work on the peace process, and other types of disputes in society."*

Many people were of the opinion that no peace could be achieved without Pakistani cooperation. Despite ethnic bonds, most people had an extremely negative opinion of Pakistan and the perceived destructive role it played in Afghanistan.

## **V. People's Recommendations:**

During the consultations, participants put forward the following recommendations with the view of bringing sustainable peace in Helmand and Afghanistan: .

### **Strengthening Governance, Security and Stability:**

- 1) Urgently enforce acceptable standards of integrity, accountability, professionalism, transparency and honesty in all sectors of government, at all levels, and tackle corruption and nepotism in order to address the current catastrophic loss of trust by the population in its Government.
- 2) All policies and programmes should have a holistic approach of security (human security).
- 3) Increase dialogue between all state institutions, democratic counter-forces (e.g. civil society organizations and independent media) and ordinary citizens to build trust, increase mutual understanding and cooperate in suitable thematic areas.

### **Promote human rights, rule of law and tackle impunity:**

- 1) End widespread impunity, particularly for grave human rights violations and serious abuse of power.
- 2) Further build awareness of human rights providing a deeper understanding of the concept, content, benefits and realization of human rights.
- 3) Create and support independent, high-quality, professional, critical media and use them to reach, inform and educate both pro-Government and anti-Government populations.
- 4) Seek allies among traditional and religious figures of respect to spread messages of human rights, justice, fairness and non-discrimination.
- 5) Immediately and robustly tackle corruption, abuse and lack of transparency in the justice (particularly criminal justice) system (including the prison and detention system).

### **Strengthen social and economic development:**

- 1) Discourage and eliminate the destructive, unsustainable, drug-based economy.
- 2) Fight poverty, chiefly by generating equitable and fair employment opportunities.

- 3) Recognize and address the development needs of rural communities.
- 4) Ensure transparency and accountability, and equality in delivering aid.

**Support inclusiveness of the peace and reconciliation process:**

- 1) Urgently reform the current peace and reconciliation activities to make them more effective; reform or disband structures that deliver inadequate results.
- 2) Support civil society to bridge the gap of trust between the Government and people.

Tackle negative influence of spoilers of the peace and reconciliation process, including vetting of people leading the peace process as well as rejection of any amnesties for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace  
Kandahar Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial roadmap for peace represents a summary of findings and issues raised during consultations with Afghan citizens residing in Kandahar province. The consultations were comprised of focus group discussions, individual interviews and surveys of opinions, and the participants represented diverse social, educational and political backgrounds. Seven focus group discussions with 85 men and 48 women took place. Survey questionnaires were submitted by 19 men and 33 women. Most of the persons interviewed were educated, employed and lived in an urban setting. Approximately one half was government-employed, the other worked in civil society organizations or other sectors.

The consultations took place as part of phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace program (hereinafter the "People's Dialogue") initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult over 4,500 Afghan citizens with a view to develop 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

However, some obstacles were faced in conducting the People's Dialogue sessions in Kandahar, for example questionnaires distributed to Afghan citizens often contained answers or phrases that were similar or even identical, suggesting that persons worked in groups to produce consensual replies, or that some persons followed the opinions and instructions of "leaders" in completing the questionnaires. The high number of women participants (particularly in the individual surveys) was unusual, but deliberate in order to promote female participation.

This local road map for peace intends to provide as comprehensive as possible an analysis of local drivers of conflict. It also strives to identify appropriate and actionable solutions to help build and sustain peace and stability in Kandahar province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Kandahar is bordered by the provinces of Zabul to the east, Helmand to the west, Uruzgan to the north and the Pakistani province of Baluchistan to the south. Kandahar Province has 17 rural and – since January 2014 – 15 urban districts. Kandahar city is Afghanistan's second largest city and is the region's capital. Three major river systems cross Kandahar province: the Arghandab, the Tarnak and the Arghistan, all tributaries of the Helmand River. These river systems support most of Kandahar's agriculture. In the

south of the province lies the Registan Desert. The north of the province is dominated by the mountainous terrain typical of much of Afghanistan.

The estimated population of Kandahar province is about 1,057,000, but could be twice as much due to unregistered settlements and internal migration throughout the province. Majority of the population (60 per cent) reside in rural districts. The overwhelming majority of Kandaharis are Pashtun from one of the five main Durrani tribes: Popalzai, Alokozai, Barakzai (Mohammadzai and Asakzai), Alizai and Noorzai. There is also a minority presence of Ghilji tribes, including Tokhi, Hotak, Kakar, Teraki, Sulemankhil, and Mohmand. The Hazara (Shi'a) and Hindus form small minorities in Kandahar city. Thousands of nomad (Kuchi) families move through Kandahar province on seasonal migrations from the highlands.

One of the primary reasons why Kandahar province is of such strategic importance is its geographic location, making it a hub for trade and transit on the major routes to/from Pakistan, Iran and the cities of Herat and Kabul. The National Ring Road (Highway 1) passes through Kandahar city. Highway 4 connects Kandahar city with the Pakistani border at Spin Boldak. The considerable wealth of some landowners and businessmen can be attributed to involvement in the drugs trade and other smuggling activities. Kandahar province is famous for its agricultural produce and (together with neighbouring Helmand province) is often referred to as the "breadbasket" of Afghanistan. However, decades of armed conflict and political instability have had a detrimental impact on the local economy. This has particularly affected the irrigation systems that provided water for what was a highly productive agricultural sector.

Tribal elders and religious scholars (*Ulema*) continue to exert considerable social and political influence across the southern region. All districts in the province have a tribal council (*shura*), which plays a crucial coordination role vis-à-vis district authorities and in the resolution of local disputes. The influence of tribal elders has made them vulnerable to assassination by insurgents and other actors whose interests may be threatened by their influence. Tribal relations however are extremely complex and fluid. While there have been no significant tribal conflicts in the province, inter-tribal rivalry exists, particularly over political and business interests at the elite level. Tribal affiliations still influence access to political power and economic opportunities.

Kandahar's Provincial Peace Committee (PPC) was established in 2010 and has been conducting regular outreach meetings and field visits to the

districts. Tribal elders and *Ulema* have been important facilitators of communications between PPC and insurgent commanders in Kandahar province and those sheltering in the bordering towns like Chaman and Quetta in Pakistan. As at 24 September 2013, the total number of insurgents reintegrated under the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme in Kandahar province was only 152. The Commander Incentive Programme seeks to encourage insurgent commanders who have joined the APRP programme to convince other insurgent commanders to follow their example. The Peace Advocates initiative undertakes grass roots public outreach to persuade insurgents to join the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Process (APRP). Women's participation in peace and reconciliation processes (and political life) has largely been symbolic in the province. Political parties exist but do not have a prominent role in public life at the provincial level where traditional forms of social and political identification such as the tribe are still dominant.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

#### **Types of Conflict**

People in Kandahar generally identified three types of conflict, not limited to military warfare: Firstly, localized military fights over territory and influence, conducted between Afghan security forces (supported by the NATO-International Security Assistance Force /ISAF) on one side and the Taliban on another, but often marked by shifting allegiances of local actors involved. According to the participant ideology does not always play a decisive role; but also power straggle or financial gain is an equally important motivation for people to engage in the conflict. Secondly, the insurgency comprised reportedly of brainwashed, young, badly trained fighters with ideological obsessions who join the rural battles described above, but also commit sheer acts of terror that bring them no material benefit, territorial gain or political influence. Thirdly, political conflict between current and aspiring power-holders, all of whom are keen to gain or expand power and wealth. Citizens were critical of the Government for failing to protect them from these actors who reportedly acted and pursued their aims with impunity and disregard to the civilian population.

*“Our politicians say one thing to people, but do something else.”*

One woman from Kandahar further expressed her triple predicament of exasperation and exhaustion from the conflict:

*“We are tired of conflict. We just want peace and security. We neither know who these people even are that work against peace, nor why they do it.”*

Some people stated that there had been great optimism in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2003, and that the country made a lot of progress in these three years. Thereafter, both the international military forces (the NATO-led ISAF) and the Taliban increased military operations, which led to greater insecurity and mounting casualties. People generally identified the Taliban-led insurgency as a major threat to peace and stability in Kandahar province. People explained that the Taliban have a more political, even constructive (at least in their own perception) *modus operandi* in parts of Kandahar, their birthplace: to re-take power by building relationships with minor strongmen and infiltrating government institutions and local power structures.

A humanitarian official with good knowledge of the ever-changing security situation in all districts of Kandahar province stated in early 2014 that with the drawdown of ISAF there was an increasing pressure on rural populations: without ISAF high-tech support and equipment, the Afghan security forces and insurgents were engaged in prolonged battles, which led to an increasing amount of territory becoming contested between both sides affecting the civilian population. Groups in power would hold ever-smaller areas and persons travelling any distance faced extremely challenging situation having to navigate through an increasingly fragmented territory with more and more local players where conditions changed often and unpredictably.

In their questionnaires, respondents subscribed almost unanimously to a holistic definition of “peace” that included absence of war, justice, non-discrimination and equal access to services.

### **Drivers of Conflict**

Although people were aware of the problems in Kandahar driving the conflict, many insisted that all of Afghanistan’s problems were to blame on foreigners. Afghanistan’s neighbouring countries were listed as the main cause of war and insecurity. A majority of people believed that Afghanistan’s neighbouring countries were the main cause of continuation of war and that disenfranchisement caused by injustice and corruption within Government contributed to insecurity. When asked what caused discontent among the population, participants stated the following reasons:

“corrupt and unqualified government authorities”, “Taliban and armed opposition groups” and “warlords and local commanders”.

People were generally of the opinion that the Taliban would remain a source of insecurity, thereby dismissing frequent confident claims by the Government that it was on the verge of defeating an insurgency that was on its last legs.

A sizeable number of participants recognized that the Afghan Local Police (ALP) made a positive contribution to local, rural security. However, people generally seemed to regard the ALP as the most neglected and unprofessional of the three major security forces (Afghan National Army/ANA, Afghan National Police/ANP and ALP), as a few persons claimed that the ALP were often untrained and unequipped; recommending further training (with international assistance and oversight) for all of them.. At the time of the People’s Dialogue, the ALP was deployed to ten rural districts in Kandahar province.

International military forces were seen as drivers of both conflict and security. People acknowledged and welcomed their role in fighting the insurgency, funding development projects and – particularly – training the Afghan security forces. However, they also noted that in their military operations they caused civilian casualties and suffering. Many Kandaharis noted that despite international efforts the professionalism of Afghan security forces was still inadequate. Some people voiced frustration that ultimately the international military forces were not in Afghanistan on a selfless mission to help the Afghan people, but chiefly to safeguard their own national security and other interests.

Consistently people reported that nepotism, bribery and embezzlement had become a common, almost unavoidable practice in government institutions which is turning people against the Government and contributes to the conflict.

#### **IV. The Road Map for Peace**

Throughout the focus group discussions people shared their views on what needs to be done to achieve peace in Kandahar and achieve their vision for a better future. The People’s Dialogue consultations in Kandahar revealed a significant difference of opinions between people from urban and rural areas , including with regard to preferable solutions. For example, rural men felt that development focused unfairly on Afghanistan’s bigger cities, and showed a strong preference for traditional and local institutions (which

often conveniently allowed them to recommend themselves as power brokers) while dismissing most modern and centralized institutions of state (including elections).

People's practical proposals for long-lasting peace in Kandahar fall under the following four interrelated themes:

### **Strengthening Governance, Security and Stability**

People generally believed that the key to establishing durable peace and stability lies in ensuring control and legitimacy of the local government institutions in Kandahar. Participants listed the following issues which they believed erode the legitimacy in the government apparatus and urged that measures are taken to be immediately addressed: widespread corruption, self-serving attitudes of power-holders, unskilled civil servants, abuse of authority and political interference in Government by local power brokers and warlords. As pointed out above, Afghans predominantly from rural districts seemed to have no faith in modern, national, secular institutions of government at all. They believed that the most powerful, relevant and suitable actors to bring positive change were strictly local, traditional players with strong religious – but no democratic – credentials. Interestingly, some of these suggestions came from women, who have traditionally experienced discrimination from these same conservative forces. When asked when Kandahar province last experienced security, most answers (44 per cent) similarly conjured images of a glorious past and selected the late monarchy of the 1970s, whilst 24 per cent stated that there had never been security, 13 per cent believed there was security currently.

The Afghan Government was identified by participants as the player most “useful for bringing peace in Afghanistan”. Many people also acknowledged that, in principle, elections were a suitable tool for bringing a responsible government to power, and that the technical procedures and electoral rules were good enough. However, most were disillusioned about the electoral process bringing change in the current climate as they argued that the current class of politicians would dominate and manipulate the elections, would grab power once again, and prevent any honest, skilled politicians from achieving much progress.

A man from Kandahar city criticised the Afghan electoral process and its aftermath:

*“People get elected because they buy votes. Thus, their first priority once in office is to make as much money as possible [to win back their expenses]. Only when this is achieved they might think about working for the citizens.”*

Despite widespread scepticism of elections, some people advocated a rollback of appointments in government and said that persons such as provincial governors, district governors and mayors should be elected instead.

Participants called for strengthening the peace process and ensuring that it is led by competent, honest, influential leaders and decision-makers without blood on their hands.

People were particularly critical of the Provincial Peace Councils (PPC) and stated that they were dissatisfied with PPC’s activities. Many saw the PPC as yet another institution used (or even created) to preserve their members’ personal interests rather than to promote peace. PPC members were labelled ineffective, corruptible and duplicitous. PPC activities were even accused of actually contributing to insecurity because they allowed Taliban fighters to emerge from hiding and “infiltrate districts and villages.” Many persons interviewed strongly criticised the reconciliation efforts made by the PPCs, claiming:

*“The ongoing demobilization and reintegration of Taliban fighters is not serious. The public parading and welcoming of former Taliban back into society by district or provincial authorities is just for show. Many insurgents regard it as a joke: They sign up for the process, hand in a useless old gun, get some money, keep a low profile for a few months and then re-join the insurgency.”*

A well-educated Afghan man pointed out the double standards involved in punishing insurgents who had committed human rights abuses or other crimes:

*“The small fry among the insurgents and fighters are punished and thrown in prison. By contrast, the more senior but also far more guilty commanders are powerful and influential enough to negotiate a comfortable ‘retirement package’ for themselves, maybe a cushy job in Kabul, maybe a role as negotiator in the peace process.”*

Afghans’ views of Members of Parliament (MPs) were not particularly positive either. Only 40 per cent believed MPs elected from their areas

worked for peace, security and the promotion of human rights in Kandahar. Among respondent unaffiliated with the Government, dissatisfaction with both the PPC and with parliamentarians stood at almost 100 per cent.

### **Promoting Human Rights, the Rule of Law and Tackling Impunity**

An overwhelming majority (91 per cent) of the participants recognised that respect for human rights would contribute to peace.

