



AFGHAN CIVIL SOCIETY PRESENT ROAD MAPS FOR PEACE TO PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

Kabul, Afghanistan 10 June 2014

Disarming and disempowering local militias, tackling widespread corruption and impunity 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 Afghanistan are essential to achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan, said a group of civil society network organisations in a report released today.

Presenting a road map (see annex) to secure lasting peace in Afghanistan, the group called on the presidential candidates to endorse and include the road map in any national strategy for the country's development and stabilisation.

Prepared by 11 Afghan civil society networks and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, the 40-page report, *Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace: Building the Foundations for an Inclusive Peace Process*, summarises the views of 4,648 Afghan men, women and youth from Afghanistan's 34 provinces, documents their grievances and aspirations, and presents their solutions to achieve peace in Afghanistan.

"The People's Dialogue enables us as Afghan civil society to act as a bridge between the Government and the people; through this report we are carrying the people's voices to our future president and giving ordinary Afghans – men, women and youth, from all walks of life – a real stake in the future development of this country," said civil society representatives at the report's launch. *"Road maps for peace based on the people's vision are the only real guarantee of lasting peace in Afghanistan."*

Based on 189 focus group discussions, opinion surveys and individuals interviews, conducted by Afghan civil society between April 2013 and January 2014, which included housewives, local business people, teachers, farmers, students, community elders and religious leaders, youth, and former members of the armed opposition (ex-Taliban), the report reflects the involvement and views of Afghan men, women and youth from all walks of life on prospects for peace at the local level across Afghanistan.

"The findings and solutions in the road maps for peace are both a call to action and a demand that all peacebuilding efforts meaningfully involve Afghan men, women and youth from all parts of society," said Afghan civil society representatives. *"Such an inclusive process will not only guarantee the legitimacy of any peacebuilding effort, but, critically, lead to durable peace based on the will of the Afghan people."*

Tackle widespread corruption

A common theme echoed throughout the Afghan's People's Dialogue and detailed in the report is Afghans' discontent with their Government due to corruption, weak rule of law and pervasive impunity for human rights violations. These factors were viewed as main drivers of the armed conflict. The report noted that corruption offers a 'path to influence' and that impunity is a direct by-product of corruption in the justice system.

“The corrupt Government is discriminating among the many Afghan ethnicities, and there is no merit-based system for recruitment of officials. Systematic human rights violations are on-going, and the resultant poverty and culture of impunity are causing local disputes,” said Dialogue participants in Daikundi province. Similar views were echoed by many Afghans across the country.

Afghan men, women and youth reinforced the need to strengthen checks and balances aimed at improving oversight of local government institutions. The report found that Afghans seek accountable, transparent and efficient local government which they view as central to ensuring durable peace. People strongly called for 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.

In the report, Afghans 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.

Improve security and disarm and disempower local militias

The Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace pointed to a lack of Government presence in remote, insecure and contested areas as a key driver of the armed conflict. The report noted that the Government’s inability to maintain sufficient levels of national security forces in many parts of the country was viewed as contributing 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 has led the 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 rather than at the provincial or national-level.

“Illegal armed people exist all over. They do not want peace because they would lose power. Therefore they generate conflict among the communities. This is the unfortunate reality and the true limitation for peace in our communities. Until these groups are expelled, peace remains a dream,” said a community elder from Parwan province.

The report called on the Government to disarm illegal armed groups and other pro-Government militias. Afghans view this as critical to tackling the illegitimate influence of local powerbrokers and warlords over local government institutions.

Address local factional disputes and links to the insurgency

The report expressed Afghan men, women and youth’s grave concerns about deepening ethnic, tribal and factional animosity that drives insecurity and instability in many parts of Afghanistan. People stated that such conflicts carried the potential to and often had fuelled the broader conflict between the Government and the armed opposition – with each party desperate to build alliances, consolidate their powerbase, accumulate arms and mobilise forces to undermine their rivals.

“In our district, the major cause of conflict is long-standing factional animosity and fighting. This has divided our people: some joined pro-Government militias and others are connected with the Taliban. There has been severe fighting and many people have been killed or injured as a result,” said Afghans from Balkh province.

Countrywide, Afghans stated that factional allegiances remained a serious dividing force. At the community level, such disputes have often flared into a full-scale Taliban-led insurgency. Afghans called on the Government to focus more attention on resolving local-level conflicts and disputes and

stem growing conflict by promoting community cohesion and reconciliation, and ensuring an inclusive peace process.

Promote equitable development across Afghanistan, prioritise education, and empower Afghan youth

The report identifies lack of economic progress and social justice as a huge driver of instability. Poverty, slow and unequal development in all regions, along with mass unemployment, and inequality in the allocation of resources are problems the Government has failed to address over the last 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.

Focusing on unemployment, and in particular increasingly disenfranchised youth, the report found that 'education is the key to security'. As a defence lawyer in Laghman province stated "*youth are raw material for the on-going conflict. Most youth are jobless . . . so they are easily recruited.*"

Emphasis on the plight of Afghan youth, along with employment and income generation initiatives were viewed by Afghans as an immediate and national priority for any incoming government. "*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,*" explained a community elder from Aliabad district in Kunduz province.

