



Kabul, Afghanistan, 11 October 2014

## OPEN LETTER

### The Afghan People's 10-Point Road Map for Peace

To: His Excellency, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai

Excellency,

We, on behalf of the biggest networks of Afghan civil society, congratulate you on your inauguration as President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. We were pleased to note the prominence you gave in your inaugural address to good governance, human rights and women's empowerment, as well as the need to tackle widespread corruption while ensuring equitable development. We view Afghanistan's Government of National Unity as the ultimate vehicle to protect and promote the socio-political rights of all Afghans and, accordingly, share and support your vision of securing the rights of all Afghan men and women as the basis for building a peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

Your Excellency, based on your request from Afghan citizens for their prioritisation of social challenges that the Government of National Unity should address, we wish to share with you the key findings of a rights-based initiative we have facilitated over the past three years: the *Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace*. This initiative was conceived to promote an inclusive, Afghan-led peace process that puts ordinary Afghans at the heart of any effort to secure lasting peace in Afghanistan, while at the same time enabling us, as Afghan civil society activists, to amplify the voices of ordinary Afghans and ensure they are heard by all policymakers, including the ultimate policymakers – the leaders of our country.

To date, over 6,000 ordinary Afghan citizens - men, women and youth (including housewives, local business people, teachers, farmers, persons with disabilities, students, community elders and religious leaders, and former members of the armed opposition) have taken part in the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace through inclusive focus groups discussions in all 34 provinces, including remote, rural areas. Our efforts concentrated on soliciting ordinary people's views on the key drivers of the on-going conflict as well as corresponding, workable solutions. The findings of the second phase of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace were published in the form of a summary report launched in June 2014, entitled *Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace: Building the Foundations for an Inclusive Peace Process*, and included a **10-Point Road Map for Peace**.

The initiative has also resulted, to date, in the production of 30 draft provincial-level road maps for peace. The findings and solutions proposed in these road maps for peace serve as both a call to action and a demand that all peace building efforts meaningfully involve Afghan men, women and youth from all parts of society. Such an inclusive process will not only guarantee the legitimacy of any peace building effort, but also, critically, lead to durable peace based on the will of the Afghan people, thereby giving people a stake in the future development of their country.

The Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace highlighted that Afghan men, women and youth view disarming and disempowering local militias, tackling widespread corruption and impunity, particularly among the police and judiciary, resolving ethnic tensions, tribal disputes and factional conflicts, which fuel broader armed conflict, respecting human rights and providing equitable development assistance and service delivery across the country, as the essential components of any strategy to achieve lasting peace in Afghanistan.

The most common theme echoed throughout the Afghan's People's Dialogue on Peace, and detailed in the summary report, is Afghans' discontent with the Government due to corruption, weak rule of law and pervasive impunity for human rights violations and impunity. These factors were viewed as the main drivers of the armed conflict in Afghanistan. The report highlights that corruption offers a 'path to influence' and impunity is a direct by-product of corruption in the justice system. Your Excellency's early focus on reviewing the Kabul Bank case and reforming the judicial system is a welcome development; we look forward to being consulted on and receiving regular updates on this process.

Afghans strongly called for the implementation of reform programmes, including independent and non-political measures to remove corrupt officials, merit-based appointments of local government employees, and the introduction of more efficient administrative procedures. People also called on the Government to ensure public scrutiny of key justice sector personnel, and to implement changes aimed at combatting corruption and abuse of authority in the police, prosecutor's offices and courts.

The Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace further pointed to a lack of Government presence in remote, insecure and contested areas as a key driver of the armed conflict. People noted that the Government's inability to maintain sufficient levels of national security forces in many parts of the country has contributed to the resurgence of the Taliban and other abusive illegal armed groups in provinces such as Farah, Herat, Jawzjan and Parwan.

Afghans who live in insecure parts of the country stressed that fear stemming from Taliban infiltration and inadequate levels of national security forces led the previous Government to outsource the security of its citizens to notorious local militiamen. This, according to people in Kunduz province, has created "*States within the State*" where 'law' is administered locally according to the whim of warlords rather than by provincial or national structures. Afghans accordingly call on the Government of National Unity to disarm illegal armed groups and other so-called pro-Government militias. The people view this measure as critical to tackling the illegitimate influence of local powerbrokers and warlords over local government institutions.