Despite the fact that terrorism and military operations are a fact of daily life in Kandahar, most people interviewed had a very holistic idea of “security”, meaning not a mere absence of war, but universal education, good employment opportunities and economic developments – thus encompassing several key elements of human security, human rights and sustainable human development. One comment by an elder man from a rural district sums up how disillusioned many Afghans are with the status quo, an observation that was commonly shared among participants:

*“Is there any difference between Afghan security forces and the Taliban? They are both cruel. The Government exploits us during the day, the Taliban terrorize us at night. Neither side respects our rights.”*

Kandaharis appeared generally dissatisfied as they accused those in power of denying them their legitimate, fair and just legal entitlements: their human rights.

Not only participants from rural areas, but also educated urban inhabitants of Kandahar city expressed a permanent sense of fear arising from the actions of both sides to the conflict:

*“There is no difference between the Government’s and the Taliban’s potential for brutality. If you work against the Taliban, they will kill you. If you are too outspoken and critical of the Government, they will kill you, too.”*

Another rural resident elaborated:

*“The insurgents blindly plant IEDs. Yes they target Afghan security forces, but in reality most of the people killed are innocent civilians on their way home or to their farms. The insurgents force us to feed them, support them. Insurgents warn us not to tell the Government where they stay or live. When pro-Government forces demand us to tell them where the Taliban are we cannot say anything because we fear that the Taliban will kill us. For that the Government forces blame us and*

*accuse us of supporting the insurgency. This is a painful dilemma for us.”*

Furthermore people called for an end to the culture of impunity and corruption within the justice sector. Participants expressed dissatisfaction with the Afghanistan’s judicial sector and its inability to protect human rights and deliver justice. One man summed it up concisely:

*“Our judicial system is totally corrupt: The criminals are free and the innocent are in prison!”*

They were particularly critical of the criminal justice system, claiming that persons with the right amount of cash can buy themselves out of jail, no matter how serious their offence.

A tribal elder from a district in the west of Kandahar province said:

*“Law and order are in the hands of law-breakers!”*

Participants further said that widespread impunity for past and current crimes has created a deep rift between people and the Government, and has often led to acts of revenge as affected people took matters in their own hands in the absence of credible institutions to deliver justice.

People said that the most common manifestation of “tribal” conflicts was not armed clashes between small and localized militias like those seen in other parts of Afghanistan, but illegal and arbitrary detention of their enemies by people who wanted to settle old scores or engage in personal vendettas.

A policeman claimed:

*“I was put in prison because of a dispute with a land owner who is well-connected to senior politicians. He even boasted that he was powerful enough to get me arrested. I bought some land from him and paid for it. After that he claimed the land still belonged to him and demanded that I pay a second time. When we met on the disputed piece of land to discuss the situation I was indeed arrested on completely fabricated charges of insulting and attacking a police officer.”*

Discussions with both police officers and ordinary citizens revealed numerous hints of mutual distrust. The police complained that ordinary people did not support police efforts to investigate crimes, ridicule members of the security forces and showed no empathy for those killed in the line of duty. Citizens pointed towards a pervasive, constant fear – not

necessarily fear of the security forces – and very real concerns (this possibility was validated by the police) that security forces were infiltrated by anti-Government extremists who could take revenge on anyone cooperating with the security forces.

### ***Realising Social and Economic Development***

Throughout the People’s Dialogue, people universally acknowledged that a tangible progress in economic and social development was crucial to establishing sustainable peace in Kandahar province. They urged for development efforts to be undertaken in the following areas: improving education and healthcare, creating employment opportunities and ensuring equitable access to development. People acknowledged that the past decade had brought Afghanistan considerable progress in infrastructure, healthcare, and above all in education, particularly for girls and women. A few participants also praised the diversity and freedom of Afghan media, as well as advances in women’s rights.

A female university teacher from Kandahar explained why education was so vital to security:

*“Education is the key to security. Educated people do not fight! Look at us here in this room – we don’t quarrel! Educated husbands who have good, well-paid jobs won’t beat their wives.”*

Many wanted more and better roads, schools and clinics, confirming that there is still a need for further investment in new projects, and in sustaining the ones already started. Lastly, Kandaharis asserted that development would not only improve the lives of individual beneficiaries, but would also make the whole country more stable, secure and peaceful. Nonetheless, the ineffectiveness of the foreign aid was questioned. One female participant said:

*“Afghanistan has received an enormous amount of foreign aid in the past 12 years. How come it is still so poor?”*

Participants stressed the need for development aid to be equally divided between urban and rural areas and to tackle corruption in the development programmes. They also criticised the fact that development activities focused too much on cities, neglected rural areas, and that projects were either too short-term or turned out to be unsustainable. People also complained that development activities and poverty eradication programmes were affected by corruption.

A group of tribal elders from rural districts in Kandahar gave an example of the negative consequences of the Government doing too little to promote equitable employment opportunities:

*“As soon as people are in power they selfishly give all the jobs in their orbit to their own relatives. This alienates citizens. In rural areas unemployment is particularly severe. Young men who are jobless and see how corrupt the Government is become easy prey for Taliban recruiters, who exploit their frustration and lure them with a regular salary and perhaps even a motorbike.”*

In order to address corruption in the development and poverty eradication sectors, some people suggested that more realistic salaries are paid to government employees, particularly members of the security forces, as they warned otherwise office-holders would resort even more readily to corruption or worse to supplement their meagre income.

### **Addressing Actors and Spoilers of Peace**

Throughout the People’s Dialogue, participants consistently emphasized that a wider participation of traditionally voiceless people – including women, youth, and well-educated but politically powerless technocrats – was central to the success of development, peace and reconciliation processes. People believed that increased participation of civil society, women and traditionally marginalized segments of society was crucial to inclusivity and local ownership of such processes.

A group of female civil society activists stated:

*“The Government regards civil society as the ‘enemy’. This is because honest civil society activists are unwilling to partner with government officials in their corrupt, mutually profitable schemes. By contrast, civil society has the power to expose government misconduct, mobilize public protest and publicly shame officials who display intolerable conduct.”*

Another woman explained the perceived difference between government and civil society institutions:

*“All government decisions these days are taken with the benefit of the office-holder or his institution in mind. Non-governmental organizations work for the people. Government officials only work for money.”*

Instead of being allowed to fulfil its role of being “the bridge between the Government and the citizens”, civil society claimed it was being systematically excluded by the Government from decision-making processes, even in technical areas where civil society would have valuable expertise to contribute (e.g. in social and humanitarian affairs). However, civil society activists were constructive in their approach and favoring progressively building trust between the Government and civil society:

*“Part of this mistrust exists because the Government is simply unfamiliar with the role and tasks of non-governmental actors in a democratic society. We should increase communication, get to know each other and build constructive relationships.”*

A civil society activist acknowledged the importance to engage with the Government:

*“There are also competent, honest, capable people in the Government. We must identify them, encourage them, cooperate with them. But they are a small minority.”*

Participants emphasized the need to fight gender discrimination and empower women in order to enable them to take part in political processes, including the peace process. When asked if “conditions [were] ready for women’s participation in public affairs/life,” the percentage of positive and negative answers was almost equal (47 per cent yes, 53 per cent no). Many women said that what really kept them at home was a much more fundamental and basic problem, namely discrimination and a lack of security. This prevented many women from even making the first steps towards a later contribution to civic life, namely going to school or taking employment.

Well-educated women were keen to participate in Afghan society, were convinced that they could make a positive contribution and often displayed an unbroken, fighting spirit. One said:

*“Why should we women cover up completely? Nothing in Islam says that I must wear a burka. But the security situation is so bad that I feel compelled to hide myself, and that situation plays into the hands of those who want to restrict women’s freedom.”*

A female schoolteacher echoed the widespread frustration of position of women in Afghan society:

*“Decades of conflict have made Afghanistan ever more male-dominated. Even Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) took advice from his wife, sister and mother. Why won’t our men and rulers today do the same?”*

Women also pointed out that statistics showing the number of women in Government were misleading: most of the women counted held government jobs (chiefly teaching), but hardly any of them were in political leadership positions.

Fighting gender discrimination and empowering women was a controversial topic, even in the comparatively urban and refined environment of Kandahar city. In mixed focus group discussions, a man claimed that education and economic opportunities should be offered first to men because they had a responsibility to be breadwinners in their families, and because uneducated and unemployed men were inclined to join the Taliban. This argument was countered as another female participant said that dissatisfied and frustrated women would lead to tensions in the household and, by extension, instability in the whole community.

Regarding the negotiations with the Taliban, people did not show much enthusiasm but realized that in the absence of a military defeat of the insurgency talks would be unavoidable, whether they liked it or not. One woman said:

*“The conflict in Afghanistan has gone on for too long. We cannot ignore the Taliban. The Government should talk to them.”*

People were not generally opposed to a continued presence of foreign military forces in Afghanistan, but they suggested that both the Afghan Government and foreign actors should make a better effort to inform people in a full and transparent manner:

*“When ISAF came to Afghanistan we did not know why. Now they are leaving and again we don’t know why.”*

A well-educated civil society representative from Kandahar had a better understanding of the situation, but this did not diminish the ambiguity and frustration he felt:

*“The Afghan people trust neither the Taliban nor the Government. Only the internationals (military and civilians) in Afghanistan have a reputation for integrity. But we are disappointed at the international community, because we see no positive change after the quick progress*

*during the optimistic and easy years of 2001, 2002 and 2003. Maybe people were unrealistic and expected miracles, but there is no doubt they feel that the international community has not fulfilled their expectations.”*

Furthermore, many people were of the opinion that no peace could be achieved without Pakistan’s cooperation. Despite ethnic bonds, most people had an extremely negative opinion of Pakistan and the alleged it played a destructive role in Afghanistan. One tribal elder named as an example Pakistan’s 2013 closure of madrassas, which reportedly forced “thousands of indoctrinated and radicalized students” across the border into Afghanistan. A few people actually distinguished between “good” (Afghan) Taliban who were described as potentially reasonable, and “bad” (Pakistani) Taliban who were labelled foreign fundamentalists with malicious and destructive attitudes. People called on the USA and the international community to “make Pakistan stop interfering in Afghanistan.” Many people also criticized Iran’s interference in Afghanistan despite that country’s minimal influence in Kandahar (as opposed to the provinces of Herat or Nimroz). Some believed that “neither Iran nor Pakistan were interested in a stable Afghanistan.” Some people further believed that Afghanistan should be left alone so Afghans could solve their own problems without foreign intervention.

#### **V. People’s Recommendations**

Kandaharis who took part in the People’s Dialogue offered the following recommendations with the view of achieving sustainable peace in Kandahar province.

#### **Strengthening Governance, Security and Stability**

- 1) Urgently enforce adequate standards of integrity, accountability, professionalism, transparency and honesty in all sectors of government, at all levels, to address the current catastrophic loss of trust by the population in its Government.
- 2) Continue enhancing the professionalism of Afghan security forces (including disbanding, abolishing and punishing institutions, units or individuals that are unreformable) to make them more effective against the insurgency and ensure their respect for human rights and humanitarian law.
- 3) Adopt a holistic concept of security in all policies and programmes.

- 4) Enhance dialogue between all state institutions, civil society organizations and independent media, and ordinary citizens in order to build trust, and enable cooperation in suitable thematic areas.

#### **Promote human rights, rule of law and tackle impunity**

- 5) Ensure human rights are respected and protected across the province and in Afghanistan.
- 6) End widespread impunity, particularly for grave human rights violations and serious abuse of power.
- 7) Further build awareness of human rights towards a deeper understanding of the concept, content, benefits and realization of human rights.
- 6) Strengthen the rule of law reform: immediately and robustly tackle corruption, abuse and lack of transparency in the justice system (including the prison and detention system).

#### **Strengthen social and economic development**

- 8) Use internationally recognized human rights-based approaches in all development planning, implementation and evaluation.
- 9) Continue and increase investment in education, particularly for girls, but also including literacy training for adults.
- 10) Fight poverty, chiefly by generating equitable and fair employment opportunities.
- 11) Recognize and equally address the development needs of rural communities without discrimination.
- 5) Address corruption within the development and poverty eradication projects; strengthen transparency and accountability of development aid.

#### **Support inclusiveness of the peace and reconciliation process**

- 12) Urgently reform the current peace and reconciliation activities to make them more effective; reform or disband structures that deliver inadequate results.
- 13) Strengthen mechanisms to meaningfully involve and obtain views of traditionally marginalized groups including women and youth; incorporate these views into plans for achieving long-lasting peace.

- 14) Address gender discrimination and improve conditions for women to encourage and support women participation in public life and political process such as the peace and reconciliation process.
- 15) Support civil society to bridge the gap of trust between the Government and people. Respect and promote the role of civil society in improving governance.

Tackle negative influence of spoilers of the peace and reconciliation process, including vetting of people leading the peace process as well as rejection of any amnesties for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Zabul Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial roadmap for peace is a summary of the findings of consultations carried out in Zabul Province. The consultations were comprised of a series of focus-group discussions that involved people from throughout the province, including a variety of participants - local residents, tribal elders, religious leaders and civil society activists.

The consultations took place as part of Phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace program (hereinafter the "People's Dialogue") initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult over 4,500 Afghan citizens with a view to develop 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Zabul is among the most remote and sparsely populated provinces of Afghanistan. The vast majority of the population are engaged in agricultural and livestock production activities, with many being subsistence farmers. Light industry is practically non-existent in Zabul. The province is largely undeveloped and cut off from public services although it is located on the main ring road between Kandahar and Kabul.

The population is predominantly Pashtun, of whom the vast majority are Ghiljis from the Tokhi and Hotak sub-tribe. Zabul is located on an important traditional seasonal migration route for nomads (Kuchis), and in winter approximately 50,000 Kuchis stay in the province.

Tribal *shuras* and religious leaders (*ulema*) are firm pillars of society in Zabul, influencing political, religious and social life of communities in the province. They have also traditionally played a role mediating local disputes, including disputes between grass roots communities and authorities.

Politics in Zabul province is tribally-based and driven and access to political power has traditionally been derived from tribal affiliations and land-holdings. As is the case elsewhere in the south, political party activities in the province are limited, especially in rural areas. In general, many people have a negative view of political parties, associating them with the turmoil of the decades of conflict, when much of the suffering was perceived as being inflicted by political parties/factions.

### III. Conflict Analysis: Drivers of Conflict

Participants identified the following factors contributing the armed conflict in Zabul: presence of Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) and infiltration of AGEs from Pakistan; poor governance and service delivery; lack of access to justice; lack of development and economic opportunities; and lack of access to quality education and schools.

AGEs still maintain a significant presence in the province as it is an important transit route for insurgents based in Pakistan who enter Afghanistan via Zabul and from there proceed to other provinces. Much of the support for AGEs in Zabul is premised on their adherence to Pashtunwali (Pashtun code) and the Hanafi Orthodox interpretation of Islam which is widely practiced by Pashtuns, as well as tribal and kinship connections. Generally, it is believed there is a smaller proportion of ideologically-motivated Taliban in Zabul. Foreigners are believed to be working alongside local Taliban in the province, mostly as trainers, and in this role are generally accepted by local communities.

The reported lack of support for the government in Zabul province, and particularly in the districts, was said to be mostly due to the overwhelming weakness of governance and service delivery. According to participants this weakness is due to a combination of factors, including limited financial resources, poor levels of skills and capacity amongst district officials, as well as insecurity. Reportedly, districts on the border with Pakistan are particularly vulnerable as government presence there is limited to district administrative centres. Difficulties in recruiting qualified staff for deployment in remote areas has also been a factor limiting government service delivery. For these reasons, many rural communities are largely unsupportive of the government citing the fact that they have not received any tangible benefits from it.