A member of a local council in Helmand province asserted that people's frustration and willingness to resort to violence are fuelled by a lack of basic services, stating: "*low quality of education, joblessness, lack of fundamental services, such as electricity and water for agricultural activities, and lack of good governance drive the conflict.*" The report found that similar sentiments were voiced in discussions throughout the country.

Afghan men, women and youth countrywide also saw opium poppy cultivation and the struggle for control over the illicit economy as directly linked to high rates of unemployment and lack of economic opportunity, corruption within Government institutions, illiteracy, youth's susceptibility to drugs and the influence of armed groups over vulnerable youth and destitute farmers.

People called on the Government to focus more proactively on fostering job creation, investing in alternative crops such as cotton, and emphasising the development of education facilities for youth as ways to combat the drugs problem.

Promote an inclusive peace process and reform the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme

The report highlights people's frustration with the peace process; the views of ordinary people, those who have to live with the outcome of any settlement, have been ignored and Afghans questioned the legitimacy of persons involved in the peace process.

"I do not believe in the current peace process, as it is led by people who have been part of the conflict in the past. They have a lot to lose if peace arrives." This view of a former Jihadi commander in Balkh province was expressed by many Afghan men, women and youth involved in the People's Dialogue. Afghans stressed that the current actors running the peace process cannot meaningfully contribute to the peace process.

The report also found that Afghans emphatically view the Government's Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) as a failure. Afghans 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, stating that it failed to deliver on its promises and left them feeling used, unsupported in the long-run, and vulnerable to attack by the Taliban for their cooperation with the Government.

Overall, Afghans stressed that those currently involved in the peace process are unable to achieve lasting peace as they do not represent and reflect the views and voices of ordinary people as many have an interest in the continuation of conflict.

Afghan men, women and youth called 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 also called on the Government to fundamentally reform the APRP to give ordinary Afghans a stake in building the foundations for lasting peace at the local-level.

Protect and promote human rights and women's rights

Throughout the People's Dialogue, Afghans asserted that proactive and concerted efforts to promote and protect human rights, enhance rule of law, and tackle impunity should be the basic goals of the Government, civil society and the international community. Most Dialogue participants who spoke on human rights, advocated for an increase in the number and quality of human rights awareness programmes to familiarise society with human and women's rights which would be viewed by all as compatible with Afghan society and culture.

"Only when all these root causes of the conflict that have plagued our country for years are meaningfully addressed – based on the solutions identified in our road maps for peace envisioned by the people – will real peace and stability be achieved in Afghanistan," said members of a civil society network. *"We urge the presidential candidates to include our solutions and road maps to achieve sustainable peace in their efforts to bring stability and prosperity to all Afghans."*

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The full report can be downloaded in Dari, Pashto and English from the following websites:

www.sanayee.org.af
www.cshrn.af
www.aihrc.org.af
www.acsf.af
www.afghanwomennetwork.af

2. The Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace is an initiative in which ordinary Afghans express their views through inclusive discussions on prospects for peace, reconciliation, security, economic development, human rights and the rule of law. The People's Dialogue aims to empower ordinary Afghans by raising awareness among the Afghan population about peace and reconciliation processes, and by ensuring that people's legitimate grievances, concerns and aspirations are heard, amplified and incorporated by policy-makers into all processes and plans for achieving sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

3. A steering committee guides the work of People's Dialogue, whose members include: Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC); Afghan Civil Society Forum (ASCF); Afghan Civil Society & Human Rights Network (ACSHRN); Afghan National Union of Labour (AMCA); Afghanistan Organization of Human Rights & Environmental Protection (AOHREP); Afghan Women's Network (AWN); Afghan Women Skills Development Centre (AWSDC); Afghan Youth Social Cultural Organization (AYSCO); Civil Society Development Center (CSDC); Sanayee Development Organization (SDO); Transitional Justice Coordinating Group (TJCG); and the Women Political Participation Committee (WPPC).

4. Phase I of the People's Dialogue comprised 78 focus group discussions held in 31 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, and involved 1,526 Afghan men, women and youth from diverse ethnic groups and socioeconomic backgrounds. The findings of Phase I were published in a comprehensive report issued in December 2011, entitled *Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace, Laying the Foundations for an Inclusive Peace Process*. Phase II of the People's Dialogue was launched in April 2013. As in phase I, phase II was implemented with the aim of promoting an inclusive, transparent and accountable peace process by obtaining people's views on the future direction of their country. Afghan civil society involved 4,648 Afghan men, women and youth in phase II of the People's Dialogue (with 67 per cent male and 33 per cent female participation in inclusive focus group discussions) in order to develop local road maps for peace. To date, 30 road maps have been completed. During both phases, over 6,000 Afghan men, women and youth have taken part in the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace.

Afghan People's Dialogue 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 Tackling 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).