Afghan men, women and youth also expressed grave concerns about deepening ethnic, tribal and factional animosity that drives insecurity and instability in many parts of Afghanistan. People stated that such conflicts carry the potential to and often have fuelled the broader conflict between the Government and the armed opposition. Afghans called on the Government of National Unity to focus more attention on resolving local-level conflicts and disputes and stem growing conflict by promoting community cohesion and reconciliation, which would assist in ensuring an inclusive peace process.

The report identifies lack of economic progress and social justice as a serious driver of instability. Poverty, slow and unequal development in all regions, along with mass unemployment, and inequality in the allocation of resources are problems that participants in the Afghan People's Dialogue believe the Government has failed to address over the past 12 years.

Afghans also raised serious concerns about the misuse, misappropriation and inequitable distribution of development assistance. People noted that lack of community infrastructure and services such as roads, bridges, schools and healthcare facilities continued not only to undermine stable governance but also

resulted in enormous hardship and suffering among poor Afghans. We believe that your agenda, as articulated in your inaugural speech, where you state that the Government of National Unity has “a commitment to directly transfer the national budget to the provinces” can serve a basis to resolve these problems.

Focusing on unemployment, and in particular increasingly disenfranchised youth, who can pose security challenges, the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace found that ‘education is the key to security’. Emphasis on the plight of Afghan youth, along with employment and income generation initiatives were thus viewed by Afghans as an immediate and national priority for the Government of National Unity.

Opium poppy cultivation and the struggle for control over its illicit economy as directly linked to high rates of unemployment, corruption within government institutions, illiteracy, youth’s susceptibility to drugs and the influence of armed groups over youth are fundamental problems identified by the people. Afghans therefore called on the Government of National Unity to focus more proactively on fostering job creation, investing in alternative crops, and emphasising the development of education facilities and services for youth as ways to combat the drugs problem.

As also highlighted in the summary report, Afghans emphatically viewed the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) as a failed programme. They expressed resentment at their exclusion from both the process around the implementation of the Programme, as well as the lack of broader community-based development envisaged at the Programme’s conception. In the report, Afghans expressed the view that the APRP is led by those who have a vested interest in continuation of the conflict. Former Taliban fighters who had been reintegrated through the APRP also voiced dissatisfaction with the Programme.

The report highlights that Afghans are calling for an inclusive peace process to ensure that peace is based on the legitimate desires and will of all Afghan people and not just elites and powerbrokers. People are calling on the Government of National Unity to fundamentally reform the APRP in a way that gives all people a stake in building the foundations for lasting peace at the local-level.

The report, summarising the views of Afghan men, women and youth is enclosed with this letter. We hope it will support and further enhance Your Excellency’s vision for building lasting peace in Afghanistan – based on the legitimate grievances, desires and will of the Afghan people. We also enclose the **People’s 10-Point Road Map for Peace**. The main message of the report is that durable peace can only be achieved by addressing the root causes of the conflict that has plagued our country for years, based on the solutions identified by the people; only then will the conflict be meaningfully resolved.

We look forward to meeting with Your Excellency to further discuss the findings of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace and how Afghan civil society can play a role in securing peace as a reliable bridge between people and the Government.

Yours sincerely,

Steering Committee members of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace

*Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC)*  
*Afghan Civil Society Forum (ASCF)*  
*Afghan Civil Society & Human Rights Network (ACSHRN)*  
*Afghan National Union of Labour (AMCA)*  
*Afghan Women’s Network (AWN)*

*Afghan Women Skills Development Centre (AWSDC)*  
*Human Rights Focus Organization (HRFO)*  
*Organization for Special Development and Legal Rights (OSDLR)*  
*Sanayee Development Organization (SDO)*  
*Transitional Justice Coordinating Group (TJCG)*  
*Women Political Participation Committee (WPPC)*

## **Afghan People's 10-Point Road Map for Peace**

The report of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace contains 33 recommendations to the Government of Afghanistan, the armed opposition, the international community and Afghan civil society on steps needed to achieve lasting peace in Afghanistan. The recommendations of the 4,648 Afghan men, women and youth involved in (phase II) of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace have been expanded into provincial road maps for peace. Thirty (30) road maps have been completed to date.