Economic factors have also been identified as a major conflict-driver, and in the absence of any alternative employment opportunities, many have turned to the Taliban in order to obtain a basic salary and means of economic livelihood.

One elder from Shari Safa district summarised the issue as follows:

*“Most of the people in the district are jobless, and the Government is not providing any employment opportunities. Because of this the Taliban is able to recruit the unemployed youth, providing them*

*with motorbikes and a salary. These benefits are not being provided by the government.”*

Also participants said that as a result of the widespread lack of an effective government presence, local communities have turned to parallel Taliban structures, particularly in order to access justice and to resolve disputes. As a result, in Zabul the vast majority of disputes – including even those involving serious crimes – are reportedly resolved through traditional mechanisms such as *marakas* (local shura). In many areas, it is allegedly common for the Taliban to play a role in resolving disputes. Participants further said that there is limited confidence in the formal justice sector, due to prevalent allegations that judges and prosecutors are highly corrupt.

The education sector in Zabul still faces major challenges due to the widespread closure of schools by AGEs, shortage of school buildings, furniture and infrastructure, shortage of stationary and lack of qualified/professional teachers. Education attainment levels are very low; the overall literacy rate in the province is 10 per cent and only 2 per cent for women.

Tribal elders from Naw Bahar and Shari Safa Districts complained of the lack of education opportunities in the province:

*“We are not satisfied with what we have been given by the central administration. There is no proper provision of education in our districts. In contrast, from other provinces the students are even qualifying for higher education overseas. But [in Zabul] we still face problems providing education for our children at primary and secondary school level.”*

#### **IV. The Road Map for Peace**

- ***Support Inclusiveness of the Peace and Reconciliation Process***

The consultations illustrated a widespread dissatisfaction among the communities with the way in which the peace and reconciliation process had been managed. It was felt that the people leading the peace process were not reaching out effectively to all sectors of society, including the Taliban, and therefore participants called for more confidence-building measures in order to persuade Taliban to cease fighting.

A mullah from Arghandab district expressed the view that:

*“If Taliban believe their life is safe and the Government will not arrest them, they will come and join the peace process.”*

A high school student also suggested:

*“The people and the Government should work together practically for peace. It should be explained to Talib brothers how they should put down their weapons and come over to the Government. The only reason Taliban keep fighting is that there is no proper mechanism to allow them to feel confident when they put down their weapons.”*

Participants further called for inclusivity of the peace process. Many of those who took part in the discussions felt excluded from the peace process. A general opinion through the consultations was that the peace process is managed by self-interested elite who were not representative of the broader wishes of the communities.

Several participants (including a member of the Provincial Peace Council) commented that:

*“The peace process is everybody’s task, not just the responsibility of the High Peace Council.”*

- Many expressed the view that tribal and religious leaders given their importance in influencing the communal and social outlook in Zabul, should be far more involved in the peace and reconciliation processes. Furthermore participants also called for women and youth to be more effectively involved in the peace process.

***Strengthen Governance, Security and Stability:***

In order to improve the support for the Government, communities called for strengthening of the Government and tackling corruption within the government administration.

Outside the provincial capital of Zabul, Government presence and control is limited to district administrative centres. Difficulties in recruiting qualified staff for deployment in remote areas has also been identified as a factor limiting government effectiveness.

However, most of those who participated in the discussions expressed the view that, even in the few places the Government existed, the government administration at district level was weak and corrupt. Those who were not

antagonistic towards the Government were at best indifferent. Many voiced the opinion that local communities looked to Taliban to solve their problems, as they were tired of the failings of corrupt, uneducated and self-interested government officials.

According to a group of elders from Shari Shafa, Shah Joy and Kakar districts:

*“The Government is corrupt and officials are working for their own interests, not for the benefit of Islam or for the country. Therefore people turn to the Taliban than the government in this regard.”*

- **Strengthen Social and Economic Development:**

As mentioned above, the lack of economic opportunities for the people of Zabul was seen as a major factor in pushing the youth to join the Taliban.

In this regard in order to improve the employment opportunities for youth, participants identified the lack of education as a priority area which needed to be addressed: Even though many schools are currently closed because of the security situation, many urged the Peace Council to engage with the Taliban and request that they allow the schools to be re-opened.

- **Promote Human Rights, Rule of Law and Address Impunity:**

Many of those who participated in the consultations expressed concerns over the arbitrariness and corruption within the judicial system which results in impunity. Some complained that the government authorities are influenced by local power-brokers and that they often carry out “collective punishment” on all members of a tribe when there are isolated actions of a few individuals. Others claimed that authorities routinely violate human rights by imprisoning innocent people and mistreat prisoners in detention. This was linked to more general failings of the Government.

One elder from Arghandab stated:

*“At both, provincial and district level, the courts are putting innocent people in jail, beating innocent people who are respected in their own communities. The people have no rights because the law is in the hands of influential power-brokers.”*

Another participant said:

*“I saw many prisoners who were badly treated by the Government. The government is very bad and very corrupt.”*

## **V. People's Recommendations:**

Throughout the consultation process in Zabul, participants proposed the following general recommendations with the view of achieving sustainable peace in Zabul.

### ***Support Inclusiveness of the Peace and Reconciliation Process***

- 1) Ensure appointees to the Provincial Peace Council are competent, effective and impartial.
- 2) Provide credible confidence-building mechanisms to encourage the Taliban to engage with the peace process.
- 3) Include more youth and women in the peace and reconciliation process.
- 4) Ensure tribal elders and *Ulema* are properly consulted as part of the peace process.
- 5) Encourage the view that achieving peace is the responsibility of all Afghans, not just the political elite.

### ***Strengthen Governance, Security and Stability:***

- 16) Urgently enforce accepted standards of integrity, accountability, professionalism, transparency and honesty in all sectors of government at all levels, to address the current loss of trust by the population in its government.
- 17) Tackle nepotism and corruption, ensuring appointments to government department jobs are awarded on merit, and are not sold to the highest bidder through bribes and corruption.

### ***Strengthen Social and Economic Development:***

- 6) Create job opportunities that will prevent youth being recruited by Taliban.
- 7) Increase investment in the education sector, and ensure better quality of teachers.

### ***Promote Human Rights, Rule of Law and Tackle Impunity:***

- 7) End the influence of power-brokers over the local government administration and impunity they enjoy from prosecution.
- 8) Promote observance of human rights principles.

Provide a reliable and impartial justice system by tackling corruption within the judicial system.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Uruzgan Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial roadmap for peace represents a summary of the findings of a series of focus-group discussions carried out in Uruzgan province. The consultations involved ordinary residents, tribal elders, religious leaders, teachers and civil society representatives from throughout Uruzgan.

The consultations took place as part of phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace program (hereinafter the "People's Dialogue") initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult over 4,500 Afghan citizens with a view to develop 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Uruzgan is known as both the birthplace of the Taliban's former leader Mullah Omar, who spent his youth in Dehrawud district, and as the province from which former President Hamid Karzai began his campaign in 2001 to remove the Taliban. While the province is tribally and culturally linked to Kandahar, it is distinct from its neighbours and has a unique sense of independence and self-rule.

Uruzgan is one of the most under-developed provinces in Afghanistan and the ability of the Afghan Government to deliver basic social services, improve governance and enforce the rule of law has been hindered by the ongoing conflict. Government presence has therefore been limited to district centres and the provincial capital Tirin Kot. The presence and ability of Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) to operate in the province has been attributed to its geographic location, inter-tribal tensions and conflict over access to government positions and natural resources. Despite recent improvements in the provincial government's ability to provide services for the population, high levels of poverty, low educational levels, large-scale unemployment and limited access to civil administration and judicial services have been contributing factors to the conflict. A focus on inclusive development mechanisms down to the district level, remains essential for longer term stability.

The economy of Uruzgan is largely informal and agrarian. Lack of adequate transport, storage and market facilities for its agricultural products hamper the quality of food products and they are often sub-standard. The local market cannot be competitive. The general decline in the price of wheat has made many farmers less inclined to invest in it, with some turning instead to opium cultivation. Unemployment is increasing largely because

of the military draw-down and general decrease in donor funds for development projects in the province.

The province has a Pashtun majority (approximately 92 per cent) with the remaining being Hazaras who are predominantly settled in Khas Uruzgan and Tirin Kot districts. Roughly three quarters of Pashtuns are from the Durrani tribe and one quarter from the Ghilji tribe.

Politics in Uruzgan province is primarily tribally-based. However, since the fall of the Taliban regime, armed militias have emerged as an additional factor shaping political dynamics and access to government positions in the province. Grassroots communities have considerable mistrust towards political parties and believe political leaders are motivated by individual interest rather than their tribe or nation.

In Uruzgan there is an extremely low level of participation in public life by women, even when compared with Kandahar or Helmand. In Tirin Kot women seen outside the house are generally migrants from other parts of Afghanistan. In the districts, women's freedom of movement is understood to be even more limited. There are small numbers of female teachers, doctors, and nurses, but very few women work outside the home in any capacity, and most of these are originally from other provinces.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Drivers of Conflict**

The consultations revealed a widespread dissatisfaction with the failure on the part of Afghan Government and International Military Forces to provide a safe and secure environment. People also criticized the Government for failing to tackle administrative corruption, poor governance and inability to ensure basic social service delivery. The Government has also been unable to uphold the rule of law, guarantee access to justice or meet communities' expectations relating to social justice. Lastly, it has failed to create job opportunities. These failures coupled with conservative traditional and religious beliefs, lack of tribal harmony, civilian casualties and poverty have arguably given AGEs a means for leveraging support in some sections of the local population.

A number of current and former senior Taliban leaders (Mullah Omar, Mullah Baradar, Mullah Abbas and Nooruddin Torabi) come from Uruzgan. It is also reported that parallel Taliban structures continue to function in the province. In general, people are not supportive of the AGEs but it would appear that AGEs are taking advantage of the limited presence of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and the withdrawal of International Military

Forces, particularly in the more mountainous or remote parts of the province. AGEs also use failings on part of the Afghan Government to discredit it.

In the past few years Uruzgan has seen frequent fighting between pro-Government forces (including police loyal to district governors, as well as private militias) and Taliban (with strong influence throughout the province). In addition, affected communities have for several years been complaining about the activities of the pro-Government warlords.

Despite improvements in Tirin Kot and neighbouring areas, the security situation in Uruzgan province continues to be volatile and unpredictable. Difficult terrain and geographical isolation, lack of ANSF manpower and logistical support have all had an impact on security in the province. Following the hand-over of security responsibilities from ISAF to ANSF in the end of 2014, AGEs have shifted their focus from international military targets to ANSF and their attacks have frequently resulted in civilian casualties. In line with the regional trends, AGEs continue to use IEDs, launch small arms attacks on ANSF posts and targeted killings of government officials and those who support the government - provincial council members, *Shura* members, *Ulema*, tribal elders and other influential figures have been victims of AGE assassinations.

#### **IV. The Road Map for Peace**

Throughout the consultations, participants made a clear connection between strengthening governance and tackling corruption within the government, providing economic and social development, and the improvement of security in Uruzgan. People were critical of the efforts of the international community to address Uruzgan's development and security gaps, with many resenting what they perceived as "outside interference". However, alongside calls to address government corruption and injustice, the most frequent call was for the provision of education and jobs as a means of enabling those in the province to improve their own situation and to provide some hope for the young and disenfranchised who would otherwise be drawn to the insurgency.

- ***Strengthen Governance, Security and Stability:***

The participants throughout the consultations called for the need to address tribal nepotism, corruption and inefficiency within government structures.

One participant encapsulated the prevailing sentiment of dissatisfaction as follows:

*“We have not been given our rights, and all government jobs, humanitarian assistance and other income and benefits have been put in the pockets of local warlords. One influential person can hold five jobs at one time, and can prevent anyone not from his tribe from receiving assistance. We have been ignored, and that leads to conflict between the Government and the people.”*

Participants also called on the local Government to ensure a tribal balance within the government administration as they complained extensively about the lack of equal opportunities to all tribes, alleging the dominance of the Popalzai tribe (a sub-tribe of the Durrani).

As a means of countering nepotism and tribal bias participants called for elections where they were free to express their views without intimidation or pressure from local warlords. They also called for an increase in the number of Members of Parliament (MPs) entitled to represent the people of Uruzgan in parliament.

In regard to the security forces, participants stated that Afghan National Police (ANP) training and discipline had improved, but that there was still more to be done. They particularly called for more training to be provided for both Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan Local Police (ALP).

Further, as some participants made allegations of foreign interference in Afghanistan hampering the development and security, calls were made for the international community, particularly Pakistan and Iran not to interfere in Afghan affairs.

A resident of Tirin Kot expressed the commonly held view that:

*“The international community should stop its interference in our domestic affairs and let the Afghan people work for the rehabilitation of their own country.”*

- **Strengthen Social and Economic Development:**

Participants called for enhanced social and economic development, as a common complaint expressed in the consultations was the lack of attention paid by central and provincial government to basic human security and development needs of the people of Uruzgan. Many also complained that neighbouring provinces, particularly Daykundi, have received a

disproportionately large amount of social and economic support comparing with Uruzgan.

Further recommendations were made for the provision of adequate education facilities. The Provincial Director of the High Peace Council (HPC) commented that, as the education system in Uruzgan was extremely weak, high school graduates from Uruzgan were unable to compete with students from Kabul when competing for university places.

One religious scholar stated that:

*“The residents of Uruzgan have been ignored by the Kabul administration. Our children do not have a proper education system, no proper health care. Our youth do not have proper jobs and the Government has done nothing to assist.”*

Many complained that, whilst the Government and international donors had provided new buildings for schools and health clinics, there were no trained teachers or doctors, and that the provision of essential public services was therefore only “symbolic”.

Others made the explicit link between the lack of education and job opportunities and the ability of the AGEs to recruit new fighters. People stated that poverty and insecurity caused by lack of employment had created a distance between the Government and the people, and had allowed this social discontent to be exploited by AGEs.

According to a university teacher, access to education is also seen as a prerequisite for the effective achievement of other rights:

*“Human rights should be prioritized, but that is difficult when we do not have peace and stability. If young people cannot attend schools and universities and cannot find employment, what is the value of women’s rights?”*

Participants also complained that Uruzgan’s economic and social development was hindered by the lack of electricity. Participants therefore called for the province to be connected to the national energy grid as the Department of Power only provides limited electricity to Tirin Kot and Dehrawud Districts. Furthermore, local residents in Uruzgan also expressed frustration with what they perceived as misdirected or inappropriate spending by international donors. Many complained that much international development aid had been spent on hiring international contractors, or had been misappropriated by corrupt officials and that

much of the money spent on these projects had gone into the pockets of people outside Afghanistan.

According to one elder from Chinarto District:

*“Millions of dollars have been spent in Uruzgan by the international community, but most of that money has gone into the pockets of a few people who have invested in a life of luxury in Kabul, Dubai, and other countries abroad.”*

People also complained that many projects funded by international donors had been implemented without consulting the local government, and that many were of poor quality and/or unfinished.

