



International community and Afghanistan government discussed the country's development and reform agenda

KABUL, 28 July 2020 - The Fourth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) concluded today after two days of constructive discussions between the Afghanistan government and international partners on the serious challenges faced by the country, the opportunities for development and peace, and government's vision, plan and strategy for next five years up to 2025. The SOM was attended by senior officials from more than 40 countries and international organizations, ministers and officials from the Afghan government, as well as civil society and private sector representatives.

The meeting, held in the Presidential Char Chinar Palace in Kabul with participants joining either in person or by online video link, was co-chaired by the Acting Minister of Finance of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, Special Envoy of Finland to the 2020 Afghanistan Conference, Janne Taalas, and the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Deborah Lyons.

His Excellency, President of Afghanistan, Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, delivered the keynote address. President Ghani provided his vision for peace and progress towards self-reliance and economic growth at a time when there is a historic opportunity for peace but also challenges such as COVID-19, poverty, unemployment and economic disruption.

“Internally, we are launching a national dialogue across levels and functions of government around the idea of forging our transformation between now and the end of the decade of transformation in 2024. International and regional consensus on the End-state of a sovereign, democratic, United Afghanistan, at peace within and with the world and capable of preserving and expanding the gains of the past 19 years- as articulated in the meetings of July 5 and 9- provide a foundation for securing our shared interests and realization of shared values. Heartfelt thanks for your continued interest, support and partnership with Afghanistan,” said President Ghani.

The Ministry of Finance presented the draft Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF II) for 2021-2025, outlining the government's strategy and plans for the next five years. The plan is organized around three pillars of market-building, state-building and peace-building, and underpinned by the assumption that combined they will contribute to nation-building. The plan focuses on key areas such as peace, inclusive economic growth -especially through emphasis on agriculture, extractives, urban cities and regional connectivity. In addition, the plan covers measures for responding to COVID-19, addressing corruption, the empowerment of women and girls, good governance, as well as rule of law and justice. In addition, the Finance Ministry presented a progress report on the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework (GMAF).

“Since the last Senior Officials Meeting in 2017, Afghanistan has changed a lot and Afghans have come a long way, thanks to our people’s resilience, our government leadership, and our partners’ support. Our budget execution and domestic revenue mobilization rates have never been higher. More and more women have joined the Afghan government, and together we have created an important momentum in a complex political and security environment. However, it’s our collective responsibility to preserve as well as build on our accomplishments,” said Acting Minister of Finance, Arghandiwal.

There were fruitful discussions in which international participants congratulated the Government of Afghanistan for producing a solid draft ANPDF II plan, especially welcoming the overarching conceptual framework on government policies, initiatives and programmes, as well as work to address COVID-19. International partners also called for inclusion of challenges along with achievements in all sectors and exclusive focus on implementation and delivery going forward. Issues such as gender and women’s empowerment, anti-corruption, governance and the rule of law should be further strengthened in the plan.

“With the upcoming peace talks setting a shift in the development landscape, the Government and development partners must learn from past experiences, clearly identify the challenges going forward and ensure that we are working well together to maximize the opportunity that a more peaceful Afghanistan provides to its people,” said UN SRSG Lyons.

The meeting was preceded by two side events on 27 July. The first focused on the Economic Impact of COVID-19 in Afghanistan, chaired by the Deputy Minister of Finance, Abdul Habib Zadran, and the EU Head of Unit for Asia, Raffaella Iodice, as moderator. The event highlighted the need for maintaining a balance between emergency responses and longer-term effects on the economy for minimizing the impact on people, especially the most vulnerable. The second event addressed Development and Peace, chaired by National Security Adviser, Dr. Hamdullah Mohib, and moderated by SRSG Lyons. The event spotlighted the mutually reinforcing nature of development and peace; while development strengthens peace and makes it sustainable, peace enhances development and reduces its cost.

The SOM represents a milestone on the road to the quadrennial ministerial pledging conference, slated to take place in Geneva in November this year.

“Afghanistan is at an important juncture. The 2020 Afghanistan Conference presents a valuable opportunity for the Afghan Government and the international community to commit to common objectives for the future. There is a real opportunity for a more peaceful Afghanistan, which would have a very beneficial impact on development. It is imperative that this opportunity for peace is not lost,” said Special Envoy Taalas.

Dates for the upcoming conference, co-organized by the Government of Afghanistan, Finland and the United Nations, will be released late September.