Afghan men, women and youth nationwide urged national and international policymakers at all levels to promptly and adequately address the root-causes of conflict and promote sustainable peace through focus on the following 10 identified priorities:

### **1) Promote Responsive State Institutions**

- Rampant corruption within local government institutions (police, prosecution departments and judiciary) and parliament requires stronger checks and balances to improve oversight of these institutions.
- Reform programmes need to be implemented, including independent and non-political measures to remove corrupt Government officials, enhanced training and capacity building initiatives for local government employees, ensuring transparent and merit-based appointments of local government employees with priority given to eligible candidates from provinces where the post is located, and introducing more efficient administrative procedures.
- A performance-based system should be introduced with rewards (*makafat*) and punishments (*majazat*) that would recognise well-performing officials and reprimand those engaged in corruption.

### **2) Strengthen Security Institutions**

- The Government's limited reach was viewed as a main factor in the Government's lack of authority over territory and its ability to peacefully manage local conflicts. Afghans in general acknowledged progress on reforming and strengthening the Afghan national security forces (ANSF) and reported a high-level of confidence in the Afghan National Army. Afghans repeatedly raised serious complaints, however, about criminal and abusive behaviour, including gross violations of human rights, by the Afghan National Police, Afghan Local Police and pro-Government militias.
- To build effective, responsive and democratic security forces, the People's Dialogue proposed establishing and expanding the functions of security institutions.
- Afghans asserted the need for continued international support to professionalize and build a community-responsive ANSF, and stressed the need for continuous support and cooperation in equipping and training the ANSF to strengthen ANSF capacity which was viewed as vital to maintaining security after withdrawal of international military forces at the end of 2014.
- To build confidence in the ANSF, people proposed the establishment of an effective oversight mechanism with local communities empowered and enabled to report human rights violations by the ANSF with unlawful actions investigated and punished.

### **3) Disarm and Disempower Illegal Armed Groups and Other Pro-Government Militias**

- Afghans emphasised the imperative to end the illegitimate influence of local powerbrokers and warlords over local government institutions. This action, people asserted, would in turn strengthen peace and stability at the district-level. Afghans throughout the country strongly sought re-introduction of the Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) programme, launched by the Government in June 2005 and ended in March 2011.
- Afghans stressed that opium poppy cultivation, drugs smuggling and illegal extortions by drug-traffickers have sustained or exacerbated the conflict in many areas. People stated that revenues generated from cultivation, processing, and trafficking of opium poppy, as well as drug addiction, directly benefitted insurgent groups and local militias. People blamed these groups for contributing in a direct way to further destabilisation and insecurity in remote areas where the illicit economy thrives.
- Afghans called on the Government to prioritise eradication of the illicit drugs trade and the revenues it generates by strategically locating Afghan national security forces in areas where the drugs trade flourishes to curb insurgent activities and disempower illegal armed groups.

### **4) Promote Human Rights, Rule of Law and Tackle Impunity**

- Afghans strongly advocated that the Government and international community should take practical steps to ensure the safety and security of civilians during armed counterinsurgency operations and protect their basic human rights in that context. Afghans were very vocal in their desire for stronger rule of law, transparent, accountable and efficient State institutions, and an end to Afghanistan's legacy of impunity.
- The overwhelming majority of Afghans involved in the People's Dialogue suggested that reforming law enforcement and the judicial system must remain at the centre of any efforts to establish durable peace. They proposed vetting of key justice sector personnel, developing and enforcing comprehensive laws and institutional and procedural changes aimed at combatting corruption and abuse of authority in justice sector institutions, along with adequate oversight to ensure the independence of justice institutions.

### **5) Promote Women's Rights and their Role in Peacebuilding**

- Nationwide, people called for urgent action by the Government and international community to implement measures which would end the negative impact of harmful traditional practices on women's rights, and allow women to participate meaningfully in all peacebuilding initiatives.
- Afghans called on the Government to work proactively to raise awareness in all communities on harmful practices against women and girls, and work to fully implement the 2009 law on the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW law). Many Afghans agreed *"we must not allow either women's rights or human rights to be victimised"* (as part of any efforts to secure peace).

### **6) Enable Youth through Fostering Job Creation and Strengthening the Education System**

- Afghans noted with huge concern that the Taliban and other armed groups are easily able to recruit disenchanted youth who struggle to otherwise find meaningful employment. People stressed the need for specialised skills training centres and a robust job creation process including increased investment into construction and development projects which would require human resources.