- **Promote Human Rights and the Rule of Law and Address Impunity:**

Participants raised concerns about the abuses committed by local warlords, allegedly involved with a group of ALP in numerous extrajudicial killings. People called that the impunity these actors enjoy for human rights abuses to be addressed. People also urged for strengthening of the justice system, which was perceived as being weak and corrupt.

One of those taking part in the consultations complained:

*“We see so many innocent people being kept in jail for no reason. Most of them are there because they were unable to bribe ANP, prosecutors or judges to release them.”*

Participants reported as common practice the release of those who are wealthy enough to pay bribes, whereas many innocent people had been tortured into “confessing” crimes that they did not commit. Such cases were highlighted as being a major motivating factor in fuelling anti-Government sentiment:

*“What does the Government expect from a man who has been wrongfully imprisoned? Will he support the Government or stand against it? I would say that he would definitely take up arms and struggle to overthrow this corrupt administration.”*

## **V. People’s Recommendations**

During the consultation process in Uruzgan, participants proposed the following general recommendations with the view to achieving sustainable peace in the province.

***Strengthen Governance, Security and Stability:***

- 18) Urgently enforce accepted standards of integrity, accountability, professionalism, transparency and honesty in all sectors of government at all levels, to address the current loss of trust by the population in its Government.
- 19) Ensure appointments to government department jobs are made on merit, not tribal affiliation.
- 20) Continue enhancing the professionalism of Afghan security forces to make them more effective against the insurgency and increase their adherence to human rights and humanitarian law.
- 21) Increase the number of MPs representing Uruzgan in parliament.

***Strengthen Social and Economic Development:***

- 8) Increase job creation to fight poverty and insecurity.
- 9) Increase investment in the education sector, particularly the recruitment, training and capacity building of teachers.
- 10) Increase investment in the health care system, particularly the recruitment, training and capacity building of medical staff.
- 11) Connect Uruzgan to the national power grid.
- 12) Improve management and oversight of development projects to prevent waste and poor implementation.

***Promote Human Rights, Rule of Law and Tackle Impunity:***

- 1) End the political influence and impunity of powerful warlords.
- 2) End impunity for grave human rights violations and serious abuse of power.
- 3) Provide a reliable and impartial justice system in order to prevent the violent resolution of disputes.

Fight corruption within the government administration and the justice system to protect human rights and end impunity.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Ghor Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial road map for peace represents a summary of key findings and issues raised in the focus-group discussions, individual interviews and opinion surveys carried out during the consultation process with 150 Afghan citizens residing in Ghor province. Participants were comprised around 35 per cent women, and represented diverse social and political backgrounds including public-sector employees, community elders, farmers, teachers, representatives of civil society, religious scholars and reintegrees (ex-Taliban). The consultations took place as part of Phase II of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace programme (hereinafter the “People’s Dialogue”) initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) to consult over 4,500 Afghan citizens to develop 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

This local road map for peace intends to provide a comprehensive analysis of local drivers of conflict, as well as to identify appropriate solutions to help consolidate and sustain peace and stability in Ghor province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Ghor province is located in the central-western part of Afghanistan, covering 38,579 square kilometres and bordering nine other provinces: Badghis, Bamyan, Dai Kundi, Farah, Faryab, Helmand, Herat, Sar-i-Pul and Uruzgan, linking the southern, northern, western and central highlands regions of the country. The province is divided into ten administrative districts, with Chaghcharan as its provincial capital.<sup>199</sup> Ghor is mountainous and underdeveloped; it suffers severe winters with heavy snowfall which block the roads and passes each year, further isolating the province.

According to the Central Statistics Office, the population of Ghor province is 646,300, although other estimates go as high as 780,000. Chaghcharan is the most populated district in the province with a population of 131,800, followed by Lal Wa Sarjantal (108,900), Pasaband (92,200), Taiwara (88,900), Shahrak (58,200), Tulak (50,000), Du Layna (35,100), Saghar (33,700), Dawlat Yar (31,800) and Charsada (26,600).

The province is predominantly populated by Tajiks, while Hazaras form the second major ethnic group with more than 17 per cent and Pashtuns account for 2-3 per cent. There are two main religious sects: Sunnis

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<sup>199</sup> The capital was moved from Taiwara to Chaghcharan in 1965.

constitute the majority and are located throughout Ghor province, while Shiites form approximately 17 per cent and are mostly located in Lal-Wa-Sarjangal district and some small villages in Pasaband and Dawlatyar districts. The majority of the population speaks Dari. During the summer months, Pashtun Kuchis migrate to Ghor from Farah, Helmand, Herat and Badghis. The Provincial Governor's Office estimated a seasonal migration of approximately 20,000 Kuchis in 2012.

Ghor province has been under the influence of the Jamiat-e-Islami and Hezb-e-Islami parties,<sup>200</sup> including during the period when the Taliban were in power. Harsh winters causing disruption to movement, combined with the lack of a significant Pashtun population, have prevented any consequential infiltration by the Taliban, although they have at least some presence in eight of the ten districts. Nevertheless, there are other major causes of instability in the province, with tribal disputes and the presence of illegal armed groups (IAGs) being substantial contributors.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

#### **Types of Conflicts**

During the consultations, the people of Ghor identified a wide range of interconnected conflicts, including the Taliban-led insurgency, political disputes, inter-ethnic conflicts, tribal conflicts and conflicts between IAGs.

Ghor province is distinctive as being predominantly Tajik, with an important Hazara population residing in the east, mostly in Lal Wa Sargangal district and in part of Dawlat Yar district, with a relatively small number of ethnic Pashtuns (estimated 2-3 per cent) who are traditionally more sympathetic to the Taliban. The main type of conflict in Ghor is therefore tribal, with often longstanding disputes between groups. Tribal disputes have been exploited by former mujahedeen who have formed IAGs to protect their own as well as tribal interests; by politicians that use tribal allegiances to secure power; and by the Taliban, who have exploited these divisions to obtain the cooperation of local communities where they had no traditional influence.

#### ***Tribal Conflicts***

Ghor province is plagued by intertribal conflicts. Tribes, sometimes in the guise of IAGs, fight over land, domination of smaller tribes and other sub-

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<sup>200</sup> Jamiat-e-Islami and Hezb-e-Islami parties have generally been rivals of the Taliban.

tribes, as well as issues related to “honour”. Some conflicts described by participants go back generations and involve grievances over dominance, land sharing and empowerment of different tribes. Although ethnic conflict also exists in the province, due to the predominance of the Tajik population, the conflict is divided more along tribal than ethnic lines. In Shahrak and Taiwara districts, one housewife observed that *“Tribal issues between Pahlawan and Chishti tribes [both Tajik] in Shahrak and Taiwara districts create the most conflicts among the people in those two districts.”*

Subjugation of tribes by other tribes over many generations has created longstanding disputes that continue to create conflict in the province. Reports of tribal disputes leading to deaths and injuries, and subsequent reprisals, are unfortunately commonplace in Ghor. According to one student:

*“The tribal leader’s interest is to subjugate other tribes with which they have unresolved disputes and clashes for decades. There seems to be no lasting and acceptable solution or any determination or mechanism from the Government side to end the disputes between the conflicting tribes.”*

At the same time, some tribes are affiliated with the Government and use their relative clout to exercise domination over other tribes in the province. According to one local elder:

*“Three big tribes are involved and create most of the conflict in the province. They block the roads and intimidate NGO staff in Dawlatyar district. Most of the tribesmen are hired by Government departments, but at the same time they are causing the conflict.”*

Tribal disputes are found across the districts and provide the context and framework for other types of conflict now present in Ghor province.

### **Taliban-led Insurgency**

The people noted that the conflict between the Government and Taliban groups with strong ideological beliefs is another main driver of conflict in Ghor.

A female student said:

*“The Taliban are mostly against the Government as they [the Taliban] say that the Government implements American projects. Human rights are not acceptable for them because they believe human rights are a western phenomenon which is against Sharia law. These people are the biggest*

*threat to human rights. I am a woman who studies in a girl's school, where I received threats from Taliban to leave my job because they think the school environment is not in accordance with Islamic orders."*

Although initially Ghor province was not considered a fertile ground for the Taliban-led insurgency, the group has managed to make inroads in the province, where it previously held no sway, exploiting tribal fissures and opportunistic IAG commanders to gain a foothold. Participants noted that, while the number of anti-government elements (AGEs) existing in Ghor was not sufficient to cause long-lasting instability in the province, they were taking advantage of fissures in society to operate. Also Ghoris commonly claimed that some of the armed groups that operate under the name of the Taliban were supported by foreign countries and had an agenda to take over the country.

### ***Illegal Armed Groups (IAGs)***

IAGs are difficult to define with any specificity in Ghor province, as they often blur the line between so-called tribal defence groups and militia groups that have an autonomous existence outside the tribal structure. Some IAGs are more inclined to side with Government and others against it, but their decisions are based on self-interest as opposed to ideology.<sup>201</sup> According to a farmer from Ghor province, *"Most of the IAGs are fighting for tribal and personal gains. Some of them just want to keep power in the area in order to obtain financial support from the Government."*

The toll they take, however, is significant. Expanding on this topic, a teacher explained:

*"All the concerned groups that are involved in the current conflict in the province share a common interest: the opportunity to rule a certain part of the territory. However, there are closer ties between, for example, Taliban and the illegal armed groups who can compromise mutually whereby the AGEs would be able to move freely in certain areas controlled by illegal armed groups and in exchange, the illegal armed groups may not have problems in terms of controlling their areas and also receive support and protection from the AGEs if there is a requirement."*

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<sup>201</sup> Illegal Armed Groups are a separate category of actors from the Taliban and other anti-government elements, as AGEs are those armed groups taking direct part in armed conflict against the Government of Afghanistan and/or international military forces, pursuing political, ideological or economic objectives.

A former Government official further explained the complexity of the conflict structure in Ghor province as divided between IAG, AGEs and tribal groups:

*“In Passaband district, people are divided into two parts; one part supports the AGEs and the other part supports the Government or illegal armed groups affiliated with the Government. Each tribe has a local leader or commander leading and protecting the tribe.”*

These types of conflicts are deeply intertwined and feed off each other. Even for local communities consulted, it is difficult to draw a line between purely tribal disputes, purely political disputes and disputes driven by conflicts between local commanders of IAGs.

### **Drivers of Conflict**

Participants identified numerous drivers of the conflict in Ghor, including tribal disputes, the lack of effective Government control, the absence of the rule of law, poverty, lack of education, ideological differences on the part of the Taliban and conservative elements of society, the influence of politicians and powerbrokers, the ineffectiveness of the ongoing peace process and the influence of and interference by foreign governments.

### ***Tribal Disputes***

Many interlocutors stated that the main driver of conflict in Ghor arose from tribal disputes. As explained above, many tribes in Ghor have disputes going back for generations, with different tribes exercising power over other tribes or sub-tribes. Some disputes are over women or honour. More basically, the disputes are about exercising or demonstrating power.

According to a lorry driver from Passaband district, *“Most of the disputes are tribal or related to political parties. In my district, most of the conflict is about obtaining power.”*

Participants spoke about an honour incident in Dawlatyar district in 2011 that resulted in the death of six people in clashes and targeted killings. The dispute, which has not been resolved to date, apparently started when one tribe kidnapped a woman from a rival tribe, setting off a cycle of retribution.

According to a businessman from Ghor, *“Women’s rights should be respected in Ghor province to avoid tribal conflicts. Women are subjected to cultural violence.”*

The various tribes have essentially picked sides, joining the Government or the Taliban movement depending on the choices their rivals have made and what might best protect their interests in the future.

According to a university student originally from Shahrak district:

*“There is no trust between local people. Everyone tries to obtain and hold power at the expense of other tribes. Some of the people are marginalized and join the Government just to defend their rights. Tribal issues are the most concerning problem in the districts of Ghor province.”*

This lack of communal trust and desire to obtain power at the expense of other tribes is deeply ingrained in Ghor.

### ***Lack of Effective Government Control***

Interlocutors pointed to the lack of effective Government control and lack of effective projection of state authority as another driver of the conflict in Ghor province. In the opinion of one elder from Dawlat Yar district, this lack of Government presence, combined with longstanding tribal issues, drives the conflict. He explained the conflict as *“51 per cent is Government weakness and 49 per cent is the people’s weakness.”*

The rugged terrain of Ghor has been a key obstacle to Government control. Although the shortest route from Herat to Kabul would go through Ghor, the ring road effectively goes around the province, making access to the province difficult. In view of little insurgent infiltration in the past few years, fewer resources have been directed toward a province that benefits neither from abundant natural resources, nor from being on the main route linking major commercial centres.

A student from Ghor province stated:

*“There are various factors that contribute to the existence of conflict in Ghor province. The main reason for the continued conflict in the province is the inability and ineffectiveness of the central Government in supporting the people and reforming the ineffective Government system. The police are not capable of handling the insecurity due to either lack of resources, both human and material, or their factional affiliation with various local illegal armed groups that are contributing to the insecurity. Due to limited Government capacity to control much of the province, local illegal commanders and sometimes Taliban exploit this opportunity and commit human rights violations with impunity.”*

Many participants raised the theme of impunity during the focus-group discussions and individual interviews. The perceived failure of the Government to exert its authority has left a void that was filled by local powerbrokers, tribal leaders, illegal commanders and, eventually, the Taliban.

### ***Influence of Politicians and Powerbrokers***

At the same time, IAGs and tribes are reportedly affiliated with certain powerbrokers who have a stake in the local government or represent the province in Parliament. Participants claimed that some members of Parliament, in particular, were directly in control of certain IAGs in Ghor to ensure local loyalty and control.

One local elder claimed that *“Government and Parliament are busy working for their personal benefit and the leaders of armed groups are connected to and supported by political parties or members of Parliament.”*

People also alleged the involvement of IAG commanders and powerbrokers in vote manipulation in the 2009, 2010, and 2014 elections. IAGs and local commanders have been accused of busing people in to voter registration booths to have them registered and then collecting their voter registration cards.

A businessman from Ghor noted:

*“Local powerbrokers and illegal armed groups’ commanders are supported by members of Parliament. These MPs have their own groups of armed men in the area, which they use to support them during the election period; the groups receive money in return.”*

The various armed groups do not all work for the same MPs, but the latter are often linked to various groups that have spheres of power within the province. This allows politicians to take advantage of the longstanding disputes between tribes in order to ensure a reliable voter base.

A housewife from Ghor noted:

*“They [politicians and powerbrokers] protect the armed groups and commanders to ensure their future election to Parliament. There is a good trade in the election - the illegal armed group receives money and in return delivers support to the respective candidate by coercing the people. The individual cannot make his own choice, the same tribes and same party and*

*armed commanders are linked and cooperate with each other. They don't think about peace. Their own benefit is the most important."*

By placing personal and political interest above regional interests and national unity, these powerbrokers constitute another driver of the conflict. As pointed out by the participants, their interest is not in creating a peaceful, law-abiding atmosphere, as that would undermine their ability to garner votes and a place on the national political stage. Tribes, already pitted against one another because of their tribal grievances, are thus given political bases upon which to fight.

### ***Interference by Foreign Governments***

Another common theme raised by the participants was the issue of foreign interference. Many people saw a malevolent hand at play from regional countries, as well as the international military presence. Regarding neighbouring countries, participants alleged that they had a hand in financing local IAGs to some extent.

According to a former government official from Ghor:

*"Each tribe has a local leader or commander leading and protecting the respective tribe. These local leaders are linked to political parties, from which they receive money and other assistance to keep supporting them [the respective political parties]. Everyone knows in this area that Government's employees are connected with IAGs and support them financially and equip them with motorcycles, mobile phones, and provide them with others favours. At the same time those local armed men are linked to neighbouring countries, which fuels the conflict in the area."*

Participants also believed that the international military forces in Afghanistan were a driver of conflict, although, by the end of 2014, there was no longer an international military presence in the province.<sup>202</sup>

### ***Absence of the Rule of Law***

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<sup>202</sup> As of 1 January 2015, NATO transitioned from its International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan to its non-combat Resolute Support Mission (RSM) tasked to train, assist and advise Afghan national security forces. RSM operates from Kabul as its central hub, with four regional bases in Herat, Mazar-e Sharif, Kandahar and Laghman. The number of international forces has significantly decreased. As of December 2015, the RSM force comprised 12,905 soldiers from 42 troop-contributing countries. See: <http://www.rs.nato.int/troop-numbers-and-contributions/index.php>, last accessed 6 March 2016.

Many people pointed to the lack of an effective and impartial justice system as a driver of conflict. They viewed impunity of local actors as perpetuating conflicts between tribes. Along with the absence of an effective system of Government control across the province, many people felt that the Government was not neutral in disputes between people. As such, people preferred to go to local *shuras* or AGEs to resolve disputes. In some parts of the country, it also appeared that AGEs and IAGs were preventing people from approaching formal justice institutions in order to maintain their grip on power.

A farmer from Ghor claimed:

*“The Government is not impartial. People mostly despair of how the Government performs, they mostly believe in local shuras. They resolve their problems in the informal justice system conducted by local elders or AGEs (such as Taliban ‘courts’). Most of the people do not even like to talk about human rights. If they believe in human rights they should lay down their gun and join the peace process, but first they should be prosecuted for what they’ve done against people.”*

As mentioned above, the primary driving force behind the conflict in Ghor is the pursuit of power. This plays into people’s perceptions of how local government works and how the lack of effective rule of law institutions fuels the conflict.

A teacher from Ghor explained how this fuels conflict in the province:

*“In the absence of the rule of law and an adequate response from Government officials, powerbrokers and irresponsible armed commanders are ruling part of Ghor province with almost complete impunity. These actors never show respect and obedience to the rules and regulations or human rights or democracy. What is important for them is to expand their control and earn further financial benefits and make a living out of the situation.”*

The civilian Government institutions or the courts are seen as unable to resolve grievances between groups, so certain conflicts in Ghor are being resolved through violence.

### **Poverty**

Participants noted that the limited economic choices available to local people in Ghor province could force regular people to join the insurgency, simply to make enough to feed their families. The lack of meaningful

alternatives to joining the insurgency or engaging in poppy cultivation ensures a steady stream of manpower to IAGs and AGEs and turns the population against the Government.

A truck driver from Pasaband district stated:

*“Local people need to have another choice, the Government should provide employment but there is no employment. These are the most important problems that motivate the people to be recruited by political parties or AGEs. The Government told us not to cultivate poppy, but they did not support the farmers to do legitimate agriculture. People’s economic situation is very bad, most of the people are going to other countries for work.”*

Ghor is known as a poor province within Afghanistan. It lacks infrastructure and paved roads connecting it with other provinces or the capital. Thus, prices for imported goods are even higher in Ghor than in surrounding areas, and at the same time the people are unable to access wider markets across the country. As in most of the country, in such circumstances it is easy to recruit supporters to the various armed groups.

### ***Ideology***

Ghor is considered to be a conservative province in terms of people’s attitudes, and the people noted that while some AGEs and IAGs are fighting purely for control, others are ideologically opposed to the Government.

According to a student from Shaharak district:

*“There are many ideas among them (AGEs), some of them are fighting ideologically and do not think about peace, they just want to bring down the Government and implement Sharia law. Other groups such as the IAGs just want to keep their power in the area and keep ruling over local people. Some of the people are criminals and are looking for impunity and would agree to peace if they were protected from prosecutions.”*

People who fall into the ideological camp have an existential disagreement with the form of the current Government and seek its overthrow and replacement with another form of government entirely.

According to a student from Ghor province:

*“There are some groups, actors and parties taking part in the conflict that never believed in human rights in their standard form. Their main view on issues like human rights and democracy is that the two phenomena are a*

*western product and their aim is to distance people from their religious and traditional moral values.”*

Such ideological gaps are another driver of the conflict in Ghor, although perhaps less so than in many other provinces.

#### **IV. The Road Map for Peace**

Throughout the focus-group discussions in Ghor province, people almost universally identified a wide range of context-specific, locally-driven, practical peacebuilding initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict. These included reforming and expanding the peace and reconciliation process; addressing the governance gap and ensuring a society governed by the rule of law and not the rule of force; expanding economic and development opportunities; and curbing the influence of foreign powers in the province. Although curbing the influence of foreign countries' influence in the province is not necessarily a local, provincial-level issue, it is important to note as it was an issue raised across Ghor province.

##### ***Reforming and Expanding the Peace and Reconciliation Process***

Participants consistently pointed to the fact that the current peace process under the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) was failing in its main task of achieving local reconciliation in Ghor province. The members of the local Provincial Peace Council are accused of acting in their own interests and not in the interests of peace.

A lorry driver from Pasaband district stated that:

*“Members of the peace process (APRP) are not real peace-seekers, they just seek to strengthen their own interests. The peace process had no positive effects in Afghanistan, some powerbrokers receive high salaries and there is no result. They are not acceptable for the Afghan people. If the peace process was done well, if violators were brought to justice, then we would see development in Afghanistan. And human rights values will be observed. We want Islamic human rights.”*

Furthermore, some participants questioned the APRP members' capability of understanding the reasons why people fight and to offer solutions for what could be done to bring insurgents and IAGs to the Government's side.

One re-integrated AGE said:

*“All the conflict makers are linked together. At the moment, there are around 600 individuals who are in different groups and active in Chaghcharan district. The Government and all the people know them. But this is the question for me and all the people and my friends who joined the peace process: why there is no effective action towards them from the Government to identify who they are and who they are working for?”*

Another issue regarding the reconciliation process which participants raised consistently was whether the APRP had attracted authentic insurgents. This issue has been raised on numerous occasions, that the people who reconcile and reintegrate are not in fact AGEs, but groups that come together to join the peace process in an effort to obtain the financial and job-related benefits offered by the APRP.<sup>203</sup>

A student from Shahrak district, Ghor, said:

*“There are many liars that come together and claim that they want to make peace. No real AGEs have delivered their weapons to join the Government. There has been no success with APRP since it was established.”*

Despite the criticisms, some participants saw the APRP as potentially capable of providing real solutions to the conflict in Ghor. One village leader pointed to *“a case of conflict that was solved by the peace process in Ghor province. The issue happened last year in Allah Yar area of Chaghcharan where APRP succeeded to resolve a dispute among two tribes.”*

The peace process is in need of greater transparency in all aspects, including recruiting the right people and demonstrating their impartiality. Currently there are some people in the peace process who are linked to political parties and serve as high-ranking officials, but are not as impartial and effective as they should be.

A student said:

*“Peace is in the hands of the actors in the conflict, but they don’t live for themselves, they are working for the political parties. There is also the*

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<sup>203</sup> According to the APRP, ex-combatants who renounce violence, accept the Afghan Constitution, live by the rule of law and cease support for and ties with AGEs, will be reintegrated into their communities and be provided assistance with education and vocational training, protection and security. See: *National Security Council, D&R Commission, Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP)*, July 2010, available at: [https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/AFG/00060777\\_00060777\\_APRP\\_National%20P programme%20Document%202010%2006%2001.pdf](https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/AFG/00060777_00060777_APRP_National%20P programme%20Document%202010%2006%2001.pdf)

*interference of foreign countries. Peace is like a dream for every individual in Afghanistan, if the peace process employees work hard and with honesty, they will be able to succeed in this process otherwise there will be no progress."*

The people saw the peace process as inter-linked with development and outreach to communities. They were concerned about the gap between the Government, development and the people.

As a businessman from Ghor stated:

*"The Government should assign accountable and honest people to high positions at the district and provincial level who are not linked to any party. The Government and the international community should make sure that development projects are distributed evenly across the province. Religious leaders should encourage people to engage with the Government."*

Involving mullahs and religious leaders in outreach was a common recommendation amongst participants. In addition, some participants also saw the need to bring civil society, women and women's groups together and urged the religious bodies to preach the message of peace and ensuring long-term education and development as the way forward.

A student from Ghor said:

*"Civil society should be supported by the Government in order to be vocal and effective in the peace process. Women should be also given the opportunity to participate and engage in the peace dialogue and their role should not be ignored. The religious leaders and Government officials with social status must be mobilized to engage in the peace process."*

This approach was echoed by a teacher from Ghor who said that:

*"There are some people whose role is perceived to be contributing to peacebuilding in Ghor province, such as religious leaders, influential people and civil society activists. However there are certain actors like AGEs and IAGs that never show respect for these actors due to the policy that they have. Women can also play a role in peace – for example in their family setting by advising their male relatives not to contribute to insecurity and getting involved in human rights abuses."*

Thus, people in Ghor saw a role for all segments of society in supporting the peace process. However, it remains for the Government to develop a meaningful way to include all these voices in the peace and reconciliation

process and ensure the participation of all levels of society, including women and representatives of civil society.

### ***Expanding Effective Government Control and the Rule of Law***

Another common theme amongst the participants was the need to expand effective Government control and ensure the rule of law. Participants often spoke of the impunity enjoyed by IAGs and influential people in the informal justice institutions and the application of the law. Some saw different groups represented in the Government or in the police as having their own or their tribes' interests in mind when conducting official business. They also noted that the Government was in effect not present in many areas of the province and that, instead, tribes and IAGs effectively exercised Government functions outside district centres.

At the most basic level, people felt the lack of Government-provided security was a major concern and needed to be addressed.

A farmer from Ghor recommended that *"The Government should strengthen their presence at the district level. Afghan youth should be encouraged to join ANSF."*

Aside from simply being present, people also noted that the Government was in need of reform at the district and provincial level, as well. ANP recruited locally were routinely accused of acting out of loyalty to their tribes or on the orders of local powerbrokers. A local resident from Du Laina district suggested:

*"ANP should be from other provinces and the number of the ANP should increase. The ANA should extend its area of operation to the remote areas and remove the AGEs. IAGs should disarm and Government should create jobs for the youth. The Government should start reform in the district administration and Government employees should start working for the people."*

People noted over and over again that it is the Government responsibility to protect human rights of the people. The lack of effective Government presence, especially in remote areas, however, rendered the people vulnerable.

A housewife from Ghor said that *"Human rights should be guaranteed by the local government, especially in remote districts. Public awareness should be increased regarding peace and stability."*

On the themes of expanding and reforming Government institutions at the district level, the people noted that impunity and corruption were also enabling conflict to continue.

According to a local resident of Du Laina district, *“The judicial system should be accountable. Corruption should stop and the offender should be brought before the court. Impunity should be ended and all criminals should be brought to justice.”*

The issue of corruption and accountability was brought up not just in regard to the courts and formal local government. As discussed above, people also noted that impartiality must be extended to the peace process, as well. While people were in favour of a meaningful peace process capable of bringing insurgents back into the fold, they were also conscious of the need to safeguard the rights of victims.

As a student from Shahrak district stated, *“The Government and APRP should be against the Taliban who have history of violations. The Taliban should go before the court and respond to the people’s grievances.”*

At the same time, participants were also aware of people’s role in ensuring accountability.

As one shopkeeper from Dawlatyar district noted:

*“We are about to participate in an election [referring to the upcoming then Presidential and Provincial Council elections in 2014], we should elect someone who has a good background and honestly works for the people and not based on ethnic interests.”*

### ***Expanding Educational and Economic Opportunities***

Across the board, the people felt that the lack of economic opportunities and meaningful education was a key component in the intransigence of the insurgency. People from a wide variety of backgrounds noted the need to increase possibilities for people to live stable, economically prosperous lives to defeat the insurgency.

According to a truck driver from Pasaband district:

*“Lack of the Government attention to the people’s economic, security and social problems increases the instability. If the Government pays attention to people’s economic and other challenges we will see decrease in instability level.”*

People noted that economic weakness had led them to participate in their own ways in the conflict. In tough economic situations, people are forced to make decisions based on short-term goals and not in the long-term interests of the nation.

A shopkeeper explained:

*"We are all contributing to the instability in the country, because if we did not allow the Taliban and prevented the local elders from receiving money from political parties, they would not be able to make conflict. By receiving a small amount of money we sell our country and do not think of the future."*

Accordingly, people see their future as one of two possibilities, diverging toward a path of education and development in districts and rural areas or toward a path of further instability. They see the Government, and the people, sacrificing future promise for current gains. The future path to stability, in the view of participants, lays in extending Government control to the districts, making development a reality for people in rural areas and expanding both the quality and availability of educational opportunities.

In the words of the student from Shaharak:

*"If people trust the Government and support the Government's programmes, we will see a bright future. If the Government supports education, will not see instability anymore. But if the Government does not support the peace process, if the Government does not keep balance in terms of development and education and does not strengthen its presence in the rural areas, we will see more instability. If the situation goes like this we will see a countrywide war in Afghanistan. Political parties will fight each other. Conflict among tribes and groups will increase."*

Not surprisingly, the need for concurrent expansion of education and employment opportunities is seen as equally important for the people. The key is that people need to see the benefits of peace in their communities.

A teacher from Ghor explained:

*"Access to education and Government support for underdeveloped provinces can in the long run be effective in securing peace and changing the people's minds from violence to peace. Creating reasonable and decent job opportunities for the youths, who are otherwise the main potential to continue the conflict, would also contribute to lasting peace in the province."*

### ***Resetting International Relations***

Although Ghor has no international borders, people still asserted that the influence of neighbouring countries was affecting the province negatively. People also felt that the benefits of international assistance and development programmes were lacking in Ghor.

A lorry driver from Passaband noted:

*“The international community should be impartial and be honest in delivering services to Afghanistan. They should support more the Afghan National Forces. Neighbouring countries should not interfere in Afghanistan’s internal issues, here I mean Pakistan and Iran.”*

Regular Ghoris feel squeezed between the international interference and the Taliban in the context of the current conflict. Although a transition was underway, they pointed to a need to reset relations with other countries that would allow Afghanistan to develop on its own path, free from outside interference in its internal affairs.

In the words of the student from Shaharak:

*“If we end the Taliban’s presence in Afghanistan, we will be able to provide security and peace in Afghanistan. Also these foreigners are supporting instability in Afghanistan. The international coalition military forces should leave Afghanistan. Iran and Pakistan should be forced to stop interfering in Afghanistan’s internal issues.”*

### **V. People’s Recommendations**

Throughout the consultation process, people in Ghor proposed the following general recommendations with a view to engaging the Government, international actors and civil society in a constructive dialogue to address the root causes of the conflict in the province.