- Afghan men, women and youth also stressed the need for the Government to establish a more functional and efficient education system for youth which would include more adequate infrastructure and quality of lessons. Afghans reiterated that improved educational infrastructure would help to accommodate additional students.
- Afghans called on the Government to ramp up efforts to reopen schools for girls in those districts where the presence of armed groups has violated Afghan girls' right to education.
- Ensuring a sounder quality of education was also said to require efforts towards building the capacity of teachers and adopting modern curricula, including science and technology, at all levels tailored more specifically to the capacity of students.

## **7) Realise Equitable Social and Economic Development**

- Afghans all viewed tangible progress in economic and social development, including concerted efforts towards strengthening the education system, creating employment opportunities and ensuring equitable access to development, as crucial to sustainable peace. A majority of Afghan men, women and youth stressed that despite some clear improvements, achievements have not been equal to the billions of dollars in donor aid spent in Afghanistan over the past 12 years. Progress should be measured not only on the quantity of services, such as the number of schools and hospitals built, but on the quality of these critical services.
- Afghans stressed that fostering employment opportunities, particularly for youth is imperative.
- Afghans noted that the persistent lack of equitable and sustainable development has had a particularly severe impact on vulnerable youth and destitute farmers, two segments of society affected by high rates of unemployment and lack of opportunity, illiteracy, susceptibility to drugs and the drugs trade in certain strategic provinces. They called on the Government to focus more proactively on fostering job creation and emphasised development investment in educational facilities for youth as ways to help curb the problem.
- Sustainable investment in the agricultural sector such as land extension and sufficient irrigation systems would also help improve rural economies. Private and Government-owned enterprises such as textile production, carpet production, resin cleaning, oil production and dairy factories could also create employment opportunities if they received adequate Government support.
- Afghans also noted that a large portion of communal disputes often arose around issues concerning uneven access to development assistance. The people highlighted that all Afghan citizens are equally entitled to benefit from development assistance regardless of their ethnicity, political connections, links with Government, geographic location or existence of conflict in their respective regions. Throughout the country Afghans emphasised the use of countrywide assessments to monitor development projects as a way to increase the effectiveness of development assistance.
- Overall, Afghans offered several concrete proposals on how sustainable development could be achieved in their regions. Due to the agrarian character of many Afghan provinces, a number of Dialogue participants stated that development aid should be directed towards the construction of hydro-electric water dams, which they stated would assist in combatting draught, foster job creation and provide a steady supply of power to their provinces.

## **8) Ensure Inclusivity in the Peace Process**

- Throughout the People's Dialogue, ordinary Afghans consistently emphasised that ensuring wider participation in the peace and reconciliation process – including by men, women, minority groups, civil society and especially youth – is central to its success. People believe increased

participation by these segments of society would better ensure inclusivity and local ownership of the process.

- Many Afghans expressed concern that Afghan youth are not being encouraged to participate in local governance, which they believed also serves to frustrate peace. Greater youth participation could be achieved through the introduction of youth incentive programmes or through recruitment policies specifically aimed at targeting youth.

**9) Strengthen Community-based Dispute Resolution Mechanisms**

- Dialogue participants noted that Afghans have a strong culture of addressing conflict and local dispute through people-led councils (*jirgas* and *shuras*). They universally stated that supporting such local conflict resolution mechanisms in a way that serves the community's interests, including those of women and ethnic minority groups, would foster a political and social space in which ordinary people could engage with each other and with conflicting parties in a constructive dialogue for peace.
- A number of Afghans cautioned however that *jirgas* and *shuras* should not serve as forums for adjudication of serious human rights violations or for acts of violence against women.

**10) Neutralise Spoilers of Peace**

- To address the negative influence of peace spoilers, Afghans strongly advocated for vetting mechanisms based on objective criteria for both ex-armed combatants and leaders of the peace and reconciliation process. Afghans throughout the country believed that those who are involved in the peace process should be honest, influential, well-respected in their communities and democratically elected/appointed. People strongly recommended that those who have been accused of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity should be excluded from the peace process.
- Afghans living in border provinces urged the Government to do more to secure Afghanistan's borders and prevent the infiltration of armed groups into Afghanistan. Afghans reiterated their call for neighbouring governments to cease backing armed groups through the provision of material support (weapons and/or safe havens).