#### ***Support reform and inclusivity of the peace and reconciliation process***

- Reform the APRP programme thoroughly and develop a model that incorporates the voices of civil society, women and religious leaders into the peace programme to make it inclusive to ensure durable peace.
- Ensure that the peace process is depoliticized, preventing political interference from powerbrokers, warlords and other spoilers who do not support the interests of the people.

- Expand the APRP programme to resolve tribal or local disputes that are causing instability, and empower the APRP with the necessary tools to undertake such activities.
- Ensure that the legitimate grievances of victims of armed conflict are taken into account and that those who have committed crimes are prosecuted.

***Strengthen local government institutions and expand Government control:***

- Extend state authority to areas where currently it has limited control, through the deployment of additional ANSF.
- Ensure that police are recruited from outside the province to ensure that they are not susceptible to local tribal biases.
- IAGs should be disarmed and the Government should no longer support them in operating parallel structures.
- Appoint honest, impartial, professional staff in Government offices and root out nepotism and corruption in Government ranks.

***Promote human rights, the rule of law and tackle impunity***

- Ensure that the promotion of human rights is undertaken with consideration for Afghan and Islamic values, with the active participation of religious leaders, women and civil society.
- Ensure that the laws are upheld equally for all people throughout the province and that those guilty of corruption are prosecuted.
- Strengthen local governance and ensure that appointments of Government officials is done in a transparent, merit-based manner.

***Strengthen social and economic development***

- Support implementation of robust rural and urban development initiatives aimed at strengthening local economies and linking them with the national economy, as well as focusing on the creation of employment opportunities.
- Ensure equitable access of local communities to development assistance and enable people to monitor development projects in their areas.
- Expand education programmes as well as higher education opportunities and professional training for the youth to rural areas.

Refocus assistance from the Government and the international community to ensure that development programmes are reaching rural areas.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Bamyan Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This road map for peace for Bamyan provinces represents a summary of the key findings and issues raised by 245 Afghan citizens residing in Bamyan province. The consultations comprised focus group discussions held in every district of the province, individual in-depth interviews and survey questionnaires. The participants reflected a broad range of society, including farmers, public sector employees, community elders, teachers, civil society representatives, religious scholars, persons with disabilities, and reintegrees (ex-combatants). The consultations took place as part of Phase II of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace program (hereinafter the “People’s Dialogue”) initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult over 4,500 Afghan citizens with a view to develop 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

This local road map for peace intends to provide both a comprehensive analysis of local drivers of conflict as well as appropriate actionable solutions to consolidate and sustain peace and stability in Bamyan province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Bamyan province is part of an area commonly called “Hazarajat” in reference to the majority population of Hazara Shiites who live in the region. “Hazarajat” area extends from Ghor province to Sari Pul, Samangan, Parwan, Maidan Wardak and Ghazni provinces.

Bamyan province was a key stop for merchants travelling on the Silk Road and remains the product of mixed religious and ethnic influences. Its main economic activity is agriculture and it has significant mineral wealth attracting mining extraction and foreign investment. Bamyan’s provincial development plans have been consolidated and prioritised but issues remain, particularly in relation to the functioning of the health and education sectors.

Bamyan province’s population is estimated at between 500,000 and 650,000 inhabitants, with over 65 per cent of the population aged less than 20 years. It is composed of Hazaras (70%), Tajik (20%), Pashtun (5%), with the remainder composed of various smaller minority groups.

Historically, the Hazara population in Bamyan has suffered persistent discrimination; however, this increased significantly following the Taliban’s takeover of the area in 1999, when the group was specifically persecuted.

Taliban-perpetrated ethnically motivated-massacres of Hazaras were documented between 1998 and 2001 in various districts of Bamyan. To date, there has been no justice for the victims either formally or informally. During these years, access to main market and service centres, such as Kabul, Ghazni, Mazar and Kandahar provinces from Bamyan became difficult following a Taliban blockade of the region in 1998. As a consequence, the majority of the population had no access to health, education and basic services and thousands of families left for Iran and Pakistan in search of economic opportunities and employment.

At present, Bamyan province is one of the poorest, most mountainous, and agriculturally unproductive areas of Afghanistan. Much of the land is barren and inaccessible, with acute water shortages, small landholdings, extensive food insecurity, and poor soil quality. The area also has very little to no industry. With the majority of its population under 20 years of age, the local job market is likely to face additional pressure in the near future in the absence of any employment source other than international agencies and NGOs.

The province is rich in mineral resources, however these reserves have not been properly extracted and are exploited with little or no involvement of the provincial or district administrative levels depriving local communities of the benefits. The largest concession held by foreign investors is currently in Kahmard (an estimated 45 megatons of Coal) and South Shibar (Hajigak Pass, 1.8 billion megatons of iron ore). Yakawlang and Waras districts also have identified high potential for mineral resource extraction but are currently untapped.

### **Political landscape**

The security situation in Bamyan province is relatively stable with few civilian casualty incidents, however, it has recently slightly deteriorated. While the Hazara population is relatively open and progressive and the security situation is still conducive to implementing minimum human rights standards, Bamyan still experiences a number of problems that significantly impact the local population's enjoyment of basic human rights.

Provincial authorities receive inadequate support, which impacts the ability of district and other authorities to implement human rights standards. This environment is also conducive to corruption in the judiciary which on the other hand increases the reliance of the local population on community based conflict resolution mechanisms that are usually not advantageous to

women. Moreover, the limited number of public defence lawyers based in the province further impacts the provision of fair trial standards and contributes to human rights violations in the administration of justice. Other issues of concern are poverty, traditional practices, and impunity or lack of accountability.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are more active in Bamyan province than in other regions and benefit from considerable freedom of speech. More than 60 CSOs have been registered with the Department of Justice.

Kuchi migrations in the spring and summer periods in combination with the vulnerability due to insurgency of the north-east districts also give rise to seasonal security concerns. Bamyan province's vulnerable areas are concentrated in three districts: Kahmard, Saighan and Shibar. Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) based in Tala Wa Barfak district of neighboring Baghlan province are allegedly supported by local elements in Shibar and Kahmard and conducted repeated offensives against Afghan National Police (ANP) check posts and placed IEDs throughout the spring and summer of 2013.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

During the consultations in Bamyan, 245 participants discussed and reflected on the types of conflicts affecting the province, including the impact of local disputes on security and stability. The participants described Bamyan as essentially suffering from the spillover effects of insecurity in neighboring provinces, including attacks on police check-posts on the road from Bamyan to Kabul by AGEs infiltrating from nearby areas, as well as due to general disregard for the province by the central government. They also identified high level corruption in local and central government for giving rise to a culture of impunity. Additionally, they referred to internal and external causes for the war in Afghanistan, claiming the existence of dominance of certain ethnicity in the central government and marginalization of Bamyan province by the central government, and the interference of third parties (neighboring provinces and countries).

#### **Types of Conflict**

##### **Presence of AGEs (Taliban):**

Most of the participants identified Taliban as the main factor driving conflict in Bamyan province and a major threat to peace and stability. According to the participants, the Taliban benefit from insecurity and

therefore purposely try to bring it about in order to achieve their larger goals. They reportedly maintain a presence in at least three of Bamyan province's six districts (Saighan, Shiber and Kahmard districts). Incidents of IED explosions, armed attacks on police checkpoints and civilian casualties have been reported from these districts indicating the significant presence of Taliban and their activities in the area.

In addition, AGEs have also infiltrated the province from the Tala wa Barfak district of Baghlan province and have conducted attacks against the Afghan security forces and the government administration in an attempt to demonstrate their presence and authority in the area. Reportedly, a regional Taliban administration is based in Tala wa Barfak district from which they coordinate with the top management of the Taliban for extending their presence in neighboring provinces. The participants consider the Taliban based in Saighan, Shiber and Kahmard districts of Bamyan province to be directly controlled by Tala wa Barfak-based AGEs.

**Kuchis seasonal incursion:**

Pasture disputes between Kuchis and local residents are considered one of the factors of conflict in Bamyan. Such disputes frequently develop into violent confrontations between Kuchis and the locals. Every year, in spring and summer seasons, armed clashes between local communities and Kuchis have been reported on pastures in Behsood I and II districts of Maidan Wardak province, which border Bamyan province. As a result, residents of Bamyan province in the areas neighbouring the pastures are sometimes attacked by armed Kuchis. During the focus group discussions, the participants viewed the disputes between Kuchis and local residents as politically motivated for putting more pressure on the Hazara community.

**Interference of neighboring countries:**

Participants believed that Pakistan and Iran have vested interests in Afghanistan, including over the Helmand River which passes through Iran and the Durand border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Due to these interests, the participants believe that Iran and Pakistan will not stop interfering in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan because they think a sovereign and stable Afghanistan is not to their benefit. Participants alleged that Iran and Pakistan have supported rival political parties during the civil war, who have engaged in the civil armed conflict, and that Iran and Pakistan have now moved to interfering through religious scholars resulting

in an apparent tension between Shia and Sunni sects. Sectarian prejudices remain a critical issue in Bamyan province.

### **Political Rivalries:**

The legacy of political rivalries stemming from the Afghan civil war when Mujahideen with loyalties to political parties and some with alleged affiliations to Iran and Pakistan were in conflict, have negatively impacted the community. For example, several armed conflicts between the political parties of Harakat-e- Islami (led by Shaikh Asif Muhsini), Sazman Nasr (led by Qurban Ali Airfani), Shurae-e- Itifaq Islami (led by Sayed Ali Behishti), and Sepae –e- Pasdaran Islami (led by Mohammad Akbari) occurred among the Shia community. Similar armed conflicts also took place between Hezb-e- Islami (led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar), Jamiat-e-Islami (led by Burhanuddin Rabbani), and Itihad-e- Islami (led by Rasul Sayyaf) amongst the Sunni community in Saighan and Kahmard districts. These civil war conflicts caused both casualties amongst civilians and fighters, leading to consecutive revenge attacks. Although local government has control over the area, conflict linked to these previous armed clashes still sporadically occurs.

### **Land disputes:**

Land disputes generally tend to result in violence, typically between two families or two local tribes. The participants recalled various clashes resulting from land disputes causing loss of life. They highlighted particularly the dispute over water in Saighan district between Hazara and Tajik groups as a major problem. People raised concerns that due to corruption causing delays with legal proceedings such disputes are not properly addressed and predicted that tensions will spiral out of control if the government does not resolve the problem.

### **Illegal armed groups:**

Illegal armed groups are still present in Bamyan province and are considered a security threat. The participants from Yakawlang district mentioned that some illegal armed groups have been created as a result of the judiciary's failure to address a legal dispute in a proper and transparent manner. The participants claimed that some illegal armed groups stand against the local government whereas others are used by politicians and members of parliament for their own benefit during elections.

The participants also considered as an obstacle to tackling the abovementioned issues and contributing to the conflict, the corruption in the judiciary, with delays in the legal proceedings in order to obtain as many bribes as possible. The delays in the legal process are also seen as giving rise to tension and conflict and create divisions between the government and the local community.

### **Drivers of Conflict**

Participants mentioned the below main factors as causing the conflict in Bamyan province:

#### **Discrimination:**

The participants widely shared the perception that Bamyan is neglected by the central government and complained of the lack of Government's proper attention to Bamyan's economic development.

One of the religious scholars<sup>204</sup> said:

*"We see a high level discrimination from the government. For example Bamyan province is a peaceful province, and Helmand province is a volatile province, but the Government gives only 6 million budget to Bamyan and 500 million USD to Helmand. In contrary, Bamyan should be given incentive for its peaceful environment."*

Participants from Yakawlang district also echoed the belief that the government is discriminatory in its allocation of resources and budget,<sup>205</sup> affecting negatively the province's development.

#### **Interference of political parties in government affairs:**

In most of the focus group discussions, participants discussed the perceived interference of political parties in government affairs and negative competition creating divisions among communities in the districts and Bamyan center. Some of the officials are viewed as being linked to political parties and alleged of serving their interests, creating a perception of bias and corruption. Participants commonly shared the view that in practice, rival political parties' have divided people in their campaigns to attract support.

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<sup>204</sup> Saighan district focus group, 16 June 2013.

<sup>205</sup> Discussions in Yakawlang district, 6 June 2013, with participants including male and female; school teachers, community elders, religious scholars, students, farmer, and community development schools.

A university lecturer elaborated:<sup>206</sup>

*“There is no political party in its true sense in Afghanistan, politics is negatively affected by the prolonged wars, and political parties have become predominantly ethnically-oriented. We do not have political parties with ideal political agendas.”*

A community member said:

*“Most of the higher government ranks are political, which means that a political party or a politician should back a candidate in order to get the position. In return, the appointed person, is required to work for the benefit of the political party providing the support.”<sup>207</sup>*

In Bamyán center, participants also agreed that: *“The political parties had some rivalries and competition in the past, during the civil war period, and when a member of a rival party get appointed to a government position, the rival party engages in a negative and improper competitions which often ignites division and antagonism among communities . All parties are based along ethnic lines and have been established for personal gains.”<sup>208</sup>*

#### **Culture of impunity and lack of implementation of law:**

During the discussions, the majority of participants raised concerns about the lack of implementation of law, the culture of impunity, injustice, and lack of social justice. Injustice and corruption within the government has created disenfranchisement. The participants criticised the central government for not implementing the law, and claimed that there is a distinct culture of impunity, where some political parties are backing the perpetrators of illegal acts and the government is failing to bring them to justice due to corruption. The people further emphasised the government’s inability to fight corruption and blamed the ongoing conflict for eroding the rule of law.

Another concern raised by the participants is the corruption within the justice and judicial departments in Bamyán province which affects the administration of justice and leads to impunity. People also stated that the pending cases for a long time with the prosecution offices and courts have created mistrust and a lack of confidence in the current government. The unsolved cases reportedly also resulted in more personal, tribal and ethnic

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<sup>206</sup> Focus group discussion with residents of Bamyán Center, 17 April 2013.

<sup>207</sup> Focus group discussion, Waras district, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2013.

<sup>208</sup> Focus group discussion, Bamyán Center, 17 April 2013.

disputes. People also believed that the corruption in the judicial system and the government administration also contributed to increasing the support for the AGEs.

**Administrative corruption:**

Corruption was raised as a concern by every person who attended the focus group discussions. Widespread corruption in every field and every department has created an environment of mistrust and lack of confidence of the government by the community members, which people believed may have given room and space for the AGEs to expand their activities in some parts of Bamyan province, such as in Kahmard, Saighan and Shiber districts.

A community elder from Kahmard district said:

*“I have been asked to pay 1000 Afghanis to get a national identity card for my children, while the original price is 10 Afs. With such a corruption, AGEs find a soft corner to exploit in the heart of community members.”*<sup>209</sup>

**Poverty, Unemployment and Lack of Development:**

Unemployment and lack of development in the province are also seen as major drivers of conflict in Bamyan. Unbalanced and unequal development is an issue of concern both for people and government authorities in the province. Participants said that with the establishment of democracy after the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001 and the involvement of the international community in Afghanistan, the community members were optimistic for a better future and equitable development, but claimed that no major development projects have been initiated in Bamyan, blaming discrimination and prejudice towards Bamyan province.

**Poor governance:**

Other sources of tension and conflict that were discussed and identified through the eight focus group discussions, survey questionnaires and structured interviews in Bamyan province include a lack of professionalism in the government, lack of implementation of public administration reform, and the community’s lack of confidence in the Government due to the raised above issues.

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<sup>209</sup> Focus group discussion, Kahmard, 1 September 2013.

#### **IV. The Roadmap for Peace and People's Recommendations:**

Throughout the consultation process, the participants proposed the following general recommendations with a view to engaging the government, international actors, and civil society in a constructive dialogue on addressing root causes of conflict in Bamyan province:

- ***Strengthen the Afghan security forces***

Most of the participants were of the view that the Afghan National Security Forces should be supported, trained, and equipped with the necessary weapons and ammunitions to be able to protect the territory of the country. Bamyan residents said that in particular, the province is in dire need of an Afghan National Army base and an increase in the number of Afghan National Police to maintain security in the province. The security situation on the roads connecting Bamyan to Kabul should be addressed.

- ***Rationalisation of foreign policies***

Participants proposed the rationalization of foreign policies to deal with foreign affairs diplomatically in order to reduce the tensions with neighboring countries, in particular Pakistan about the Durand line.

- ***Support inclusivity of peace and reconciliation process***

Peace talks with Taliban should be carried out by scholars, religious persons, youth groups, civil society activists, human rights activist, women's rights activists and the international community. Taliban should be encouraged to join the peace dialogue, and if they show unwillingness, should be suppressed by force. Participants suggested that in Bamyan province, the peace talks should start with the residents of Tala wa Barfak district in Baghlan province in order to prevent infiltration of AGEs.

- ***Ensure involvement of women in the peace process***

Overall, participants believed that the peace process should not result in succumbing to AGEs limiting women's rights, including the right to education; otherwise the peace will not be acceptable for Afghan citizens. All human rights principles should be recognised and respected in any peace agreement with AGEs.

In every focus group discussion the participants strongly supported the promotion of women's rights and women's involvement in the peace process and in high level decision making: *"In any peace process human*

*rights, in particular women's rights, should be respected and AGEs should respect and accept the Afghan Constitution which provides for equal rights for men and women.*<sup>210</sup> *"Women's right and human rights should not be compromised; and the minority's rights should be respected".*<sup>211212</sup>

- Awareness raising on the peace process and the Afghan Constitution should be conducted in the community level. **Improve social and economic development**

Bamyan residents strongly called for an equal development, without prejudice and for the development support by the international community. Bamyan and other provinces of Afghanistan should be given the same allocation of the development budget.

- **Promote human rights and rule of law to tackle corruption and impunity**

Most participants believe that enforcing human rights and ending impunity will help bring peace as well as ensuring equal justice among all ethnic groups and the respect for Islamic principles. People were adamant that peace should not be a cover for impunity. Awareness raising campaigns for human rights and the rights of women should be launched.

- **Implementation of transitional justice Distribution of power to the provinces**

The participants proposed a better distribution of power to the provinces, to ensure improved coordination of development efforts at the provincial level, taking into account local interests, as the best solution towards sustainable peace and security in Bamyan and in the country. They also suggested a countrywide strategy that must consider all the segments of society ensuring social justice. The participants pointed out that national-unity, more localization of power and social justice are positive tools for bringing durable peace in Afghanistan.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Focus group discussion, Yakawlang district,, 6 June 2013, and Focus group discussion with women, Bamyan , 12 September 2013.

<sup>211</sup> Focus group discussion, Waras district, , 22 May 2013.

<sup>213</sup> Focus group discussion, Yakawlang district 6 June 2013and Focus group discussion, Shibar district, 24 April 2013.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace**

**Panjshir Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial road map for peace represents a summary of key findings based on the views and concerns shared by people who participated in focus-group discussions, individual interviews and opinion surveys carried out in Panjshir province. The consultations were held as part of Phase II of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace (hereinafter “People’s Dialogue”), a nationwide programme initiated by 11 civil society networks and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) to consult over 4,500 ordinary Afghans across the country with a view to developing 34 local road maps for peace – one for each Afghan province.

In Panjshir province, two focus-group discussions, five individual interviews and ten opinion surveys were carried out during the consultative process with around 80 local community members. Participants represented diverse social and political backgrounds, including community elders, male and female teachers, representatives of youth organizations, representatives of civil society, religious scholars and former jihadi commanders.

This local road map for peace intends to provide as comprehensive an evaluation as possible of the situation, as well as the identification of appropriate actionable solutions to help sustain peace and stability in Panjshir province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Panjshir Valley (in translation, the Valley of the “Five Lions”) is located 120 kilometres north of Kabul, near the Hindu Kush mountain range. It has a total surface area of 6,645 square kilometres. It was part of Parwan province, with four districts, until the decision to establish it as a third-category province in 2004. There are now seven districts in Panjshir province: the provincial capital Bazarak; Hisa-e-Awal, with District Administrative Centre (DAC) in Khenj; Rokha, with DAC in Shast; Anaba, with DAC in Anaba; Dara, DAC in Keraman; Paryan, with DAC in Nawdanak; and Shotul, with DAC in Dalan Sang. In early 2012, a new district, Abshar was created out of Dara to extend government services (mainly health and education) to remote populations of Dara district, though it has not yet been fully operationalized.

Panjshir is historically linked to the Jamiat-e Islami political party with Jamiat/Shura-e-Nazar, Ahmed Shah Masood’s resistance movement that opposed both the Soviet occupation (famously besieging 500 Russian tanks in Rokha district during the Jihad) and the Taliban in 1996-2001. As a result,

it has experienced severe fighting, forcing its population to evacuate the valley several times and for some to resettle permanently in other provinces or abroad.

Panjshir is an ethnically Tajik, homogenous province, historically opposed to the Taliban. Although there is no indigenous insurgency in the province, the movement of anti-government elements (AGEs) from the neighbouring province of Nuristan, as well as other provinces like Baghlan or Kapisa, remains a prime concern for the authorities. Insurgency-related activities in Nuristan have also affected Panjshir as a recipient of refugees fleeing armed conflict-related violence. The disaffection of former jihadi commanders, demobilized by the former Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) initiative and unemployed to this day, is seen by the authorities as a potential source of instability.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

#### **Types of Conflict**

Community members from Panjshir proudly claimed that there were no ongoing conflicts in the province. The situation, they alleged, was completely different from all the other five provinces of the Central Region. They reported three main reasons as to why Panjshir province was considered the most secure province in the region. The first of these is its geographical location, surrounded by high mountains and inaccessible from surrounding provinces other than Parwan, which is called the “Entrance Gate of Panjshir”. The second reason is Panjshir’s history of Jihad, which united the population. People noted that Panjshir province was the heart of Jihad for a very long time, with 14 years against the Russian forces and the then-central government in Kabul, followed by another five years of resistance against the Taliban.

A female teacher who attended the People’s Dialogue consultations said:

*“There is no conflict here in Panjshir province, this is because our people are united and support each other. We do not support AGEs and we know our responsibility with regard to our people and our country.”*

The third reason people gave was related to ethnicity, with all of Panjshir’s residents belonging to Tajik tribes. A tribal elder said:

*“A lot of conflicts in Afghanistan are caused by tribal disputes. Taliban used such disputes as an opportunity to gain support from*

*one ethnicity tribe in order to fight the other. Fortunately, in Panjshir we all are from one ethnicity. We are united and stand together; we support each other just as we supported our Mujahideen for a very long time."*

Participants did, however, express deep concerns over current threats to peace and stability. A civil society activist said:

*"Right now we do not face any conflicts in Panjshir, but we do have serious concerns about the future. We did not reach a critical stage yet, but we do have internal political problems which can amount to a threat for the current peace of the province."*

Throughout the discussions, people referred to "current" and "future" concerns.

### ***Current concerns***

During the group discussions, participants emphasized three main concerns that could trigger conflict in the province:

- (1) corruption and weakness of the local government;
- (2) lack of attention from the central government, resulting in a discriminatory policy against Panjshir province; and
- (3) lack of development projects and, as a result, a high rate of unemployment.

### ***Corruption and weak governance***

Community members complained about corruption and the weak performance of governmental authorities. They allege that officials do not pay attention to the poor living standards of community members. The Government, they allege, could have done much more to improve living conditions over the last few years.

A civil society activist mentioned:

*"The corruption can destroy peace in Panjshir province. The situation is getting worse day by day and there is no willpower to fight the dishonesty of officials and get rid of them."*

The people allege that corrupt officials in the province are supported by some powerful authorities at the central level in Kabul. This patronage encourages even more corruption.

A local elder claimed, *“The corrupt and weak local government has the support of the central government...”*

A civil society activist stated the following:

*“The biggest concern of the community is the weakness of the local government. The distance between people and the government is gradually increasing. The government officials do not have the capacity to attract the community and the people any longer.”*

#### Lack of attention from the central government

Most of the participants claimed that the central government did not pay sufficient attention to Panjshir province.

A former jihadi commander said:

*“The current peace of Panjshir province is not solid; if the central government officials continue with their discrimination against Panjshir province, there is a possibility that the people of Panjshir will start again with a fight for their rights.”*

Another government employee said:

*“We have concerns that relate to the discrimination of the central government against Panjshir province. There is not social justice in Panjshir. If this discrimination continues, maybe the current peace and the present stability will be at stake.”*

Community members strongly believe that they are ‘victims of peace’. They allege that it is their peaceful status that inhibited the provision of adequate development and employment projects to Panjshir province by the international community.

A local elder pointed out:

*“We have witnessed the implementation of projects and the delivery of funds in insecure provinces of the Central Region. But there is nothing for us; this is because we already have peace and stability and the international community does not want to spend their money in a stable and peaceful environment. Can you tell me why? We also need jobs, income and development – this is discrimination, the International community must pay attention to peaceful and calm provinces such as Panjshir to encourage other*

*insecure provinces like Logar to change the security environment for the better.”*

#### Lack of development projects and unemployment

The participants raised their concerns about unemployment in Panjshir, especially with regard to women. Twenty years of war in Panjshir province produced approximately 4,000 widows who are seeking employment. Additionally, young people require work. People claimed that most of the younger generation had left Panjshir for Kabul to seek employment opportunities. Although there are resources such as mines, gemstones and water, community members complained about the lack of development projects implemented in Panjshir province.

A female civil society member said:

*“I would like to stress my concern over the poverty and unemployment of youth and females in Panjshir. We have more than 4,000 widows who require jobs, income and protection. But the local and central government are too weak and did not address these issues at all.”*

An Ulema member stated: *“The big concerns of our people in Panjshir are poverty, unemployment, illiteracy...”*

A former Jihadi commander said:

*“Because of several years of Jihad, we have a huge number of widows, injured and disabled persons; additionally, the lack of employment and the consequent frustration created a lot of drug addicts and we do not have specialists who can help them. This has created distance between the people and the Government.”*

In addition, a large number of Mujahideen who handed over their guns under the DDR programme are unemployed and complain about the lack of support from the Government.

A former jihadi commander emphasized the following:

*“For several years I was a commander during the Jihad, but when I joined the DDR programme, the government forgot about us. They did not pay attention to our future; they just took our weapons and then left us alone. The performance of the state is the main reason for the concern of the people. Nowadays we are not armed and we*

*do not fight, but we do need jobs in order not to restart the fighting.”*

In this context, another former jihadi commander stated:

*“Once we handed over the weapons, the Government’s attention to our problems decreased. You see, most of us were jihadi commanders and we had weapons and troops, but when the Jihad ended and officials requested us to handover the weapons and promised to provide us with employment opportunities, we willingly accepted, joined the DDR programme and handed over all our weapons; but unfortunately the Government then forgot about us. In the early days we were all hopeful but now we do not trust the Government any longer.”*

### **Future concerns**

Apart from the above-mentioned issues, community members in Panjshir raised additional concerns which they named “future concerns”:

- (1) neglect/abandonment of Mujahideen leaders by the Government and the international community; and
- (2) intra-party dispute among the Mujahideen.

#### *Neglect/abandonment of Mujahideen leaders*

The neglect of the Mujahideen leaders resulted in frustration and discontent:

*“The central Government and international community neglected the Mujahideen leaders. We did immense work during the Jihad against the Soviet Union and Taliban, but there is no recognition.”*

#### *Intra-party dispute among the Mujahideen factions*

Community members state that there is increased tension between the various factions of the Mujahideen elite in Kabul, involving the Mujahideen leaders from Panjshir. People raised concerns over this division and were afraid that the internal fighting among the elite in Kabul might result in divisions and tension in Panjshir province. There are three main concerns involving local government, the central Government and the political leaders of Panjshir.

With regard to local government, community members complained about corruption and weak performance of the authorities.

A local elder said:

*“Our local authorities are busy with their private business and do not care about the people. There was no transparent appointment process - they were selected because of their relationship with powerful authorities.”*

On the other hand, most of the participants accused the central Government of “discrimination”.

Former jihadi commanders stated:

*“Due to several years of Jihad, we have a huge number of widows, injured and disabled persons; additionally, the lack of employment and the consequent frustration created a lot of drug addicts and we do not have specialists who can help them. This has created distance between the people and the government.”*

*“At the beginning of the current regime, most of the Mujahideen leaders of Panjshir joined the government and handed over their guns and weapons to work for the people; then, step by step, the central government dismissed the jihadi leaders from Panjshir province. Now we only have two of them in the system. But I strongly believe that they must appreciate us, our Jihad and what we did in the past.”*

Finally, community members stated that there was increased tension between the various factions of the Mujahideen elite in Kabul, involving the Mujahideen leaders from Panjshir. People raised concerns about this division and were afraid that the internal elite fighting in Kabul might create divisions and tension in Panjshir province, as well.

A former jihadi commander said:

*“The social and political fabric of the society has changed since the Jihad. In the past there was only one leader, Ahmad Shah Massoud, but at present time we have several leaders who think about their personal interests first before they think about us, the people. Our current leaders are not aware of community problems; they do not even talk with the people.”*

#### **IV. The Road Map for Peace**

Throughout group discussions, interviews and opinion surveys, community members in Panjshir put forward the following recommendations to assure stability, a long-lasting peace and a better future for the people in Panjshir. These focused on two main areas:

- (1) reform of local government; and
- (2) greater consideration for economic and development programmes in the province, with special attention paid to this so far neglected province.

##### **Reform of local government**

People believed that the appointments of most provincial officials were not based on merit, but rather on their personal relationships. A local elder said:

*“If a weak person is appointed because of personal relations, nobody will question his/her performance.”*

They also emphasized the need for reform and more capacity-building programmes for officials. A young man from civil society said:

*“We can see that some of our Panjshir officials are working in the same position for a long time without any positive output; however, they are not being replaced.”*

##### **Consideration for economic and development programs in the province**

Natural resources, such as mines, gemstones and water are available in Panjshir, so community members called for proper investment in their exploitation.

*“We have good resources and opportunities in our province, but the government needs to give priority to our neglected province; additionally, a hydro-electric dam established along the Panjshir River could contribute to the change in people’s lives with electricity available throughout the province.”*

## **V. People's Recommendations**

- Reform of local government, ensuring appointment based on merit and the avoidance of nepotism
- Fight against corruption
- Capacity-building training activities for local authorities
- Proper investment in development projects

Creation of employment opportunities and provision of support for the most vulnerable, such as youth, former jihadis and those left widowed and disabled from the Jihad.

**Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace:  
Local Road Maps for Peace  
Daykundi Province**

## **I. Introduction**

This provincial road map for peace represents a summary of the key findings and concerns raised in six focus-group discussions, ten individual in-depth interviews and 21 surveys of opinion carried out with approximately 200 ordinary Afghan citizens residing in Daykundi province. Participants had a various and diverse backgrounds, including farmers, public-sector employees, community elders, teachers, civil society actors, religious scholars, persons with disabilities and returnees from different districts, including from the volatile districts such as Kijran, Miramor and Kiti.

The consultations took place as part of Phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace program (hereinafter the "People's Dialogue") initiated by 11 civil society actors and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to consult over 4,500 Afghan citizens with a view to develop 34 local road maps for peace – one for each province.

This road map for peace aims to provide as comprehensive as possible an analysis of local drivers of conflict as well as to identify appropriate, actionable solutions to help build sustainable peace and stability in Daykundi province.

## **II. Provincial Profile: Geography, Demography and Political Context**

Daykundi province is part of Afghanistan's central highlands region and belongs to the area commonly referred to as 'Hazarajat', that is, predominantly inhabited by Shiite Hazaras. Daykundi was part of Uruzgan province, but was officially established as an independent province on 20 July 2004 by the former President Hamid Karzai, based on demands from the Hazara community arguing that they has no access to the provincial capital at Trinkot in Uruzgan as a result of deepening insecurity and ethnic-related violence. Daykundi covers a land area of approximately 17,501 square kilometres, comprising roughly three per cent of the total territory of Afghanistan. Daykundi province borders the provinces of Ghazni, Uruzgan, Helmand, Ghor and Bamyān and is divided into eight districts: Nili, Shahrīstan, Miramor, Ashterlay, Bandar/Sang-Takht, Khedir, Kijran and Kiti.

At the time of the consultations, no official census had been conducted in the province, so its population remains the subject of debated among community elders, the Provincial Council and provincial authorities, who claim anywhere from 650,000 to 700,000 inhabitants. The ethnic breakdown of the population is estimated as 90 per cent Hazara, 5 per cent

Baluchi, 3 per cent Sayeed and 2 per cent Pashtun. The vast majority of Daykundi's population (99 per cent) resides in rural areas.

Daykundi is known for its harsh climate. In winter, many areas of the province are inaccessible and as a result suffer from food insecurity. In view of its remoteness, rugged terrain and extreme weather conditions, the province is prone to humanitarian risks throughout the year. In addition, the provincial administration reportedly lacks the capacity and resources to respond to these issues.

Some areas of insecurity are to be found in Daykundi, but far fewer than in many other Afghan provinces. During the consultations, participants reported that the eastern part of Miramor district and the southern part of Daykundi province were particularly insecure. These areas have been under attack from Uruzgan and Helmand-based anti-government elements (AGEs), in particular the Taliban, who have established illegal check-posts and temporarily blocked access from the main roads to the food market of Kandahar and the south-eastern region. In addition, there are local conflicts and inter-ethnic rivalries, especially in the south (Kijran), where Pashtuns are suspected by other communities of favouring the Taliban based in the neighbouring provinces of Helmand and Uruzgan. Together with apparent weak government control in the southern areas, increasing pressure has also been placed on the scarce provincial administrative resources of some other districts.

### **III. Conflict Analysis: Types and Drivers of Conflict**

During the six focus-group discussions, 21 surveys of opinions and 10 structured in-depth interviews, around 200 community members comprised of men and women from various parts of Daykundi consistently pointed to the spill-over effects that the province was experiencing from insecurity in neighbouring provinces. They also reported some chief factors driving the conflict in the province: administrative corruption; lack of equal development opportunities and unemployment; presence of armed groups; political rivalries; impunity and lack of implementation of the law; discrimination; interference from foreign countries; and negative interference of political parties.

## **Types of Conflict**

### ***Armed clashes between AGEs and Afghan National Security Forces***

Daykundi shares sizeable borders with Ghazni, Helmand and Uruzgan provinces, along which areas the Taliban enjoys full or partial control. AGEs with an extensive presence in the Charchina and Gezab districts of Uruzgan, the Baghran district of Helmand and the Ajirestan district of Ghazni have been able to infiltrate into the Kajran and Miramoor districts of Daykundi.

All the connecting roads between Daykundi and Helmand and Uruzgan provinces are allegedly under the control of the Taliban, which adversely affects freedom of movement for residents of Daykundi. Participants claimed that the Taliban blocked access to these roads for Daykundi's residents several times in 2013 and demanded 'taxes' from public transport vehicles. In particular, participants said that the Taliban blocked the important transport links from Kiti and Kijran districts to Kandahar and Uruzgan provinces repeatedly. In addition, they were asked to raise the Taliban flag and to collaborate in removing Afghan security forces from their respective districts.

One religious leader said:

*"Since the US Special Forces left Kijran, the Taliban launched their attacks and blocked the roads. This is because the US Special Force had not been replaced by the Afghan National Army and this has resulted in a gap used by the Taliban."*

A shopkeeper added: *"It is more than 20 days that I couldn't transport my loaded truck due to closure of the road by the Taliban. The truck was loaded with potatoes and they are now perished. Few days ago, some trucks were allowed to cross the area in exchange of 15,000 Pakistani rupees per each truck. When the drivers arrived in Nili confirmed the tax demands and that the Taliban warned them not to disclose the taxing so not to destroy the image of the Taliban, otherwise they were threatened that will be punished and their trucks will be burned down."*

The use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) has increased near Daykundi's perimeter. Residents reported that AGEs and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), both based in Ghazni, Helmand and Uruzgan provinces, had been engaged in armed clashes in Daykundi, without accountability for any harm caused to the civilian population as a result of their operations.

### ***Pasture/land disputes between Kuchi nomads and local residents***

Pasture/land disputes between migrating Kuchis and sedentary residents have a long history. The pasture dispute is considered to be one of the major conflicts in Daykundi province, particularly affecting the Miramor district that borders with the Ajristan district of Ghazni province. Every year in the spring and summer seasons, armed clashes between local communities and Kuchis have been reported on pastures in Miramor district.

During the focus-group discussions, participants blamed the central Government for not implementing the law, causing increase of hostilities between Kuchis and local residents in Daykundi. They also accused the Taliban of backing the Kuchis in order to make the border area insecure and spread their control and presence in the area.

Participants claimed:

*“Kuchis have weapons and attack the community without accountability, as the central government is not determined to implement the law against the Kuchi criminals.”*<sup>214</sup>

### ***Political rivalries***

During the focus-group discussions, participants alleged the influence of political parties on local conflicts. They claimed that influential political figures had used local communities for their own political purposes, creating local rivalries which sometimes resulted in violent confrontations among communities resulting in injury and death.

Participants alleged: *“The political parties and members of parliament use the warlords and communities as a tool for their political and personal interests and they do not care about the public interests.”*<sup>215</sup>

The head of a District Development Assembly said: *“Political-parties’ rivalries, especially during elections times, are problem maker and the political parties are the main causes of war in the province.”*<sup>216</sup>

### ***Illegal armed groups***

According to participants, illegal armed groups (IAGs) have an extensive

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<sup>214</sup> Focus-group discussion, Shahristan district, Daykundi province, 4 July 2013.

<sup>215</sup> Focus-group discussion, Shahristan district, Daykundi province, 4 July 2013.

<sup>216</sup> Focus-group discussion, Khadir district, 8 May 2013.

presence and enjoy free movement in Daykundi. These IAGs are led by former warlords who fought against each other during the civil war and are still looking for revenge against their rivals. Sometimes members of parliament allegedly provide them with money to campaign for their benefit and, in return, they force communities to vote for the respective candidates. This has been a pattern seen in Daykundi since 2004. Participants said that the IAGs do not care about the law or human rights and that they only look to achieving their own personal gains. Further, participants shared the view that the police were not able to control these IAGs and that the police are even “in agreement” not to restrict their movements.

An influential person stated:

*“IAGs have no respect for human rights at all, and some people see their benefit in war, that’s why they are against the human rights standards.”*

A school principle reiterated:

*“IAGs want poverty in the area and do not respect human rights standards”.*<sup>217</sup>

Participants generally shared the following belief:

*“Warlords and candidates who didn’t receive votes in the elections also have hands in creating insecurity. The failed candidates create insecurity in order to defame the ones who are successful and to pave their ground for the coming elections.”*<sup>218</sup>

### ***Ethnic and religious prejudice***

Participants believe that ethnicity is still a big challenge for the residents of the province and a problem affecting development in Daykundi. In this regard, participants accused the local governments of neighbouring Helmand and Uruzgan provinces of not making an effort to prevent the attacks by and influx of the Taliban from these provinces into Daykundi.

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<sup>217</sup> Focus-group discussion, Khadir district, 8 May 2013.

<sup>218</sup> Focus-group discussions with representatives of Kijran and Kiti districts, 7 May 2013.

## **Drivers of Conflict**

### ***Presence of Taliban and AGEs***

In Daykundi, the Taliban and other AGEs are considered to be a serious threat against the province's peace and security. Residents said that these groups are in a state of constant war with the security forces, as well as affecting and targeting the civilian population.

### ***Corruption***

According to participants, administrative corruption is widespread in the state institutions, especially in the judicial system. Most participants shared the impression that the widespread corruption was one of the main causes of insecurity and extended from the central to local governments.

Participants expressed the following opinion:

*"Corrupt government is creating discrimination among the Afghan ethnic groups; there is no merit-based recruitment of officials; systematic human rights violations are continuing; poverty and culture of impunity are causing local disputes."*<sup>219</sup>

The head of a women's *shura* also said: *"The government is corrupt and the government is responsible for all existing problems."*<sup>220</sup>

Residents recognized the role of the justice system in bringing about accountability and tackling corruption to bring security and social justice to communities. However, they complained that the official organs on the contrary did not respect the law and that the judiciary and justice sectors had not done enough to implement the law, alleging that they were instead themselves engaged in corruption, which had widened the gap between the government and the community.

A defence lawyer claimed: *"The weak and corrupt justice system undermines security and results in creation of conflicts"*.

A journalist explained: *"When the justice system doesn't act properly, it results in the creation of sense of revenge of the affected parties and then the parties themselves act to defend their rights."*

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<sup>219</sup> Focus-group discussion, Shahristan district, Daykundi province, 4 July 2013.

<sup>220</sup> Focus-group discussion, Nili district, 9 May 2013.

### **Culture of impunity and lack of Implementation of the law**

The impunity is reportedly widespread in the community at every level. The communities believe that the Government has made impunity an official practice.

Daykundi residents consistently complained that: “Law and justice do not touch the warlords and powerful criminals; only poor people face trail and justice.”

Participants raised concerns that the local government neither in the provincial centre nor in the districts is determined to combat the culture of impunity and that still no warlord alleged of crimes or other powerful criminals have faced justice for their crimes. The participants concluded that the never ending impunity affects the security and encourage the victims to take revenge in their own hands against the perpetrators as the main recourse. People alleged that the illegal armed groups in Daykundi have committed war crimes and due to the lack of accountability some victims are trying to take revenge against these perpetrators, with the assistance of rival illegal armed groups.

### ***Poverty, illiteracy and unemployment***

The participants believe that one of the root causes of insecurity is poverty, illiteracy and unemployment, while the political-parties and IAGs use poor and uneducated people for their own benefit and personal objectives.

Daykundi is one of the poorest provinces in the country, the level of employment is very low and many communities wallow in poverty. Most criminality can be traced to poverty. Further, the rate of price inflation is very high in comparison to other provinces because of bad roads and a long snowy season that results in long-term blockage of the main roads in winter.

In most of the focus-group discussions, participants blamed the government for not introducing and implementing concrete plans to reduce poverty and enhance educational levels in the province.

### ***Foreign interference***

Most of the parties that currently dominate Daykundi politics were allegedly formed in Iran and Pakistan during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. For many years, these parties were backed by Pakistan and

Iran and participants believed that insecurity in Afghanistan served these foreign interests.

The participants further shared the belief that the Taliban were “puppets” of foreign countries whose agenda was to undermine security in Afghanistan. The participants also mentioned also that Iran interfered in Daykundi through religious scholars who apparently had links with that country.

#### ***Negative interference by political parties in local affairs***

Political parties reportedly enjoy considerable influence on communities in the province and proactively support their own affiliates within local government and on the provincial council. People said that the members of parliament representing Daykundi succeeded through support from political parties, and that even civil servants were appointed with support and on recommendation from political parties.

Participants stated that members of parliament interfered in the official affairs of the province, as higher authorities (district governors, chiefs of police and heads of government departments) were obliged to cooperate continuously with members of parliament or lose their jobs. Continuation of such negative interference undermines transparency and the rule of law, while increasing insecurity in the province.

#### ***Discrimination***

The participants firmly believe that Daykundi province is discriminated against and intentionally ignored by the central Government, seriously affecting its development. They also said that discrimination was a factor in creating distance and disparity between the Government and local communities, by producing insecurity and social injustice.

### **IV. The Roadmap for Peace and People’s Recommendations**

Throughout the consultative process, people proposed the general recommendations outlined below, with a view to engaging Government, international actors and civil society in a constructive dialogue on addressing the root causes of conflict in Daykundi province.

- **Strengthen and increase the national security forces**

Most of the participants were of the view that the Afghan National Security Forces should be supported and mobilized with the necessary equipment to

overcome insecurity. Participants suggested the strengthening and increasing the numbers of Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army military bases in border areas to prevent the influx and infiltration of AGEs into Daykundi province.

- **Improve and ensure equality of social and economic development**

The Government must ensure equal development, without prejudice, and should eliminate discrimination to focus on the promotion of national unity. Governmental institutions and local governments in all provinces of Afghanistan should receive an equal development budget for construction and reconstruction projects.

- **Promote human rights, the rule of law and tackle impunity**

Most of the people consulted believe that ensuring human rights and ending impunity will help bring about peace. They stressed the need for maintaining justice among all ethnic groups and respect of Islamic principles. People held a strong opinion that peace should not be a cover for crimes and called for the end of impunity. Awareness-raising campaigns in favour of the rights of women should be launched.

- **End disputes between Kuchis and local residents**

Implementation of the law is a permanent solution to ending the dispute between Kuchis and local residents in Afghanistan. Participants urged the Government to provide appropriate land for Kuchis to prevent violent confrontations.

- **Elimination of corruption**

To ensure its legitimacy and the rule of law, the Government must put an end to the administrative corruption and culture of impunity for corruption, so that all the people of Afghanistan may live under the equal protection of the law and without social injustice.

- **Promotion and protection of women's rights**

The Government should provide the opportunity for women to take part in all social, political and economic affairs of the country. In any peace talks, women should be consulted as decision-makers. The achievements that have been made towards the advancement of women's rights should be protected.